

# Handbook of American Prehistory and History



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By

Javier Martín-Párraga,  
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and Juan Manuel Garrido-Anguita

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# INTRODUCTION

Becoming familiar with the most important historical events from the past is imperative not only for students who wish to become professional historians, but also those specializing in any of the many areas related to the humanities. It would be impossible to study Shakespeare without first being familiar with the Renaissance period or the Tudor monarchy, just as it would be equally impossible to specialize in religious architecture from the Middle Ages without being fully aware of the historical events that took place during the medieval period. Art, literature, politics, religion, and philosophy are all deeply rooted within the moment in which they are produced, and, consequently, studying all these scientific disciplines requires a comprehensive knowledge of history.

At the same time, discovering our past is an almost inescapable requisite in order to become mature citizens, since we are nothing but the product of the events that took place before we were born. As an example, understanding the socioeconomic and cultural revolution which the arrival of the Internet introduced to our lives would be unreasonable without awareness of the evolution of the different technologies upon which it was based. In a similar way, trying to deal with such a complex topic as terrorism would be impossible without being familiar with topics such as independentism and the Cold War period and its global consequences.

As stated above, history is one of the most important subjects, and it has an indisputable appeal to basically all of us. Nonetheless, many students not specializing in history find this subject difficult to study, and sometimes consider it boring and unrelated to their own academic interests. We are convinced that this understanding of history as difficult to cope with and the prejudices regarding its lack of usefulness are related to teaching methods that too often ask students to memorize endless lists of names and dates which are not properly contextualized or explained. We are aware that this unfortunate way of tackling the teaching of history no longer takes place at universities or colleges and is becoming less and less frequent in primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, however, we still meet many students in our classes who are prejudiced against the study of history while not being equipped with the indispensable tools to approach the discipline in a productive, positive, and, at least partially, autonomous manner.

We are firmly convinced that in order to discover our past we need to

analyse the most important documents and artistic creations from the past, which are our primary and most indispensable sources when studying history.

Thus, this book aims to provide those students studying American prehistory and history with all the necessary tools to not only manage but also enjoy the exploration of the past. In order to do so, this book is divided into two parts, which are as different as they are connected and interrelated. The first part includes five chapters explaining why analysing primary sources is fundamental to studying prehistory and history, while also offering the most useful techniques and strategies to successfully do so. The last chapter from this first part deals with the importance of online sources for studying history. This section becomes especially important since the almost infinite resources the Internet offers make the study of history not only easier but also faster and more economical. The second part of this handbook provides students with twenty different primary sources covering the most important periods in the history of the United States of America. These primary sources are accompanied by a webography and a set of activities and images aiming to help students get the maximum information from these texts while fostering autonomous learning.

Last of all, it is important to highlight the fact that this handbook was planned, researched, and written as a joint effort by two historians who are also experts in prehistory, Juan Manuel Garrido-Anguita and Marta Rojano-Simón, and a scholar whose main fields of expertise are literature and cultural studies, Javier Martín-Párraga. We are convinced that this interdisciplinary approach makes this book suitable for not only students of history but also those enrolled in any other discipline in the field of humanities.

## **PART I:**

# **STUDYING AMERICAN HISTORY**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY SOURCES FOR STUDYING AMERICAN HISTORY

*The original documents are incorrigible indiscreet,  
that at the first provocation they tell the truth.*  
—Ana Cecilia Rodríguez de Romo.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines history as, “the discipline that studies the chronological record of events (as affecting a nation or people), based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their causes” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/history>). This general definition is however not fully satisfactory to most historians, since scholars who are dedicated to analysing historical events based on a scientific methodology consider that it must be complemented by other concepts. Among these are scientific methodology, the analysis of primary and secondary sources, and the search for and analysis of historical landmarks, causes, consequences, hypotheses, historiographical trends, and conclusions that can be explained from a scientific point of view (Tribó).

History was defined as an independent field of study at the end of the nineteenth century (it was previously considered to be a branch of philosophy), and a large number of historiographic streams or schools emerged, bringing different objectives and methods to the field (historicism, positivism, historical materialism, Marxism, annals, new history, structuralism, and poststructuralism, for instance) (Hernández Sandioca). These different approaches share a common denominator – the application of scientific methodology.

Within the branch of humanities are many other fields that consider the study of history as essential to contextualize the object of their studies. Thus, for literature, art, or translation students, in-depth knowledge of the historical period in which the texts were written, painted, or executed is necessary. Similarly, it is essential for students not specializing in history to understand the methods used by historians to know the past in the most rigorous way possible. Thus, students from any degree in the field of humanities facing the study of sources must learn to formulate hypotheses

about the facts that are analysed and seek explanations through different means.

