JANIS TERUGGI PAGE | MARGARET DUFFY

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES

WILEY Blackwell

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Preface

How can we make sense of the myriad visual images surrounding us today? How can we strategically use images with a clear understanding of their function and impact?

This book answers these questions by providing new "ways of seeing" visual representations through different lenses and in different contexts. It then provides practical guidance for creating purposeful and ethical visual communication.

The authors recognize the accelerating dominion of images in communication, society, and culture. We human beings process images and video effortlessly and automatically. Visuals carry an emotional and visceral punch that text can rarely, if ever, match. As multinational marketers, social media influencers, and teenagers on TikTok know, visuals create their own language, accessible to all, regardless of traditional textual barriers of understanding such as education or language.

We've watched as entertainment and information have morphed into largely image-based communication including advertising and brand messaging, organizational communication, and individual creation and uploading of images, memes, and videos of all kinds. As of this writing in early 2021, people are watching 5 billion YouTube vides every day and Instagram has over one billion users worldwide. U.S. digital advertising expenditures are projected to grow to 22.18 billion U.S. dollars in 2021 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/256272/digital-video-advertising-spending-in-the-us/).

Most of us take the sphere of images for granted: it's just the way the world is. Of course, human beings have always created symbolic structures of meaning that shape how we interpret and participate in social life. However, we also tend to treat these image systems as natural phenomena. We conveniently forget that we ourselves invented these structures of meaning and it's important we understand their significance and meaning in more thoughtful and nuanced ways.

For some years, we've been conducting research on images, moving and still, and their various roles in society. We've studied and written about digital visual folklore in emails about President Obama, the widespread sharing of memes of football star Richard Sherman, comedy television's performance of vice presidential debates, presidential candidates' online visual storytelling, images of morality in political TV ads and news coverage, sexual imagery in advertising, issues in visual persuasion ethics, photographic coverage of the Pope's 2015 visit to Cuba, ethical implications of VR, AR, and 360° technologies, and satiric images of Trump as spectacle in global magazines, among other visual topics.

Inspired by our previous work, we wrote this book for students and scholars with the intent of providing insights into the role of visuals in our dynamic social environment. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "We are symbols and we inhabit symbols" (*The Poet*, 1844). We hope this book connects with a broad range of scholars and practitioners in the arts, humanities, social sciences, engineering, technology, and neuroscience and serves as an invitation to future study.

Acknowledgments

Both authors made generous contributions in the research and writing of this book. As this project has evolved through its various phases, there are many people to whom we owe special thanks.

We would like to begin by thanking our academic colleagues in visual communication for inspiring and challenging us to create this book and extend our theoretical, applied approach to visual communication education to students in all preprofessional fields that encounter visual phenomena.

Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers who offered clear critique, advice, and suggestions based on their own teaching experiences in visual communication. We also benefited greatly from our students who, through classroom engagement, provided helpful feedback on lessons and exercises.

We want to acknowledge our colleagues and administrators at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Communication, and the Novak Leadership Institute at Missouri School of Journalism for their support during the research and writing of this book.

We also deeply appreciate the contributions from the professionals and academics who shared insightful profiles in our chapters and who offered their suggestions and ideas as we developed the outline of the book.

Drawing from years of study and practice in fine art, Janis is especially grateful for the long-term mentoring in visual metaphors by Sr. Alyce Van Acker, O.P., of the Fine Line Creative Arts Center, St. Charles, IL.

Finally, we would like to thank our spouses William Page and Daryl Moen for their constant encouragement throughout our long process of shaping and perfecting each chapter, resulting in a work we are truly proud of.

About the Authors

Janis Teruggi Page is a faculty member in the Department of Communication, University of Illinois at Chicago, and has been affiliated with the Strategic Public Relations Master's Program, George Washington University, for more than a decade. She has taught visual communication courses throughout her academic career. As a Fulbright distinguished chair, in 2018 she researched intercultural visual communication and taught visual literacy at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. An award-winning author, her research includes "Images with Messages: A Semiotic Approach to Identifying and Decoding Strategic Visual Communication," published in the *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication* (2015), and "Trump as Global Spectacle: The Visual Rhetoric of Magazine Covers," published in the *Handbook of Visual Communication* (2020). She is also coauthor of the textbook *Introduction to Public Relations: Strategic, Digital, and Socially Responsible Communication* (2019, 2021) with Lawrence J. Parnell. Prior to joining academia, she had a 20-year career as creative and marketing director for various US media companies. A former student at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago, she holds a PhD from the Missouri School of Journalism with a secondary emphasis in art history.

