

Audience iconography: Initial considerations

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If one were to consider iconic images of audiences in American history, it would be relatively easy to create a list. It might include, for instance, John Searle's 1822 watercolor painting, *Interior of the Park Theatre*, which depicted New York City's most prominent citizens in the audience for a popular farce and was reproduced as a kind of nineteenth-century *Who's Who*. Or one might think of Nathaniel Currier's popular chromolithograph, *Washington's Reception by the Ladies*, from 1845, which depicted a crowd of women and girls greeting George Washington enroute to his first presidential inauguration, emphasizing ideologies of gender and nationhood (**Fig. 1**). Thomas Eakins's 1889 painting, *The Agnew Clinic*, would merit inclusion for its photographically-precise and controversial imagining of an amphitheater filled with male medical students, all leaning left or right to get a better look at a mastectomy surgery.



Fig. 1. Nathaniel Currier, *Washington's Reception by the Ladies*, 1845. Photograph by David Stansbury. Courtesy of the Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts. Gift of Lenore B. and Sidney A. Alpert, supplemented with Museum Acquisition Funds.

Twentieth century images might include one of many photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s of ordinary people sitting around the ‘electronic hearth’ of a large radio cabinet, linking family, home, and modern technology (**Fig. 2**). *Life Magazine* photographer J. R. Eyerman’s 1952 photo of an 3D cinema audience, all mechanically staring upward with disposable glasses, conjuring the technologized futurism and confidence of Americans after World War Two, would be a must, as would a television still of gathered black and white listeners surrounding Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during his historic speech at the 1963 March on Washington. It might also include one of the photos of screaming, fainting, and crying Beatles fans, which filled the pages of newspapers and magazines in the early 1960s, or subsequent documentary film images of thousands of young people camped on hillsides at events like Woodstock or the Monterey Pop Festival, all accounting for the outrageousness and social meanings of rock’n’roll.



Fig. 2. *A Farm Family Listening to Their Radio; 8/14/1926.* Photographs of Extension Service Activities and Personnel, 1928 - 1943; Records of the Extension Service, Record Group 33. National Archives at College Park: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5729282>.

And so on. These images, replicated in textbooks, news stories, and advertisements, or found with a quick Internet search, have developed multiple and layered meanings over time, and thus have become touchstones of shared memory in the United States. Citizens of other nations and cultures could certainly come up with similar lists. In fact, visual representations of people gathered or acting alone as an audience – for an event of performance, before a work of art, as a mass or public – date to antiquity. Especially throughout the nineteenth century, technological developments in printing increased the circulation of published images, offering a new expansive window onto audiencing, from public spectacle to theater. The twentieth century was the age of photography; news coverage of musical theater, clubs, concerts, sporting events, and other public gatherings, as well as public policies and cultural debates about them, yielded a treasure trove of visual

information. Overall, the accumulated record of paintings, lithographs, sketches, photographs, cartoons, and other images feature a range of individual spectators or listeners, large crowds, fans, and representations of behaviors like queuing, dancing, cheering, watching, and listening. Some images celebrate the thrill of public events; others are critical, meant to embarrass certain kinds of audience members and stake out positions of social power.¹

Despite the audience images available to researchers, visual culture remains an under-theorized source for the study of historical audiences. Research on audiences *seeing* is more plentiful than research on audiences *seen*. One reason is that the history of audiences remains a burgeoning field, emerging only after the theoretical turn to reception in the 1970s and 1980s, and visual studies is but one of multiple methods needed to fully understand its contours. Before the digital age, the curation of audience images required visits to dispersed archives and working without finding aids. Today, however, digitally-searchable images from magazines, newspapers, and other ephemera, especially by larger government archives, like the U.S.'s Library of Congress (from which many of the images in the this essay have been located), open sources like the Wikipedia Commons or Flickr, online exhibit platforms such as Google Arts and Culture, or subscription digital services like Artstor, have changed the possibilities for comparison and study.

The most robust existing bodies of work on audience visual culture come from studies of historical moments in which audiences played a part. This would include, for instance, scholarship on the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy in the 1930s, where the spectacle of the public rally was a foundation of extremist political mobilization and participation,² or on the United States Farm Security Administration's effort to document the effectiveness of its own relief efforts, during the Great Depression, through photographs of ordinary people participating in community events.³ The study of emerging entertainment technologies, like the phonograph or the television, has also yielded a number of excellent interrogations of the visual record of people interacting with sounds and images.⁴