For historians, the general contextualization of the event is not a complement but a fundamental duty, not only because the object of study comprises historical facts, but also because the link with the wider period is an intrinsic part of the subject. Thus, as stated above, for the historian's work the search for and use of primary sources are absolutely inevitable tasks.

In order to obtain a well-founded knowledge of history with respect to other humanities disciplines, the correct treatment and analysis of primary sources become absolutely fundamental complements, without which it is impossible to contextually and spatially correct the objective of our research work (Valley).

History – or, in other words, those events that occurred at certain historical moments – has transcended popular culture. The concept of popular culture is defined according to the RAE as: “a set of ways of life and customs, knowledge and degree of artistic, scientific, and industrial development, at one time, and in one social group.” But the anthropological definition is the one that encompasses everything we refer to. Eminent anthropologists such as Peter Burke consider that popular culture contains social experiences that began to be taken into account as the subject of serious research by the scientific community. Joy Storey exposes one of the most accepted definitions of popular culture:

It is an empty term on which there are as many points of view, as edges have the compass rose ... What remains once we have decided what high culture is. In this definition, popular culture is a residual category, which exists to accommodate cultural texts and practices that do not meet the necessary requirements to be classified as high culture. In other words, it is a definition of popular culture as an inferior culture. (Storey 2002, 20)

Thus, we can find recreations of relevant events from the past in a multitude of paintings, such as Velázquez's *Las Lanzas*, while in literature the historical contextualization constantly underlies it in order to obtain a high-quality account. In cinema, the use of history is either background decoration (*Casablanca*) or the purpose of the film (*D-Day*). In the world of comics and graphic novels, history has a strong influence, as we can see in works such as *Maus*, *Bathory*, and *Neandertal*. Finally, in the world of video games, as a recent manifestation of popular culture, the story is presented in many cases as the setting and active part of the interactive action (for instance the *Assassin's Creed* saga).

Thus, with the original sources in their hands, humanities students can freely enter the knowledge of the history of the United States since it allows them to access knowledge without filters or preconceived ideas. In



this way, using the scientific method, they are able to carry out a critical study and draw the conclusions that best fit the hermeneutic current they consider most appropriate. In other words, the study of primary sources will allow students to put themselves in the shoes of a historian, approaching the original sources free from prejudice, and supporting the conclusions in their own study of other sources and previous readings.

Two things remain from the past: stories and remains. As regards stories, it is evident they come down to us through chronicles, letters, memoirs, and everything that constitutes the primary written sources of history, as well as accounts of more-or-less recent periods that have come to us orally.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# ANALYSING PRIMARY SOURCES: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

### **Key Concepts in Writing a Historical Commentary**

As stated earlier, primary and documentary sources (such as those offered in this volume) are indispensable for discovering the past in a scientific manner as historians do. This chapter is intended to help students (and not necessarily only those who study history as their main degree) approach historical documents in a way that optimizes their learning of the space-time roots in which those documents were produced. This way, they will be able to conceptualize and fully appreciate their object of study.

When we approach any documentary source it is crucial to remember that our analysis must be both based on scientific principles and free from personal opinions, presumptions or prejudices. Otherwise, it will be impossible to study and comment on the text in a manner that allows us to understand not only the text itself but also the historical period in which it was produced.

A historical commentary must include the following elements:

- The analysis of the text itself (which is offered after a careful and close reading), where the main ideas are highlighted.
- A comparison of the ideas contained in the text with our previous knowledge of the topic.
- A personal reflection and opinion about the text, and its main meaning and ideas.

When writing a historical commentary, it is important to avoid repeating the text itself, while at the same time it is fundamental to order our ideas in a clear, coherent and cohesive manner, enabling us to analyze not only this particular primary source but also its historical basis.

Prior to the text commentary, itself, certain steps are always required:

- Choosing the explanation method – the literal method (which follows the structure of the text in a step-by-step manner) or the logic-scientific method (which is based on the thematic ordering or the ideas contained in the text).

- Close reading of the document, which we divide in five-line blocks to ease our task.
- Organization of the text – identification and thematic ordering of the ideas.
- Explanations of key or problematic terms.

The structure of the commentary must be based on the following structure:

(1) Introduction – in which the text is briefly presented (origins, author/s, date and place, and so on). This is also where the contextualization is offered (antecedents and main events from the same space-time context).