Margaret Duffy is Professor of Strategic Communication and cofounder and executive director of the Novak Leadership Institute. She led the effort to obtain a $21.6 million gift to endow the Institute from David Novak, alumnus of the Missouri School of Journalism advertising program. Mr. Novak is the retired CEO of YUM! Brands (Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC) and credits his education in advertising as the catalyst for his leadership success. Until 2016, Dr. Duffy chaired the Strategic Communication Faculty at the Missouri School of Journalism. She also served as associate dean for graduate studies. Dr. Duffy directed the Missouri School of Journalism's Online Master's Program from 2001 to 2016. An award-winning scholar, her research focuses on leadership, organizational communication, visual communication, and persuasion ethics. She coedited the book *Persuasion Ethics Today* (2016) and cowrote *Advertising Age: The Principles of Advertising and Marketing Communication at Work* (2011), Dr. Duffy is a founding board member of the Institute for Advertising Ethics and an inaugural fellow at the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute. In 2019, she received the University of Missouri Distinguished Faculty Award. She is a former marketing executive and earned her PhD from the University of Iowa. An author and consultant, Dr. Duffy conducts research and advises media companies and brands around the world with clients as varied as Estée Lauder and the US Army.

PART ONE

Understanding Visual Communication

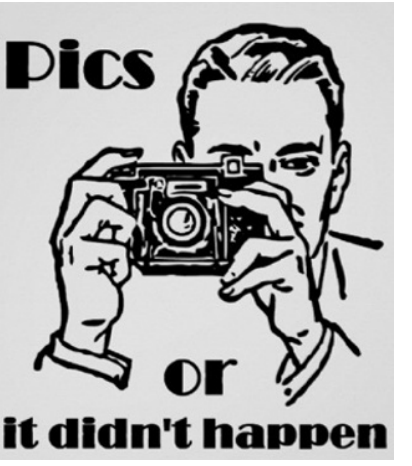
Chapter 1

Making Sense of Visual Culture

1000 Words or One Simple Picture?

"Pics or it didn't happen."

By 2015, this phrase had morphed from a meme to a catchphrase that seemed to be everywhere. If a friend tweeted that she'd been cliff diving in Acapulco, you might respond with that phrase suggesting that perhaps she was being boastful without any evidence to back it up (Whitehead, 2015).



Source: http://www.dpreview.com/forums/post/58791114. Reproduced with permission of RetroClipArt/Shutterstock.com.

If your gamer pal claimed to have reached level 60 in World of Warcraft, you might demand some proof.

Other phrases call on our desire to tap into what Whitehead and others have called "visual authority." You've all heard that "seeing is believing" and heard people say, "I'll believe it when I see it with my own eyes." And consider the famous Chinese proverb, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Here's the thing: it's not Chinese, and it's not a proverb. In fact, it was likely the creation of ad man Fred Barnard[1] in the 1920s. As William Safire (1996) writes, Barnard, trying to increase his agency's business selling ads on railway cars, came up with the phrase. He had it translated into Chinese characters with the caption "Chinese Proverb: One Picture is Worth Ten Thousand Words" and it passed into popular culture as "one thousand words." Whether it is one thousand or ten, Barnard tapped into the notion that most people find visual evidence more credible and interesting than verbal or textual expression (Graber, 1990).

In entertainment, politics, interpersonal interactions, and at work and at play, we're all consuming, evaluating, and creating visuals. Our culture is increasingly suffused with images aimed at selling us something, persuading us, informing us, entertaining us, and connecting us with others. Your skills and capabilities in communicating effectively and critically evaluating what's around you are crucial to your personal and professional success and that is what this book is about. In the following chapters, we'll provide you with the tools to become an ethical and effective communicator in an era increasingly suffused with images of all kinds.