More tangentially, audience visual culture has figured as part of larger disciplinary approaches to specific subjects. Art historians have analyzed audience representation, particularly in and for contemporary art.⁵ Sports historians have used the visual record of audiences, fans, and stadiums as part of wider explorations of game standardization and the development of professional sporting leagues, though there have been recent calls for more systematic and explicit analysis.⁶ Theater histories have analyzed images of theater interiors, a standard element of civic theater building and promotion; some scholars have focused on depictions of audiences in those interiors as part of their interpretations.⁷ Music historians have likewise interrogated the use of images of music-making, dancing, and listening as historical evidence; while these studies do not focus solely on depictions audiencing, visual culture is not excluded as a point of discussion.⁸ Numerous studies of film history address spectatorship, with some addressing how audiences were depicted in photographs and films themselves.⁹

Finally, there are also exhibitions and published collections that focus on and provide interpretation of audience images, spanning painting, illustration, and photography. These might include, for example, the photos of polka revelers in Charles Keil and Dick Blau's *Polka Happiness* or the rock fans gesturing for the camera in Erin Feinberg's *Diehards*.¹⁰ Museum exhibits, such as the Weisman Art Museum's *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* or the National Gallery of Victoria's *Looking at Looking: the Photographic Gaze*, have investigated depictions of audiences in the act of witnessing.¹¹ Websites featuring audience imagery include numerous film history archives, library collections, and online exhibits.¹²

While these studies each have something quite valuable to offer, what is needed the most, right now, given the enormity of the archive, is a more methodical way for audience studies scholars to sift and sort these visual materials outside of specific events or strict disciplinary domains. How can audience historians and theorists begin to make the best sense of the whole ecosystem of archived audience images? One thing that occurs quickly, for instance, when studying audience images interdisciplinarily, is a sense of repetition. While there is something specific to the form and uses of stadium audience imagery for sports, for instance, many of the images are at least compositionally similar to depictions of stadium audiences for rock concerts or twentieth-century political rallies. Medium is as important for technique as subject; engravers, painters, photographers, printers, advertisers, and other visual workers have illustrated the size, social identities, emotional responses, and inter-relationships of audience members with different (though sometimes overlapping) semantic toolkits. Broadly-shared historical contexts and discourses also shape the reception of such techniques. Late-nineteenth-century prints of mass audiences in urban newspapers reproduced familiar images that would resonate with the widest audience; early-twentieth-century modernist paintings of theater-goers favored innovations that would resonate for critics and private collectors.

Visual culture studies is now a well-established field that provides the theoretical and methodological tools for addressing these issues.¹³ Iconography, in particular, comprises an approach to visual culture that seeks to interpret shared conventions and meanings of representation. Developed in early-twentieth-century art history to create classifications of symbols, themes, and styles in formal works of Western art, iconographic research has since been applied more openly to subjects including music, dance, medicine, tourism, politics, food, and urban planning.¹⁴ Earlier twentieth-century iconographic studies tended to privilege singular and dominant perspectives as objective truth and downplayed the role and complexity of context and reception in constituting the very images under study. More recent studies tend to recognize that while communities have coded and decoded audience images and narratives according to discernible grammars or discourses, those actions are always complex and contingent, inflected by particular circumstances of form, context, perspective, history, and power – or, in visual culture parlance, 'scopic regimes.'¹⁵

This has particular import for studies of historical audiences, where evidence is almost always fragmentary, and there is often a tension between the implied and the real. Jérôme Bourdon addresses the tension by explicitly warning against an easy reliance on discursive generalizations about audiences and instead calls for new attention to audiences as historical objects, through greater critical understanding of historical sources. He explains:

Once we establish in what sense we can talk about audiences as historical objects, and not only as abstraction, we can discuss how to reach for historical audiences through an adequate critique and articulation of abundant and conflicting representations. In particular, historians will have to ask themselves the question of the relationship of a given discourse to actual audiences. When are discourses purely polemical, utopian, without relationship to audiences out there? When do they have some grasp on the lived experience of audiences? The work of audience historians must incorporate a critical history of texts on audiences and of their actual relationship to historical processes.¹⁶

Bourdon's critique, for the purposes of historical images, means developing a specific visual literacy for audience images, one rooted in established frameworks of visual and cultural analysis and inflected by specific histories of audience representation. Composition, including framing and perspective, has a heightened significance in audience images, for instance, given the dynamics of audiencing itself. How an image positions us, the viewers, relative to the depicted audience's viewing, is often complex. Are we in the audience, looking at the performance, or are we in the position of the performer, or onstage, looking back? Are we located more objectively aside or above the scene? Is the audience shown as whole or a portion? How is space implied? What is centered and peripheral? Aside from the mechanics of framing and perspective, the contents of an image can cue a host of ideas and assumptions. How do we know that we are seeing an audience at all? Is there a performance depicted? How do performers and audience members appear, in terms of dress, behavior, and interaction? How are identities, relationships, feelings, or experiences portrayed or symbolized? All of these qualities may be more or less constructed by the medium of the image itself, which may constrain what is visually possible and/or point to various contextual meanings. Are we dealing with a single-work or mass reproduction? Why was the image produced? Is it part of a series, a review, a critique, a promotion, a documentary? What is the known about the intent of the image and what may be real, implied, or potential in terms of its reception?