(2) Explanation – this section, the longest and most difficult, depends on the thematic organization of the text we are commenting on. The structure must be organized according to an exposition plan that follows a logical progression depending on the explanation model we have selected. The explanation of the text must be understood as a deep study that aims at understanding the historical period in which it was written. To achieve this goal, we must take into account both what the text says and our previous knowledge about its author/s and historical context. When explaining the text, it is convenient to frequently quote from it while at the same time being very careful to not overuse literal quotations. In this part of the text commentary, the key terms must be explained in a short manner, according to the right context. A historical criticism of each idea must also be offered. At this stage, we will comment on the reasons behind that particular idea, as well as its ideology, goals, effects, etc. It is also fundamental to bear in mind the legal context and compare this given idea with others from the same period. Which ideas to comment on will be suggested by our own knowledge about the author/s and period.

(3) Conclusion – this final section of the historical commentary must briefly sum up the most prominent ideas, together with our own personal interpretations. This personal interpretation must always be based on historical parameters, and we must be very careful not to “contaminate” our reading of the text with personal ideas, conceptions, presumptions, or prejudices.

## **Commentary of a Historical Text: Practical Example**

Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” Speech (1963)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous

decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land ...

#### Introduction

During the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (August 28, 1963), Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the political speech known as “I Have a Dream.” King addressed thousands at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial at Washington’s National Mall.

This speech was destined to become the most relevant (if not the most important) in a long train of efforts to fight racism and segregationist laws in America, which started with the Jim Crow Laws immediately after the American Civil War (1861–5).

Following countless attacks from white supremacists against black people in the Southern US states, demonstrations against racism and segregation started all over America. In this context, Martin Luther King Jr. started his own campaign, based on peace and understanding rather than embracing violence and direct confrontation, to end both the legal segregation and sociocultural discrimination that black people suffered in many places of America. A key event in this particular context is Rosa Parks. At the beginning of the 1950s, Parks, a humble black woman from Alabama, refused to accept the state’s segregation laws by sitting in a place on a bus marked “whites only.” The police were called and Parks was imposed a \$14 penalty. This incident produced the creation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, a society of which Luther King Jr. was later president. Other events from the same historical context were the many demonstrations organized by black people who chose more belligerent tactics. In this sense, it is important to mention another very important black activist – Malcolm X.

As a result of the demonstrations, American politicians made significant changes that brought racism and segregation closer to an end, such as the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965).

#### Explanation

Luther King Jr. started his speech by connecting it with President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation (January 1, 1863), which immediately changed the legal status of more than four million Afro-American slaves, mostly located in the Southern (rebel) states. From that

moment on, those persons stopped being slaves. Nonetheless, racism was far from over, and they and their descendants kept suffering the consequences of this action. Racism manifested a double face: legal (segregation) and sociocultural and economic (discrimination). Segregation was almost exclusive to the Southern states, where racism was also more prominent.

Luther King Jr. addressed his audience from the heart, appealing to their best, most peaceful feelings to promote a future in which every American citizen would be considered a brother and sister, independent of the colour of their skin, professed religion, or other personal differences. King, who was not only a gifted orator but also held a doctorate in sociology and theology, decided to meet his audience at the stairs of the Lincoln Memorial and go back to the very origins of America, remembering the same Founding Fathers who promised “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This promise, contained in the Declaration of Independence, had not been a reality for black Americans.

“I Have a Dream” is possibly not the most important speech from the Civil and Afro-American Rights movements because, as King acknowledges, “Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning.” Nonetheless, this speech is certainly the most famous, influential, and effective one if we take into account the immense audience and repercussion in the mass media, as well as the approach King followed – one which, like Gandhi’s, was not based on direct confrontation or violence but the peaceful tackling of the problem, which would prove to be far more effective and convincing. King’s pacifism and dislike of aggressive measures cannot mislead us, since he was more than determined to keep fighting until true equality became a reality in America:

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

### Conclusion:

I consider that studying this text is necessary, since it highlights in a very clear manner the Civil Rights movements that took place in the second half of the twentieth century in America. These movements became foundational, and without them many of the civil rights Americans enjoy would not have been possible.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE IMPORTANCE OF IMAGES FOR STUDYING PREHISTORY AND HISTORY

The term “image” can carry several different (but connected) meanings, for example: figure, reproduction, copy, model, drawing, photography, stamp, and illustration. An image can be defined as the recreation of an external reality, as a composition of imaginary elements conceived by the artist’s imagination, or a printed reproduction of objects or people captured by a photographic camera. Consequently, it seems that the meaning of the term “image” is open, as a result of the many possible interpretations that can be given.