Key Learning Objectives

1. Understand visual culture and its transformation in the digital age.
2. Explore the fluidity of visual meaning.
3. Identify ways to research and analyze visuals.

Chapter Overview

In this introductory chapter, you'll explore five important issues relating to visuals in contemporary society. First, you'll be introduced to how visuals work and how we interpret them. Second, we'll review the astounding growth of visuals and video in recent years and how this trend is on a steep upward trajectory. Third, we examine the concept of visual culture and how changing technology relates to that culture. Fourth, you'll delve into how individuals can draw different meanings from the same visuals or video artifacts and how that process relates to social life and the meanings we take from our environment. Fifth, we preview ways to analyze visuals. At the close of the chapter we offer two vignettes illustrating how visuals work and provide an overview of the book as a whole.

HOW VISUALS WORK

LO1 Understand visual culture and its transformation in the digital age

Today almost every part of our lives is visual and visualized. We routinely use devices to see, to capture experiences, and to communicate. As suggested by Tavin (2009), visual culture is "a condition in which human experience is profoundly affected by images, new technologies for looking, and various practices of seeing, showing, and picturing" (p. 3, 4). We are now at a place of unlimited visual culture and thus how we understand media and visual literacy has changed.

Photographic Truth?

Among the things that strike us about images and photographs in particular is how they *feel* as if they are presenting us with a truth about reality. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) call this the "myth of photographic truth" (p. 24) because it obscures the roles of human beings who are creating the image. Those acts of creation include many factors such as the choices the photographer makes about the scene, lighting, and composition. Indeed, the photographer decides what subjects are worthy of their time or attention.

Even with technologies that make it easy and inexpensive to capture images of all kinds, the picture-taker must choose those subjects, whether they are powerful images of war or funny pictures of grumpy cats. All of these will affect the tone of a photo and thus the interpretations people take away from it. Even though we may know intellectually that the photographer has chosen a certain subject at a certain time and framed it a certain way, a photo still carries a sense of legitimacy. Put differently, it involves the "legacy of objectivity that clings to the cameras and machines that produce images today" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 18).

FOCUS: A Historical Perspective on Visual Culture

Another way to understand visual culture is to look at it historically. This example illustrates the role of perspective. When we compare medieval paintings (1300–1500) to contemporary paintings, we see remarkable differences. People in today's societies are used to seeing two-dimensional (flat surfaces) that depict three-dimensional spaces such as a road receding into the distance. In medieval times, Christianity was the primary organizing principle of society and artists presented religious and historical images based on the importance of those portrayed rather than more realistic representations (Willard n.d.). The world depicted in the paintings was the domain of God, not the lived experience of people, as shown in this two-dimensional artwork from 1295 depicting the Twelve Apostles receiving inspiration from the Holy Spirit:

Source: Art Collection 2/Alamy Stock Photo.

In fact, it's thought that the highly religious yet illiterate people in medieval times would have found 3D representations to be puzzling and even heretical. The Renaissance in the late fifteenth century led to the emergence of interest in science, intellectual pursuits, and the more realistic depictions of the world. With this societal change, artists began achieving three-dimensional effects using a whole range of techniques including linear perspectives, in which the "illusion that objects appear to grow smaller and converge toward a 'vanishing point' at the horizon line" (Jirousek, 1995). This is illustrated in Rembrandt's 1632 painting, *The Abduction of Europa*:

Source: GL Archive/Alamy Stock Photo.

Growing Importance of Visuals

Increasingly, visuals dominate how we communicate and how we understand other people, our society, and the culture in which we live. The line between the media we consume and what we used to consider "real life" is largely erased. Media *are* our environment as much as the physical spaces we inhabit. Old ways of belief are challenged even more in a world built of visual communication. According to Anderson (1990), this is resulting in an "unregulated marketplace of realities in which all manner of belief systems are offered for public consumption" (p. 6).

Groundbreaking journalist and social critic Walter Lippmann (1922) was likely the first to apply the term "**stereotype**" referring to attitudes people acquire without specific knowledge of an event or individual. People tend to quickly process visuals along the lines of what they already believe or think and interpret them in terms of familiar categories (Graber, 1988). This may lead people to reflect less on the credibility and accuracy of visual claims than those made in type.