Such visual analysis starts with single images but can then move to comparative work, across types or through techniques, all of which necessarily draw on the scholarship of audience representation, more broadly. For example, Richard Butsch's classic typology of historical American audiences – the crowd, the public, the mass, and the citizen, each

characterized as having desirable or undesirable traits linked to social membership and worth – is useful for iconographic categorizing.¹⁷ Fan scholarship, too, affords insight into social conventions of representation, from Joli Jensen’s work on the pathologization of fans to, more recently, collections like *Seeing Fans*, whose authors explore how stereotypes of fans in hybrid popular media are being redrawn to mark new distinctions and exercises of power.¹⁸

Two brief examples from the U.S. context may suggest the work of audience iconography, beginning with the crowd. While the crowd has been a topic of critical interest since the Roman empire, the unforeseen population densities of industrial cities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and the United States made the crowd an especially popular subject of cultural commentary, and audience-crowds, especially in sports, theater, oratory, and rallies, a common subject for art, printing, and photography. Representing large audiences posed specific problems for artists and documentarians using conventional formats and tools, however, because the multitudinous gathering, in its sheer size and variation, forced new decisions about visual framing and level of detail. At same time, the perceived threat of mob irrationality, as articulated most famously by psychologist Gustave Le Bon in 1895, amplified the desirability, among some people, of more distanced, whole-scale views.¹⁹

The result was experimentation with different ways to represent audiences through new formats. Two-page centerspreads, in periodicals like *Leslie’s Weekly* or *Harper’s* in the latter half of the nineteenth century, first allowed a landscape format with a wide field of vision.²⁰ Soon, too, forms like the panorama or aerial photography similarly served to accommodate mass audiences. The panorama, painted or photographed, was a popular nineteenth-century form that allowed spectators the illusion of being immersed in a scene. While early panoramas depicted famous battles or environmental catastrophes, once photography became more common in the late nineteenth century, the careful editing together of shots, and even specially-designed panoramic cameras, were used by professional photographers to depict more ‘realistic’ images of geographical expanses and groups of people gathered as an audience (see **Fig. 3**). Aerial photography, which fully



Fig. 3. Miles Brothers, Copyright Claimant. *Panorama, crowds at Squires - Burns international contest, Colma, July 4, from moving picture stand.* 1907. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007663640/>.

emerged during World War I, extended the visual vocabulary of audience representation by evoking the entirety of crowds in a stadium or city square from above, implying objectivity through an abstract spaciality.²¹

All these forms of crowd representation actually helped bring the modern audience into being; for most people in the early 1900s, without access to balloons or camera booms, an understanding of the entirety of large crowd existed *only* through images. And this, in fact was part of the images' appeal. Audiences depicted through aerial views were exciting, new, and invoked wonder at sheer capacities and densities of urban congregation. Jeffrey Schnapp has called this 'mob porn,' invoking the audience as the 'object of desire, draped across the picture plane' and has analyzed, in particular, the ways in which the 'oceanic' mass panorama 'figures both as an irreducible whole out of which radiate other images of mass mobilization and as an autonomous graphic element that can be "cited" as the synecdoche of a totality encompassing the dictator and the nation.'²²

Multiple scholarly and historical studies of crowds suggest the ways in which depictions of crowds in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe and the United States, whether intended as positive or negative, almost always touch on anxieties about collectivity.²³ The tensions between the ideals of the autonomous individual citizen, coming together to deliberate in the public sphere, and the communally-based people, leveraging their will into collective action, were palpable in a time of rapid urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, where the dynamics of class and status were ever-changing and uncertain. Are crowds fundamentally of individuals gathered together or a group of people who have subsumed their identities into a unified mass?

These anxieties governed not only the publication and use of audience-crowd images but also played out in interesting ways in fine art, where audiences for theater, the opera, and the circus could be depicted through degrees of identifiability and anonymity, portraiture and sketch; in the most neutral instances, only a few people in the audience, often in the foreground, might be rendered as individuals with enough realistic detail to suggest the other humans sitting beyond, stretching into the background. This technique mirrors the sensory perspective of sitting in an audience, in which those nearby have features and those far away morph into more gestural outlines and puts a focus on the situation or event of spectating. But still, who, exactly, gets a face? At least for many beholders in the nineteenth century, discernible faces in crowd images went beyond the suggestion of perspective to address anxieties about autonomy.

