Let's start by looking carefully at this picture.
Take a whole minute to quietly look at the image before discussing.

Now, Let's discuss.

Teachers can facilitate a class discussion that encourages all students to contribute their observation using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). (For information on VTS see our education resource: Visual Thinking Strategies under Resources on our webpage: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/art-institute/education)

- **What’s going on in this picture?** (Encourage all students to contribute at least one observation and continually encourage contributions.)

- **What can you see that makes you say that?** (Promote critical thinking by encouraging students to support their assumptions about what they see with a rationale, for example: “This is a night-time scene because I can see the sky is black and there are lights on in the buildings.” Teachers can validate each answer by neutrally restating or repeating back the students’ comment.)

- **What more can you see?** (Keep asking students this question after each contribution until you are sure the conversation is exhausted. One of the most valuable attributes of a VTS discussion is that it encourages students to see the benefit of spending time with an image and experiencing the breadth of their peer’s observations and interpretations of the same image).

Following your VTS Discussion, you might ask students the following questions:
- Is this a real scene?
- What feeling do you get from this image?
- Where was the photo was taken?
- Why do you think the photograph was taken?
- When do you think the photo was taken?

Remember to follow each response with the question: **What makes you say that?**
This is a photograph from the La Trobe University Art Collection called Crowd Theory, Southbank by Simon Terrill. The photograph was taken at Southbank, Melbourne in 2007.

It is part of an ongoing series of ten Crowd Theory images “…where artist Simon Terrill engages with urban groups, inviting people to imagine their own idea of place. The first iteration was created at Footscray Community Art Centre in 2004 and the most recent event was staged in Thamesmead, London. For each project, an invitation is made to anyone and everyone with an association to each site to come together for a single, yet collective photographic portrait. Participants are specified the time of the event—but choose how to represent themselves—creating socially charged spaces that reveal tensions between public and private identities, and complex politics surrounding urban habitation.

Each Crowd Theory work involves extensive collaboration, through the mobilisation of up to 300 people, as well as the coordination of lighting, soundtracks, smoke machines, catering and marshalling, creating a theatre-like atmosphere.”

While this might look like a chance snap of a crowd of people walking along Southbank, like the other images in the series, the whole scene has actually been stage-managed by the artist.

The artist says: “Crowd Theory is an ongoing series of photographic and performance-based events with crowds, communities and the spaces they occupy. Each project begins with drawing on peoples’ association with place. Following a period of site research, the process begins by inviting anyone and everyone who has an association with that place to be a part of the image. From there an idea of a crowd portrait emerges. The works are carefully stage-managed public operations that involve many collaborators and are a collective effort in coordinating lighting, soundtracks, camera, catering, marshalling and sometimes a smoke machine or closing off a street.

The works explore a contrasting and oscillating space between the personal and the public, the individual and the collective, and the impact of these fluid definitions on architecture, portraiture and the photograph. For each event, a time and place is specified and a group of people assemble, but their actions on-site are left undirected and uncontrolled. The works become documents of how people choose to represent themselves within these spaces and in turn, these spaces potentially represent their inhabitants. Drawing on motifs from Bruegel to Elias Canetti, here the crowd becomes a vision of equality, where differences between people dissolve in those fleeting moments when a group of people can be said to have become a ‘crowd’.”

What do you think the artist means by “a contrasting and oscillating space between the personal and the public, the individual and the collective”?

Each of the people in the photograph has a certain amount of choice and control over their participation—they decide to turn up in the first place in response to the artist’s invitation, they decide how and where they position themselves and what they wear, while the artist specifies the time and place, loosely directs the whole scene and chooses the moment to take the picture.

So there is a balance between what the artist wants to create (and control) and what each individual person decides to do in the photograph and in the designated public space. The participants know they will be photographed and the end result is a lasting image of that moment which subtly influences their behaviour and choices.

The photograph presents a number of opposing ideas: Chance and Control, Order and Chaos, The individual and the Collective/Crowd.

At the moment when the photograph is taken "the crowd becomes a vision of equality, where differences between people dissolve in those fleeting moments when a group of people can be said to have become a ‘crowd’,” the artist says.
• What other examples can you think of where there is a tension between “the personal and the public” at the moment?

• We choose how to behave in public spaces based on our understanding of how our behaviour impacts others.
  
  • How does being in a public place influence the way we behave?
  • Do we behave differently when we are in a crowd?