Our Precarious Visual Culture

Today, something that looks like a photo may be an image that's digitally produced, altered, or enhanced. Many images are essentially fictions deliberately created to amuse, to deceive, or to offer an artistic perspective. Many of these are shared and even go viral. They range from silly fictions and jokes, such as fried chicken Oreos and a man presumably holding an 87-pound cat, to manipulated photos attempting character assassination, such as President Obama shown smoking and President George W. Bush shown reading a book upside down (Hoaxes, 2015).

Some are **memes** shared by like-minded people. These images with text make fun of public figures or celebrities and often call on well-known popular culture references and icons. For example, during the Obama presidency, many forwarded email memes pictured Obama through the lens of racial stereotyping portraying him as a witch doctor, an animal, and even a pimp (Duffy et al., 2012).

For some people, such images are plausible and shareable and even if they don't literally believe the message, they nonetheless appear to believe that the visual joke carries an element of truth. The same message put into type likely would be patently offensive. However, in a cartoon-like meme, senders and receivers of the image can claim that "it's just a joke." For others, the images offer the opportunity to further manipulate or mashup visuals and videos to create entirely new messages and meanings. People can take photos and add stickers, filters, doodles, and text overlays. They can edit and crop images, create collages and mashups. And, of course, they can and do share them.

Political Persuasion

Images created to intentionally mislead are increasingly part of the promotional strategies for political candidates and their supporters. In pre-Internet times, visuals and video, usually on television, played a major role in positioning candidates and their

opponents. Political consultants have frequently harnessed the power of the visual because human beings are able to quickly interpret and process those messages. Early on, researchers found that in news coverage and advertisements, visual elements overwhelmed verbal elements. In 1988, an ABC news correspondent, Richard Threlkeld, voiced a spot that was aimed at discounting the claims of a George H.W. Bush presidential ad called "Tank Ride." The piece showed the visuals of the ad as the reporter's voiceover detailed the false claims it made. However, research revealed that people who saw it tended to ignore the verbal statements and internalize the message of the original ad. An intentional alteration of images in an ad from President George W. Bush's 2004 campaign was digitally enhanced to add images of soldiers into a crowd he was addressing. After criticism, the campaign withdrew the ad.

Another questionable use of images is found in a web video by the Democratic National Campaign that used a dramatization of a man in a business suit pushing an elderly woman in a wheelchair off a cliff as a way to attack Republican Congressman Paul Ryan's proposed plan for health care reform (Raposa, 2012). While no one was likely to believe that Ryan's plan would literally involve throwing old people from high places, the powerful visuals coupled with a soundtrack of "America the Beautiful" nevertheless sent a deceptive message about the possible effects of Ryan's plan. As we examine many media artifacts, we can see the power of visual metaphors – in this case, a policy change – equated to a violent act against a helpless and vulnerable person.

Political persuasion has always drawn on popular culture and the conventions of films and other audiovisual devices. You've probably noticed that negative political ads (NPAs) tend to present opponents using dramatic conventions drawn from horror movies or crime dramas because viewers find it easy to understand and connect with those conventions. For example, often opponents will be portrayed accompanied by dark atmospheric visual effects, unflattering images, and scary or ominous music. YouTube, Facebook, and scores of other social networks provide low cost ways to distribute content beyond television programming.

Digital Transformation of Visual Culture

Much research on digital visual content in the twenty-first century points to a tsunami of images washing over words. WebDAM, a digital brand consulting firm and data science company, reported that verbal intelligence is dropping while visual intelligence is increasing (Morrison, 2015). Scores in the SAT reading exam hit an all-time low in 2016 (Kranse Institute, 2017) and three years later, with an increased number of student test-takers in 2019, SAT reading scores again fell nationally. Research surfacing in many parts of the world now cautions that essential "deep reading" processes may be under threat as we move into digital-based modes of reading (Wolf, 2018): essentially "skimming" with low engagement and retention.