One curious recurring motif, for instance, is the use of direct address, or an extra-diegetic gaze, in which a lone figure amongst the crowd returns the viewer's gaze. This technique, borrowed from European painting, was present in several theater images from the 19th century, including *Interior of the Park Theatre, November 7, 1822*, *Interior of Niblo's Opera House, New York City*, as well as the *The Great National Peace Jubilee and Musical Festival, Boston, Massachusetts (Figs. 4 & 5)*.²⁴ On one level, the breaking of the fourth wall invites us into the event and into the mass of the crowd, as if we, the viewers are there. On

the other hand, there is an unexpected intimacy in depicting a single viewer, among a vast multitude, turned in recognition of our own gaze.²⁵



Fig. 4. *The Great National Peace Jubilee and Musical Festival, Boston, Massachusetts.* 1869. Print. *Digital Commonwealth*, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/00000276r> (accessed April 04, 2021).

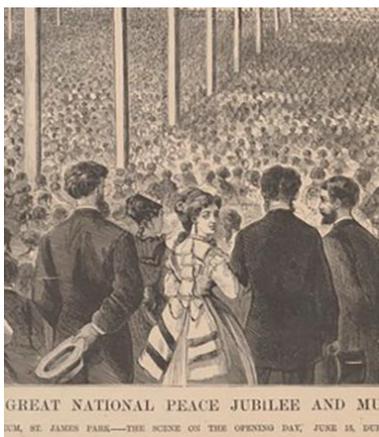


Fig. 5. Detail, *The Great National Peace Jubilee and Musical Festival, Boston, Massachusetts.* 1869.

Whereas some artists might introduce the idea of figures in the audience recognizing the viewer, others focus on the viewer recognizing members of the audience, as in *At the Play* (**Fig. 6**), in which every individual audience member is given his or her own portrait. With the subtitle: ‘Respectfully inscribed to the wealth, enterprise & beauty of California by their faithful friend, F. Marriotte, June 1879,’ *At the Play* is emblematic of a subgenre of audience images in which members of a social group, typically elites of the city, are purposefully displayed and verified, often with a corresponding key of names. In some paintings, like John Searle’s *Interior of the Park Theatre*, some attention to a realistic depiction of the scene is maintained.²⁶ In this specific case from San Francisco, the figures, while generally facing forward, happen also to be cut and pasted from other sources and therefore are posed stiffly left and right. For those used to audience anonymity in images, such an approach can be jarring (contemporary viewers might be reminded of a Monty Python animation). To viewers in 1879, however, it was likely a clever way to display the notable

figures of the city, both as high-achieving individuals and as bonded together as a leadership body stewarding the common good.



Fig. 6. *At the Play.* 1879. Photograph. [San Francisco: publisher not transcribed] Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018757312/>.

Of course, the most prevalent type of historical image of the audience-crowd in the United States is that of the unruly mob. Reflecting the fears among the growing middle-class after the mid-nineteenth century, especially about social unrest and the tenuousness of class hierarchy in the U.S., examples were plentiful, from depictions of the Astor Place Riot and Jenny Lind's arrival to throngs of enthusiastic followers in New York City at mid-century to depictions of immigrant silent film audiences and rowdy baseball kanks in the twentieth. Typically, in such images, audience members are associated with the dirtiness of the street, often assembled outside or in makeshift auditoria, and are dressed informally, marked by cues of barely-controlled behavior.

In a popular 1845 print depicting Andrew Jackson's 1829 presidential inauguration, a crowd is gathered to view the president's procession (see **Fig. 7**). The inauguration was well-known to Jackson detractors as a notoriously riotous affair, prompted by the fact that non-elites were invited to the festivities. In this rendering of the event, a formal reception appears to wait for Jackson just beyond the crowd, on the steps of the White House, while the crowd, in the foreground, arrayed too close to the arriving carriages, nearly obstructs their passage. In fact, a bystander has jumped onto the rear carriage and its horse is reacting badly by kicking backward in alarm. Some members of the crowd are without shoes and wearing straw hats; bodies are not uniformly lithe and controlled but varied in size and posture, conveying a level of visual – and social – chaos.



Fig. 7. Robert Cruikshank, *President's Levee, or all Creation going to the White House*. London: Saunders and Otley, 1841. Photograph of original print. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-50970.

Such visual conventions repeat a century later in a photograph of fans awaiting the arrival of singer Frank Sinatra, in 1944 (**Fig. 8**). While the source of disorder is rooted in gender rather than class, the image carefully signals, for viewers, a similar level of barely-contained chaos. Forced haphazardly behind a stretched queue belt on an unevenly-lit and trash-strewn street, a swarm of young women pushes against an usher, who struggles to keep order. They are smiling and cheering, holding up Frank Sinatra photographs; he looks anguished. The density of their bare legs and bobby socks in the bottom third of the photo contrasts starkly with his uniform's dark pants. The edges of the image, rather than displaying the neat framing and symmetry of an interior theater space, instead are cut by fragments of litter, theater billboards, the corner of a American flag, and shadows.