But what do images show us? Symbolism? Reality or fiction? Ideology? Truth or falsity? Every single image is produced from a particular perspective. As a result, it does not simply represent the bare truth but also transmits a given place (space), a specific moment or historical event (time), a feeling or emotion, and so on.

Images are considered by historians as one of the most valuable analytical resources for studying the past. Thus, the analysis of images (leaving aside their artistic value) can greatly contribute to the knowledge of those societies they portray: their environment, housing structures, clothing habits, working activities, and public and private ways of life. By paying attention to images, historians can discern those historical characters, places, and events worth representing in each different historical period. As a result, images transform all of them into eternal characters.

The essential function of images is to make us see all the above-mentioned things, which is necessary for our creation of sociocultural representations. But this concept is neither modern nor contemporary, since images have been around for seventy-five thousand years. Creating an image of something gives importance to what is represented. The language used as a channel of expression, such as painting, cinema, or photography, seeks to convey a message whose code is lost in time or, in other cases, is open to endless interpretations. Thus, images could be considered as a sort of time machine, forming the appearance of something (whether a person, place, or event) and preserving it. They are the

memories of a specific period that consequently enable us to analyse and increase our knowledge of past or current traditions.

A recent study carried out by a group of researchers from the University of Tennessee discovered six thousand-year-old pictorial representations of the Appalachian Mountains (circa 35 BP, 3788-3708 cal. BC (1 [sigma])), the first such images produced by the original inhabitants of the United States. Scientists indicate that the drawings were strategically placed to represent an enigmatic cosmos, or the vision these cultures had about the world and the sky. The main researcher of the project, Simek, proposes that the rock art of these communities changed the natural landscape to reflect their conceptual world. In total, forty-four open-air sites and fifty caves on the Cumberland Plateau were analysed.

According to this anthropologist, the paintings describe a cosmos that is divided into three “worlds.” The “upper world” represents the celestial bodies and forces of nature embodied in mythical characters that influence human beings. Most of these paintings are located in high areas of open fields, near the sun and stars, the red colour associated with life being used in a high percentage of them. The “intermediate world” symbolizes the natural world, with images of people, plants, and animals, located on the walls of caves as well as at some open-air sites. The images encompassed in the “lower world” stage darkness and danger associated with death, transformation, and renewal. They were mainly located in caves, where actors from another world, supernatural snakes and dogs, are represented, leading humans down the path of souls. The colour used for the drawing of this world is black, which was apparently associated with death (Jan F. Simek, Alan Cressler, Nicholas P. Herrmann, and Sarah C. Sherwood 2013).

The next stage in North American prehistory leads us to study the Anasazi culture, which encompasses the ancestors of the “Ancestral Pueblo” culture in the Four Corners region (Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico). The Anasazi did not develop writing, have a monetary system, or know about metallurgy. However, other advances such as textile manufacturing, mastery of irrigation, complex constructions, and knowledge of astronomy indicate that it was a restless and dynamic culture. The Anasazi also left images for posterity, with numerous paintings and petroglyphs imprinted on the rocky walls of the southwestern United States, reproducing their myths and beliefs. These suggestive pictographs, filled with figures of anthropomorphic beings with horns, wings, huge eyes, and strange-looking skulls, continue to generate interpretations. All these representations can still be contemplated at Sego Canyon. Archaeologists have not yet reached a chronological agreement, but most experts ascribe these Barrier Canyon-style pictographs to the archaic period from 8000 BCE to 500 CE. Clay figurines with similar



characteristics were found in the Cowboy and Walter caves in southwestern Utah in a radiocarbon dated stratigraphic context of 5600–5000 BCE (Coulam and Schroedl 1996).

Later, in the central area of the Gila-Salado Plateau near Phoenix, another part of the original North American history was recovered. In this region the Hohokam culture developed which, according to the latest investigations, consists of a formative period (1000 BCE–700 CE), a pre-classical period (700–1150 CE), a classical period (1150–1450 CE), and a post-classical period (1450–1540 CE). The material culture that they left – “The Hohokam” – has also been found in other parts of the Southwest, and reveals strong ties to the west and northwest of Mexico. The images represented in cave paintings and petroglyphs seem to have evolved from an archaic legacy in which curvilinear abstract elements predominate, to which vital representations, such as humans, lizards, dogs, and birds, are added, in addition to spirals and suns, in many cases in overloaded figure panels (James M. Bayman 2001). Other contemporary cultures located in adjacent areas were the Mogollón and Pataya.