But we're incredible at remembering pictures, writes biologist John Medina (n.d.) in his multimedia project Brain Rules. Three days after hearing information we may remember 10% of it but add a picture and memory increases to 65%. Thanks to the digital revolution,

visuals have become a universal language. A whopping 82% of all Internet traffic globally will be video by 2022, estimates Cisco (2019), up from 75% in 2017 – and **virtual reality** (VR) and **augmented reality** (AR) will increase 12-fold globally between 2017 and 2022.

Instagram had one billion monthly active users in 2018 according to TechCrunch (Constine, 2018). That same year, the total number of photos shared in the platform's history was recorded at more than 50 billion. Dating apps like Tinder and Friendsy make it easy (some say *too* easy) to exchange photos with others and find romance. When it comes to the essential organizational website, research suggests that well-designed and highly visual sites are more trustworthy than poorly designed sites (Harley, 2016).

Members of Generation Z, those born in 1996 and later, are even more visually oriented than the much-discussed Millennials, those born between 1980 and 1985 (Williams, 2015). Research on Gen Z finds that 44% play video games daily and 72% visit YouTube daily (Claveria, 2019). Advertisers and media companies are responding to shifts toward the visual by redesigning their communication on big and small screens. On the so-called "visual web," brands and news organizations have moved to image-based content creation. The massive use of mobile is a major driver of these changes as smaller screens are friendlier to visual content than textual.

Smartphones and Visual Culture

Smartphones have become so central to social life in many countries that the prospect of losing one's phone is more distressing than losing one's car. Owning a certain type of phone or wearable technology also communicates aspects of your interests, beliefs, and priorities. Today, most people in most countries are swimming in media images or being monitored by cameras in most public and private places. Signage and outdoor advertising are everywhere.

People are sending and receiving messages on screens of all types, large and small. Smartphones and tablets capture both the mundane and extraordinary in digital photography and video. Individuals are creating their own reality shows in real time, broadcasting their activities to users who can favorite or save the videos for later viewing or redistribution. Some people post funny animal videos (Figure 1.1), others create videos aimed at inspiring and motivating, and still others vlog with beauty advice. Some of the myriad of postings are more instructional such as how to install a garbage disposal, how to build and fly a homemade drone, and even how to give an opossum a pedicure.

All these technologies and their diverse applications affect how we see others and our environments, how we are seen and see ourselves. Some suggest that the visual web is a phenomenon largely fueled by social media, smart phones with sophisticated cameras, and apps that make it easy to create and share visual media (eMarketer, 2015). Hubspot lists the 10 best user-generated content campaigns on Instagram, for example, the UPS Store showcases a behind-the-scenes look at small business owners; online furniture store Wayfair lets customers showcase the results of their online shopping sprees; and Netflix lets fans promote their favorite shows and movies (Bernazzani, n.d.).