Fig. 8. Edward Lynch, *Female fans eagerly waiting to see Frank Sinatra* / *World Telegram & Sun* photo by Edward Lynch. New York, 1944. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015646076/>.

The antidote to images of popular disorder could be found in the numerous images of audience order. The disciplining of theater and concert audiences over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States, involved their separation into elite and popular spaces, offering different cultural experiences.²⁷ Promotional photographs of new theaters after 1900 helped advance the cause. They showed off the theaters' capacity and decoration, while portraying audiences in reassuring ways. In *Opening night, New theatre, Chicago*, for example (**Fig. 9**), the audience members, all white, are dressed in formal evening attire and sit quietly, awaiting a performance. Orderliness is emphasized by the framing, which includes the surrounding architecture of symmetrical columns and rows. In all, the image is intended to convey that the theater, concert hall, or opera house of the new century is a place of controlled experience, without disruption or turmoil.



Fig. 9. Geo. R. Lawrence Co., Copyright Claimant. *Opening night, New theatre, Chicago*. United States Illinois Chicago, ca. 1906. Photographic print, gelatin silver. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007663593/>.

Well-known conventions of theater representation, not surprisingly, also formed the basis of early phonograph advertisements, which sought to appeal to potential middle-class customers. While promoting the phonograph's sonic fidelity, they also emphasized the ways in which it would grant all purchasers access to highbrow customs of audiencing. This is clear in Edison advertisements, which depicted variations of the 'tone test,' a touring experiment conducted by the company in the 1910s, in which a live singing operatic star was miraculously replaced onstage by a playing Edison disc (see **Fig. 10**). Victrola advertisements juxtaposed well-dressed elite concert-goers listening to a virtuoso onstage with a middle-class family at home listening to a recording of the performance on the Victrola, both equally entranced and secure in their experience of the highest art. This

association of listening and class status would continue well into the 1970s, with the ‘blown away man’ of Maxell tape cassette television ads. Opening with the depiction of a lone man, with long hair and a leather jacket, lounging in front of his stereo system, the ad playfully flips reasonable assumptions about what is happening when a butler enters and offers him ‘the usual,’ which is neither a cocktail nor the Rolling Stones but the hair-blowing power of Wagner’s ‘Ride of the Valkyries’ played on his tape deck.²⁸



Fig. 10. *The Edison concert phonograph Have you heard it?*, ca. 1899. [Cincinnati ; N.Y.: The U.S. Printing Co] Photograph of original. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/99472463/>.

Audiences encountering performances, broadly defined, form another iconographic category. The most common depictions are of relational interactions between performer and audience. Unlike crowd images, in which the object of audiencing is often absent, abstract, or indistinct, encounter images typically focus directly on an audience’s experience from the side or from behind, offering a view of both the performer and the audience, together. For example, in *Booker T. Washington standing on a stage before large crowd in Lakeland* (**Fig. 11**), Booker T. Washington is shown during a ‘Southern educational tour’ speech at a baseball park in Tennessee, likely as part of promotions for the tour.²⁹ As if at the end of a punchline, he has paused at one side of the stage, taking in the audience’s reaction, which includes several men laughing uproariously. His onstage figure dominates the left quarter of the image, but we are still meant to see the many reactions of individual audience members, arrayed before the stage. There is much that can be said about what is

happening behaviorally in this exact moment, but the point is that this image asks us to understand Washington as a gifted orator.

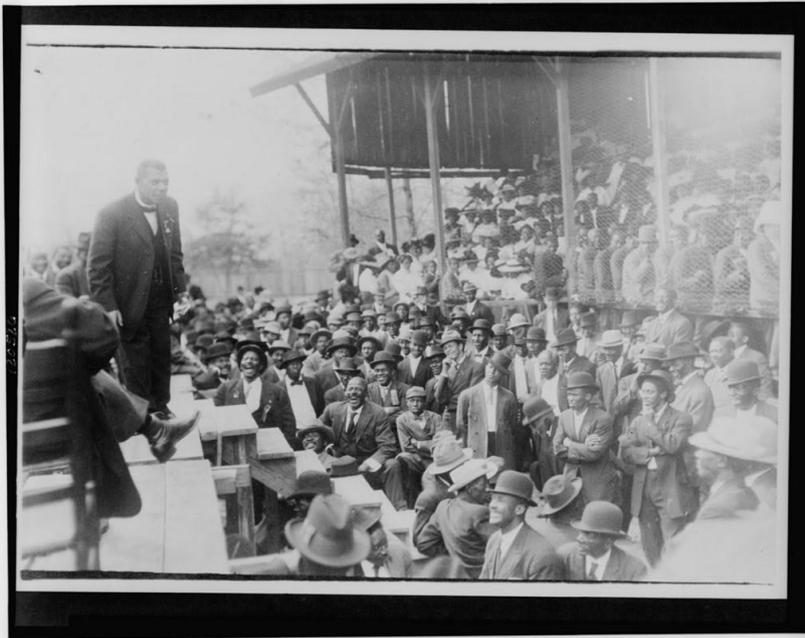


Fig. 11. Booker T. Washington standing on a stage before large crowd in Lakeland, date uncertain, between 1890 and 1915. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98500613/>.