2 Simon Terrill: Perspectives, Notes and Comments: Crowd Theory 2004-18
A catalogue to coincide with the exhibition Simon Terrill: Crowd Theory at Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2nd February-31st March, 2019.
Authors: Daniel Palmer, Chantal Faust, Chris Fite-Wassilak, Marianne Mulvey, Anna Minton
Editor: Chris Fite-Wassilak
Designer: Steven Dickie
Publisher: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2019
ISBN 0994622953, 9780994622952
https://ccp.org.au/content/2-exhibitions/1-all/0-simon-terrill-crowd-theory/ccp_simon_terrill_crowd_theory.pdf

Slide 6

This is another image from the Series, Crowd Theory - Port of Melbourne, type C print, 180cm x 242cm, produced in association with Footscray Arts Centre, 2008

• Can you find someone who has brought along their trombone?
• Can you find two ladies making a heart shape with their bodies?
• Can you find a lady waving?

Here you can see the influence of the camera. Most people are just standing still - but some individuals have decided to express their individuality. Some people seem to want to draw attention to themselves, some are having fun, some might wish to make their mark on the image. This is not a ‘natural’ crowd.

• What do you feel like when you are being photographed? Do you like it? Or, does it make you uncomfortable?

• How does being part of a large group or crowd effect our behaviour?

Following are two more images selected from the ten photographs that make up the Crowd Theory series.
Slide 7

Crowd Theory - Braybrook, type C print, 180cm x 225cm, produced in association with Footscray Arts Centre, 2004

This is a view of people at the Braybook oval in Footscray. Again, all the people you see have some kind of connection with that place.

What do we think about when we view this image?

Slide 8

This is actually the first image Terrill created in the Series, at Footscray Community Art Centre in 2004, with the rest of the pieces being created over the last 15 years up until 2018.

Each artwork exists in a context, even many contexts, which shape and provide clues to the deeper meaning of the work. There is the context in which the work was made by the artist – what the artist was thinking about at the time, maybe within his practice (e.g., he might have wanted to try out a particular way of taking photos, or in Terrill's case, explore a particular place and its community), and there may have been community or world events happening at the time that influenced his ideas or his desire to make this particular work at this moment in time. These things all came together to form what we call the artist's intent.

But there is also a context for the viewer. When we look at and ‘read’ an image, we bring to it our own context, associations and interpretations, which may come from our personal experience and knowledge and/or our place in and response to the events going on around us at the time.

Do you think we might have viewed this Crowd Theory series a bit differently if we had seen it back in 2004, compared with the way we read the image now?

How does the context in which we view these works change our response to them? What do they make us think about now?

Would it even still be possible for the artist to create such an image now?

While the image has obviously remained the same, our world has changed dramatically, and so we have changed too.

Slide 9

The title of this series “Crowd Theory” refers to the many different ideas or theories that people have developed to describe the behaviour of crowds. A French scholar, Charles-Marie Gustave Le Bon developed the view that people behave automatically when in a crowd rather than thinking for themselves, this phenomenon is often described as “herd mentality”. Le Bon found that when people act with Herd Mentality they are more likely to be destructive and disregard the consequences of their actions. Other people have gathered evidence that suggest people do still think and often act in small groups and help each other (in emergency situations for example).
• Do you behave differently when you are in a crowd? If so, how does being in a crowd influence your behaviour?

• Do you remember when you were last part of a big crowd?

• What happens when people start to move, go quiet or get noisy?

• Are you influenced by what others do? Why?

• What feeling do you get from the crowd in this image?

The artist says he “…here the crowd becomes a vision of equality, where differences between people dissolve in those fleeting moments when a group of people can be said to have become a ‘crowd’.”

• Is this your experience of being in a crowd?

Challenge Activity:
Think of a time when you were part of a large crowd. Try to describe the occasion using all your five senses.

• What did it feel like?

• Do you enjoy that feeling or does it give you other kinds of feelings?

• Do you miss being able to be part of a crowd?

Each of the people you see in this photograph were invited to participate in the creation of this image because they have a real-life connection to this place.

• What sort of connection can you imagine someone might have with this place – Southbank in Melbourne?

Some people may feel they have a connection to this place because they work or live there, some people might be in charge of managing the space or have been part of designing or building it. Someone might have a special memory that happened there, or they might own a family business there, or have a historic connection to the place.