In the Arctic zone (Alaska), the Thule culture began to develop in around 1000 CE, as the origin of the Inuit (Eskimo) people. Its name comes from Thule (currently Qaanaaq), a small town located in the northwest of Greenland where the archaeological remains of this culture were first found. These communities made their houses from whale bones, the product of the winter hunt, also making graves and using stone covers, all of which evolved into a structure built from blocks of ice known as “igloos.” The artifacts found in the archaeological sites confirm that their economy was based on the consumption of whales, seals, walrus, and caribou, completing their diet with seabirds and fish. The Inuit religion (of animistic and shamanistic origin) believes that animals have souls and, once hunted, a brief ceremony must be held by the hunter so that the creature’s soul goes to the non-earthly world. It was surely for this reason that the ancestors made naturalistic drawings and decorations on combs and needle holders, carvings of small birds, and figures of bird women. Their mythology was transmitted orally, collecting their traditions and explaining the origin of the world they inhabited (Oosten et al. 2012).

After the discovery of the New World by European explorer Christopher Columbus, a colonizing race began among the countries of the Old World. It was then that the British arrived at Virginia and established the first of its thirteen colonies, which became the founding elements of the future American country. When they landed, both French and British explorers met the autochthonous inhabitants of North America, the Iroquois. The Iroquois Confederation initially consisted of an alliance between five tribes: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, with the Tuscarora tribe joining later (1722). That alliance formed in order

to deal with a technologically superior invader – the white man from the Old World. It is precisely the gaze of European artists that began the representation of these images of contacts between foreigners and natives, such as engravings of everyday life depicting Iroquois milling grain or dried berries or Iroquois with Western merchandise from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. But the first person to go into more detail about the culture of these tribes was the French missionary Louis Nicolas, who arrived in the colonies at the end of the seventeenth century and collected his experience in the *Codex Canadensis*. This volume is composed of 180 drawings, in which portraits of plants, mammals, birds, fish, and the aborigines appear. The author paid special attention to the paintings and tattoos with which aborigines adorned their bodies.

The British Empire continued to expand gradually through later wars and colonies, gaining control of New Amsterdam (later called New York) after the Anglo-Dutch wars. At that time, the American colonies stretched westwards, seeking new territories for agricultural exploitation. When the English defeated the French (in the Seven Years' War) they conquered New France, which made England the owner of most of North America. A new territory based on this society began to appear, represented in images by painters such as Francis Hayman, who portrayed Jonathan Tyers and his family having tea. During the eighteenth century, drinking tea in the British colonies was just as fashionable as in Great Britain.

As a matter of fact, it was precisely because of tea that one of the most important historical events in the United States happened. On December 16, 1773 in Boston, Massachusetts, a group of American colonists disguised as Indians threw the cargo of three British ships into the sea in an act of protest. As is well known, this boycott became one of the triggers of the War of Independence. Thousands of images from the revolutionary period have survived, such as Emanuel Leutze's Delaware River Crossing, The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775, and the Surrender of General Burgoyne, both by John Trumbull.

The arrival of the nineteenth century brought one of the technological discoveries that changed how our world is represented – photography. This was the result of an accumulation of knowledge from Aristotle and many others, officially concluding in 1839 with the worldwide presentation of the first photographic technique – the daguerreotype. The oldest surviving photograph is a reproduction of the image known as "View from the Window at Le Gras," while the oldest extant photographic image from the United States was taken by Joseph Saxton on September 25, 1839 (Rung, A, 1940). This meant a substantial change for the United States and the rest of the world in representing and seeing objects, people, landscapes, and traditions.

Modernity brought widespread access to artistic productions and

cultural artefacts, including images, and the mass media very soon made them even more democratic and easily available. At that time of early modernity, the Statue of Liberty arrived in New York (as a gift from the French government to the American government in 1886 to commemorate the centenary of the United States Declaration of Independence, and as a sign of friendship between the two nations). The statue is the work of the French sculptor Bartholdi and almost immediately became an American icon and symbol. Within this context, and after the innovation of the technique of capturing reality through the daguerreotype using light, humanity continued to investigate the idea of capturing, creating, and reproducing movement by mechanical means. Thomas Alva Edison laid the foundations to achieve this, patenting the kinetoscope created in his laboratory by William Dickson, but it was the Lumière Brothers who created a device capable of taking, projecting, and copying moving images, which they called the cinematograph. With this device, the first cinematographic projection open to the public was held on December 28, 1895 in the Indian Salon of the Gran Café del Boulevard in Paris. Previously, before a small and selected audience, the American Charles Francis Jenkins made what is considered the first documented public screening in the United States with the Phantascope. The venue was in Richmond, showing the short film of a vaudeville dancer performing the butterfly dance.