Such photos provide opportunity for innovative composition. One might consider, for instance, the complexity of Arnold Genthe's photograph of people watching San Francisco burn out of control after a devastating 1906 earthquake (**Fig. 12**). Two-thirds of the image is taken up taken up by the 'performance': billows of smoke rising from a decimated cityscape in the distance, while, in the hilly foreground, a group of people dressed for outing, sit and stare at the spectacle. We primarily see the backs of the group, but the disarming casualness of their poses, including one man in the immediate foreground who lounges on a blanket, propped on one elbow, suggest an afternoon picnic rather than a catastrophe. One might read the photograph to indicate the weariness and resignation of onlookers, or even detachment, similar to modern 'rubber-necking.' The lounging man in the foreground, in fact, doesn't even face the fire like the other onlookers and gazes somewhat distractedly to another point of distant interest. Still, of the fragility of the moment is captured by a young boy, who, directly facing the viewer just past his shoulder, cries.³⁰

Encounter images can be enhanced not only by innovative composition, as in Genthe's photo, but also by framing. In fact, an important subset of encounter images is that of small groups of people reacting to a performance or event that is purposefully not shown. The absence of the performance creates the depiction of a de-objected gaze. In the structure of such photos, attention is cultivated not only toward the missing object, out of the frame, but also turned back on the viewer's own audiencing, in which a heightened puzzling is at work. The depicted audience is no longer a subject gazing at an object but an object being looked at by us.³¹



Fig. 12. Arnold Genthe, *Spectators sitting on hillside watching fires consume the city after the San Francisco earthquake*. San Francisco California, 1906. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007681309/>.

A well-known image of a de-objected gaze would be Pete Souza's 'situation room' photograph, taken in 2011 (**Fig. 13**). In the photograph, President Barak Obama and his staff are in Washington, D.C., monitoring the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. We don't know what they are watching (is it large flatscreen, or someone, in-person, narrating the action?). All that is offered is the setting and the positioning, postures, and expressions of the figures. The room is too small for the number of people, and the table is littered with laptops and coffee, which may indicate the spontaneity of the gathering. Despite being among the most powerful people in the world, most are dressed casually; the president of the United States is tucked over in a corner, behind the vice president and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Much has been made of Hilary Clinton's apparent emotional gasp and the indifference or smugness of some of the men as an indication of gender stereotyping, but others have pointed to the audience's tense waiting, emblematic of the unending War on Terror.³²



Fig. 13. Pete Souza, *President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, along with members of the national security team, receive an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House, May 1, 2011.* Photograph. Washington, D.C., 2011. Obama White House (Official White House Photographs), Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/obamawhitehouse/5680724572/in/photostream>. Accessed 13 April 2021.

The potential effects of this framing are apparent when we have access to what has been removed. Russell Lee's photograph of a group of farm women in Missouri during the Great Depression, gathered and listening to a speech by a touring New Deal official, is an excellent example (**Fig. 14**). Based on the caption, an historian might imagine the race or class dynamics of such a visit at that time,³³ but we are given only a group of women, in dresses, sitting outside a house. They are evenly spaced, politely watching and listening, while their bodies lean away, their faces betraying side looks and raised eyebrows. We cannot know



Fig. 14. Russell Lee, *Wives of FSA Farm Security Administration Negro clients listening to speech by visiting public health official, Southeast Missouri Farms. La Forge, Missouri.* La Forge New Madrid County United States Missouri, August 1938. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017737157/>.

what, exactly, is producing the women's body language or specific expressions of skepticism and dismay, or why – only that those expressions exist. In fact, there is another encounter image of the same moment (**Fig. 15**), with very different effect. In its wider view, the composition emphasizes the power of a white official, who confidently leans forward and occupies the most space, while, between a line of empty school benches and the wall of the house, a group of black farmers and their wives sit uncomfortably enclosed. In the *Wives* photograph, all of that context has been edited out. We are given only a fragment of the situation, which, in its limits, puts the emphasis on the women's resistant agency.



Fig. 15. Russell Lee. *Negro clients and wives listening to speech of project manager, Southeast Missouri Farms.* New Madrid County United States Missouri Southeast Missouri Farms Southeast Missouri Farms, 1938. Photograph. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017737159/>.