Before European settlement, the Wurundjeri people called the river Birrarung and it was a rich source of food for them. Perhaps Traditional Owners of the land, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation might be there to show their connection to that place?

We can see from this image, that places can have many different meanings and connections for people, aside from the purpose for which they exist.
Challenge:

Either individually or as a class, choose a public place in your community that you have a strong connection to.

- Visit that place with your visual diary and do some drawings or take some photographs
- Write a short story about what the place means to you and why. Share this with your class.
- Research the history of that place. If possible, find out who are the Traditional Owners of the land there.
- Create a timeline of any important events that have taken place over time there.
- Create a list of people who you think will also have a connection to that place, and perhaps you could arrange to interview one or two to build up a wider picture of the interconnections between that place and people in your community

From here, a crowd portrait begins to emerge.

Public spaces have long been part of our larger towns and cities around the world.

Southbank was designed by a group of architects from a company called Denton Corker Marshall in 1990. In part, this was aimed at stimulating development in a period when Melbourne was experiencing an acute economic downturn during the global recession on 1991–92.

- Do you think public spaces are important? Why?
- How are they important to creating a cohesive society?
- What are the public spaces where you live?
- What purpose do they serve in your community?

Challenge Activity:
Look at other public spaces around Australia and the world: [https://www.pps.org/article/60places](https://www.pps.org/article/60places) (for example: Times Square in New York, U.S / Circular Quay in Sydney / Charles Bridge in Prague)

- Design a new public space for your community or upgrade an existing public place – what do you need to consider?
- What is the purpose of the place?
- How will people move through the space? Don’t forget people who might use a wheelchair or have mobility.
- What will make people want to be in this space?
Simon Terrill is an Australian artist based in London. Working with photography, sculpture, installation, drawing and video, his work investigates relations between architectural spaces and their received narratives, public and private identities, and the idea of the crowd as a tool to examine architecture, identity, community and a performance of self.

His ongoing Crowd Theory project consists of large-scale stage-managed public events resulting in exhibitions at the sites of their creation along with collaborations with museums and public galleries to extend these images and stories outwards.

For more information about the artist visit: www.simonterrill.com/

---

F-10 Curriculum Links

- **Level 3 & 4**
  - VISUAL ARTS—Respond and Interpret; Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- **Level 5 & 6**
  - VISUAL ARTS—Explore and Express Ideas; Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to create artworks that express different ideas and beliefs;

- **Level 7 & 8**
  - VISUAL ARTS—Explore and Express Ideas; Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to explore and develop themes, concepts or ideas in artworks; Explore how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realise their intentions in art works—Visual Art Practices; Develop skills in planning and designing art works and documenting artistic practice—Respond and Interpret: Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in art works and how they are viewed by audiences

- **Level 9 & 10**
  - VISUAL ARTS—Explore and Express Ideas; Explore how artists manipulate materials, techniques, technologies and processes to develop and express their intentions in art works—Visual Art Practices; Conceptualise, plan and design art works that express ideas, concepts and artistic intentions—Respond and Interpret: Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences
F-10 Curriculum Links (continued):

- **Level 3 & 4**
  CIVICS & CITIZENSHIP (KNOWLEDGE) – Citizenship, Diversity and Identity; Investigate why and how people participate within communities and cultural and social groups

- **Level 5 & 6**
  GEOGRAPHY (KNOWLEDGE) – Factors that shape places and influence interconnections; Environmental & human influences on the locations & characteristics of places & their management of spaces within them; Factors that influence people’s awareness & opinion of places

- **Level 7 & 8**
  GEOGRAPHY (KNOWLEDGE) – Places and liveability; Influence of social connectedness and community identity on the liveability of places
  
  CIVICS & CITIZENSHIP (KNOWLEDGE) – Citizenship, Diversity and Identity; Identify how values can promote cohesion within Australian society, including the values of freedom, respect, inclusion, civility, responsibility, compassion, equality and a ‘fair go’.

- **Level 9 & 10**
  GEOGRAPHY (KNOWLEDGE) – Geographies of interconnection; Perceptions people have of place, and how this influences their connections to different places; Ways that places and people are interconnected with other places through trade in goods and services, at all scales; Effects of people’s travel, recreational, cultural or leisure choices on places, and the implications for the future of these places.
  
  CIVICS & CITIZENSHIP (KNOWLEDGE) – Citizenship, Diversity and Identity; Discuss challenges to and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy and cohesive society