As the cities grew the buildings grew taller (becoming skyscrapers in many American cities), producing a relay of historicisms motivated by the architecture of the Chicago School, which can be summarized as a dialogue with the past, while the school itself tends to be seen as an door open to the future, seemingly entering its definitive crisis when it builds its greatest momentum. The Home Insurance Building and Marshall Field's Wholesale Store, for example, are retained in our retina. The enormous and gigantic economic growth and unbridled development of the Hollywood film industry indicated the United States of America as the land of opportunities.

After the two world wars, modernity, and the twentieth century, citizens were exhausted, and so was their art. Would humanity have collapsed? Already immersed in the twentieth-first century, we continue with the feeling of being in a new era – not new due to a will for it to be so, but because it surely is. A modernity marked by revolutions such as the Neolithic, the Industrial, and the political is giving way to a technological postmodernity full of images where there are no territories and you can save everything in a cloud.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## ANALYSING IMAGES: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

### Introduction

Images have both aesthetic and artistic dimensions that make them works of art. Undoubtedly, artistic creations contain information of extraordinary interest since they reflect a social need. In this sense, the comment of an artistic creation must also contemplate its sociological and stylistic aspects.

In this way, taking as an example any pictorial work from a specific time of the past, we can identify a very great diversity of landscapes, vegetations, and autochthonous fauna. In the same way, we can also identify descriptions of peace treaties and battles or relevant historical meetings, historical facts, historical figures, clothing, daily life, public aspects, economic aspects, and cultural life.

Therefore, we must understand artistic creations as the vestiges of the natural predilection of the human being towards the beautiful, while at the same time establishing a link between the artistic piece and the culture that created and enjoyed it. They acquire their own formal language according to their style, which is studied as a primary objective by artistic and historical studies. From a historical perspective, images very often become a first step for immersion in the interpretation of any given historical period and how people from that period perceived the world. In a way, just as the Lumière Brothers recreated reality through successions of images in movement, history can similarly be considered as a succession of images. Thus, our conception of reality will be more accurate if we make the effort required to observe several different artistic representations from the period we are studying.

In short, a work of art is a human creation, and as such follows a process of execution which responds to an intentionality, aiming to achieve an effect on the observer by following aesthetic principles based on sensitive forms or meaning. After all, every aesthetic creation tries to make the observer as familiar as possible with the beauty of artistic language.

## **Elements of an image or artistic creation**

Any image or artistic creation is composed of a set of diverse elements that are merged, and consequently it will not be considered a finished work until the moment of accomplishing the said unity. The artwork is considered to have three main components:

- A visible reality – where it comes from and from where it takes its source materials.
- The plastic component – the needs imposed by the composition material and the way of doing it.
- The scope of the thoughts and feelings that move the artist and those embodied in the artistic creation.

The external reality influences the artist by supplying them with the elements from which their work will be created. When a painter wants to capture an image of nature, they have to reproduce their optical impressions by means of strokes that do not exist in reality and the chromatic range they select. Thus, the final result will be fully dependent on the means they have at their disposal, as well as their own skills and expertise. For this reason, the artist does not revive nature and the work of art is not made up of the will, intelligence, sensitivity, and the human hand alone. What is extracted from nature and reflected in the work are the products of research and decisions. Consequently, artists can translate conscious intentions as well as imagined motifs.

Therefore, when commenting on an image or artistic creation, it is important to understand the artist, since they are the interpreter of the society and civilization to which they belong, who sometimes transmits to us their individual nature, problems, and particular dreams. That is, we must understand the three constituent planes of the artist (the mental, the visual, and the manual), because the resulting image or artistic creation will be entirely dependent on their harmonization.

## **The Role of the Image or Artistic Creation**

All human creations comprise different ways of transforming the vision of the world and the yearning for its organization into an objective reality, which single out the men and women of a certain cultural sphere in a specific period of its evolution. For this reason, all the artistic creations from a given culture share many common elements. The importance given to the visual image as a means of expression in our current context can be seen on Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook, for example. By creating and sharing images, human beings have always tried to express their thoughts