The de-objected gaze also features heavily in the collections of British Pathé clips of audiences laughing and watching films, or the more recent *Have You Seen My Movie?*, which cleverly pieces together cinematic fragments of movie-going into a continuous and self-referential narrative, one which suggests that the content of films doesn't matter as much as the shared emotions they produce and the culture they sustain.³⁴ Of course, images of people listening to music rely almost exclusively on de-objected images, since music and speech, at least in realistic forms of visual art, cannot be rendered visually. In 'The box-circle' (**Fig. 16**), for example, the general stasis of middle-class listeners at an orchestra concert suggests the late-nineteenth-century reformist ideal of individualized inner contemplation. Closed eyes, downward gazes, clutches of the heart, and 'thinker' poses, with heads leaning forward and resting in hands, indicate intense absorption with the music. Similar conventions of representing the act of hearing would continue in later twentieth-century images of phonograph and radio listeners.

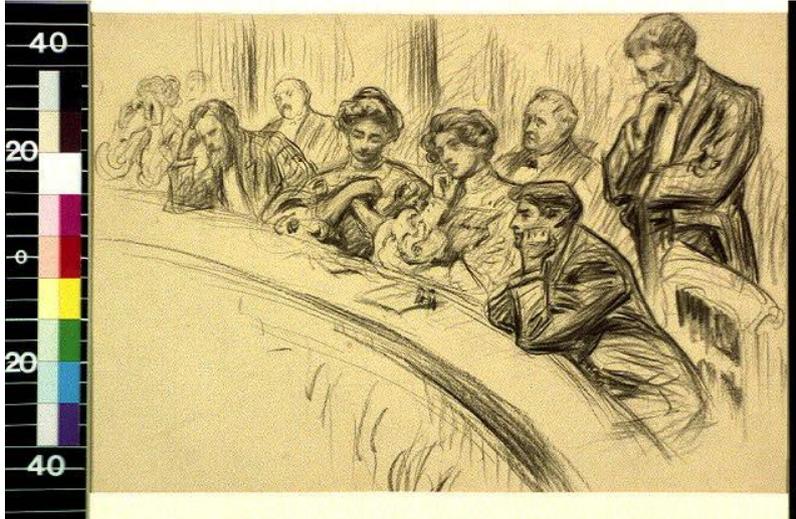


Fig. 16. Sigismund Ivanowski, *The box-circle*. 1905. From Richard Aldritch, 'The Boston Symphony Orchestra,' *Century Magazine*, 69:593 (Feb. 1905). Digital file from intermediary roll film copy. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010716849/>.

There are many more image types and conventions that might be explored, both in the past and in the present. Visual grammars of satire and critique in audience portrayals, and their relation to social and political power, comprise a significant topic, as do the ways in which audience imagery specifically has played a role in histories of racism and sexism. How motifs and techniques in audience representation move in transnational flows and are inflected by local cultures can deepen our understanding of globalization. How self-reflexive references to audiencing, especially in popular cinema, television, and social media, have socialized wider economies of attention is a critical and contemporary issue. In all, the contributions that visual culture might offer audience studies are unique, not only affirming existing arguments but also charting new junctures and patterns for further study.

In this themed section of *Participations*, scholars and researchers suggest diverse ways to approach iconographic research for audience studies. Each of the authors delves into patterned or commonplace representations of audiences, which are also profoundly inflected by the particular circumstances of place and time. Patrick Van Rossem analyzes contemporary artists' ideas about audience and how those ideas have shaped representations of audiences in art since the 1960s; overall, he points to selected artists' increasing acceptance of the audience's role in interpretation and co-creation. Barbara Ryan takes us through her investigation of a single photograph of a community dance recital of the famous chariot race from *Ben-Hur*, just outside Sydney in 1904, in which complex layers of meaning – about cultured and popular readings of *Ben-Hur*, Australian federation, and youth culture – emerge from its poses, expressions, and staging. Using photographic and written press coverage of Turkey's 10th Republic Day celebration in 1933, Idil Cetin examines the dynamic fluidity of audiencing during the event's parades and speeches, with usual participatory categories marked by time more than character and centered by the ever-present and charismatic figure of Atatürk. Finally, through analysis of four key films, Anne Trinidad explores the specific ways that Filipino cinema has relied on exceedingly

narrow visual and narrative clichés to depict enthusiastic audiences but nevertheless includes important slippages that help sustain its own enduring fan culture.

These essays were selected, in part, because of their differences, which together point to myriad possibilities for study; they are not only from different countries and informed by different humanities disciplines, but they also explore varied representational forms (painting, performance art, photography, news, and film) and different situations of audiencing, from contemporary art museums to a town dance recital, a national state celebration to popular cinema. On the whole, these essays do not cohere so much as point outward in multiple directions. In so doing, they show how the dynamics of represented audiences, in different times and places, comprise an enduring subject of fascination and a rich source of meaning.

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Notes:

¹ For more on the social significance of iconic images, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Robert Harriman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

² See Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'The Mass Paranorma,' *Modernism/modernity* 9, Number 2 (2002): 243-281; Kimberly Jannarone, 'Audience, Mass, Crowd: Theatres of Cruelty in Interwar Europe,' *Theatre*

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⁴ See, for example, Cecelia Tischi, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

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⁶ See, for instance, Mike Huggins, 'The Sporting Gaze: Towards a Visual Turn in Sports History— Documenting Art and Sport,' *Journal of Sport History* 35, No. 2 (Summer 2008): 311-329; Michael Krüger, 'Visual Sources in the History of Sports: Potential, Problems, and Perspectives with Selected Examples of Sporting Art,' *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 43, No. 2 (2018): 72-92; Kieran Murray, Conor Rochford and Su Wang, 'Between Crowd and Control: The Emergent Stadium.' *Building Material* 20 (2016): 57-73.

⁷ See, for instance, Jim Davis, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 2001); Tobin Nellhaus, ed., *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016); Jean I. Marsden, *Theatres of Feeling: Affect, Performance, and Eighteenth-Century Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁸ Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology, and Socio-Cultural formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright, *Images: Iconography of Music in African-American Culture (1770s-1920s)* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000).

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⁹ See, for example, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Isabelle Morissette, 'Reflexivity in Spectatorship: The Didactic Nature of Early Silent Films,' *Off|Screen* 6, No. 7 (2002), <https://offscreen.com/view/spectatorship>, accessed 13 April 2021; Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *One Thousand and One Nights at the Movies: An Illustrated History of Motion Pictures, 1895-1915* (Atlanta: Whitman Publishing, 2012).

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¹¹ See, for example, Donna Gustafson, *Images from the World Between: The Circus in Twentieth-Century Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001); Patricia McDonnell, ed., *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven: Yale University

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¹² See 'European Cinema Audiences,' <https://www.europeancinemaaudiences.org>. Accessed on 5 April 2021; 'Photographs on Movie Theater History in Berlin,' Deutsche Kinemathek: <https://www.deutsche-kinemathek.de/en/collections-archives/photographs-on-movie-theater-history-in-berlin>, accessed 5 April 2021; 'Theatre in the 19th Century,' British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/19th-century-theatre#>, accessed 5 April 2021; 'The Offside Museum,' <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/museu-do-futebol>, accessed 5 April 2021; 'Where Football, Fashion, and Fighting Collide: The Casuals,' <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/where-football-fashion-fighting-collide-the-casuals/7AKil6RORSdhKQ>, accessed 5 April 2021.

¹³ For an overview of methods in visual culture, see Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials, 4th Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016); or Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture, Third Edition* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2019). For a recent assessment of visual culture as a field, see James Elkins, ed., *Farewell to Visual Studies* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ A sample of book-length iconographic scholarship over the past ten or so years might include Stephanie Hawkins, *American Iconographic: National Geographic, Global Culture, and the Visual Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Monica Juneja and Gerrit Jasper Schenk, eds., *Disaster as Image: Iconographies and Media Strategies Across Europe and Asia* (Schnell and Steiner, 2014); Shannen L. Hill, *Biko's Ghost: The Iconography of Black Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Annalise Connolly and Lisa Hopkins, *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); or Stefan Huygebaert et al., eds, *The Art of Law: Artistic Representations and Iconography of Law and Justice in Context* (Berlin: Springer, 2018).

¹⁵ For an example of an updated iconographic approach, see Raymond Drainville, 'Iconography for the Age of Social Media,' *Humanities* 7, number 12 (2018): 1-26.

¹⁶ Jérôme Bourdon, *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 1 (2015): 11.

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¹⁹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1895).

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²³ See, especially, Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1960); Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews, eds. *Crowds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Lesley Brill, *Crowds, Power, and Transformation in Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006).

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²⁵ For a discussion of direct address in films, see Wheeler Dixon, *It Looks At You: The Returned Gaze of Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

²⁶ *Interior Of Park Theatre*, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-067e-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

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²⁹ For more on Booker T. Washington's oratory, see David H. Jackson, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³⁰ For more on disaster photography, see Ingrid Gessner and Susanne Leikam, 'Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture,' *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 58, No. 4, (2013): 533-542.

³¹ For more on the complexities of the photograph gaze, see Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, 'The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*,' *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, No. 1 (1991): 134-149.

³² 'Situation: Ambiguous.' *New York Times*, May 8, 2011, Section WK, p. 4, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/weekinreview/08johnson.html>, accessed 10 April 2021; Joel Aurbach, 'That Situation Room Photo.' *Washington Post*, May 4, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/achenblog/post/that-situation-room-photo/2011/05/04/AFrx7KmF_blog.html, accessed online 10 April 2021.

³³ See Paul E. Parker, *A Portrait of Missouri, 1935-1943: Photographs from the Farm Security Administration* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

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