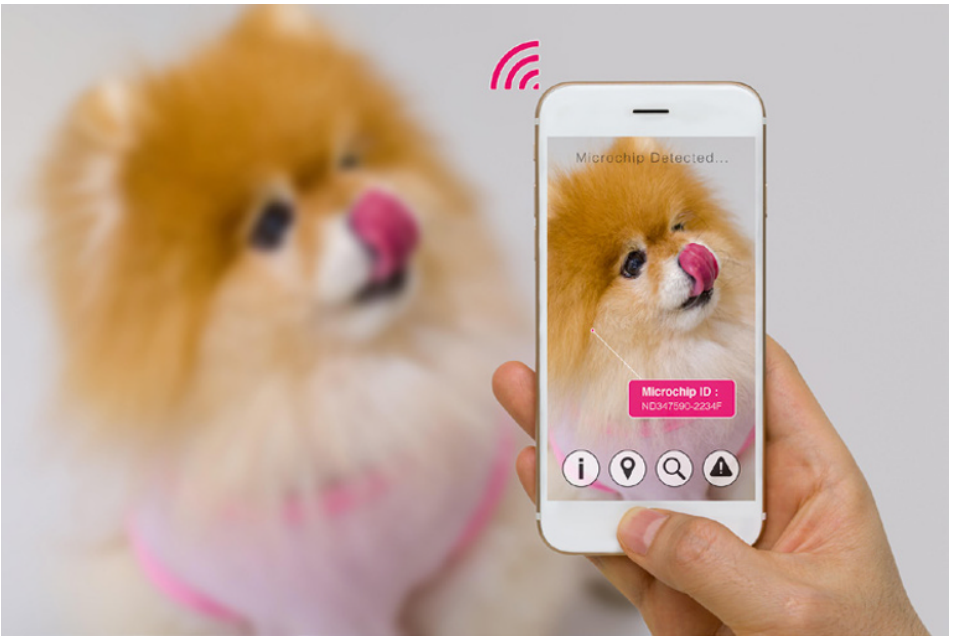


Figure 1.1 Smartphones and visual culture. *Source:* Supparsorn Wantarnagon/ Alamy Stock Photo.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

LO2 Explore the fluidity of visual meaning.

For most of us, everyday communication seems effortless. We chat, text, and share photos with our friends with an expectation of how the receivers of our message will react. However, as you know, communication can easily go wrong. A friend's mom, acting very concerned, recently asked her son what "LOL" meant on emails. He replied, "laughing out loud. Why?" She said, "that explains a lot. I thought it was 'lots of love' and I sent it in a message to someone whose pet had died."

Similarly, that photo you shared thinking it was hilarious may or may not get the reaction you expect. Intentionally or not, images and text point us to certain interpretations of their meanings while downplaying other interpretations.

Polysemy

Different images, words, and even different fonts carry cultural meanings that may resonate or puzzle, anger or offend. These differences in meaning and interpretations are called "**polysemy**," quite literally "multiple meanings." These multiple and shared meanings shape our culture and how we understand our world. When most people

hear the word "culture" they tend to think of fine arts, opera, or esoteric French films. In this book, when we refer to **visual culture**, we're talking about "the total way of life of a people . . . the social legacy the individual acquires from his group" and "a way of thinking, feeling, and believing" (Kluckhorn, 1973, in Geertz, p. 3).

Along the same lines, renowned scholar Raymond Williams (1958/1993) suggested in his foundational essay that culture is ordinary. By that he meant that we should not think of culture as simply artifacts or materials that people in a society make, whether they're smartphone photos, paintings, or Photoshopped memes. While these are part of culture creation, cultures are also created in our actions and practices in everyday life, as we individually and collectively assign meaning and morality to what we do, say, and communicate. Similarly, Clifford Geertz argued:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man [*sic*] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.
>
> *(Geertz, 1973)*

This helps us think of our world not as something fixed, static, and "out there," but as something we are actively creating as we interact with each other, with media, and face-to-face. The expectations and strictures of our cultures establish our identities and our places in society and lead us to judge what is valued and what is deplored, and make us evaluate what is worthy and unworthy. This doesn't mean that there's no "real" reality out there, but it does mean that in social life and our interactions, we socially construct the meanings of that reality.

In pre-Internet 1990, Walter Anderson wrote that in society, the "mass media make it easy to create and disseminate new structures of reality" (p. 9). We as individuals now don't need special tools and training to alter and edit videos, photos, and images of all kinds. Those with more skills can create entire worlds peopled by highly realistic images of individuals and environments as seen in games like the Grand Theft Auto series and Madden NFL. Some wearable technologies put the user "into" realistic 3D environments where they can "walk" through rooms, "drive" on simulated roads, and "shop" virtual products.

Semioticians, people who study the science of signs and their meanings, argue that all of the things human beings construct or create are "containers of meaning" (Anderson, 1990, p. 21). Thus, everything we use and wear from the shoes we choose to the ways we decorate our homes carries meaning both to the wearer/user and to those around us. Anderson suggests, "all the T-shirts and jeans and sneakers . . . are not only things but ideas" (p. 21) and they all may be studied as cultural facts and activities (Eco, 1978). For example, someone wearing a T-shirt with the message "I hate T-shirts" may be sending a message meant to be ironic or jokey. A man wearing a blue blazer and khakis may be sending a message that "I'm a guy who knows what's appropriate to wear to work." Or a small boy donning a straw hat, bandana, and strung-up tube toys may be sending the message, "I'm a cowboy today" (Figure 1.2). In addition, memes, Photoshopped photos, social media photos, nine-second videos, and emojis carry, in their form and content, ideas and values.

Because we're immersed in a world of many messages or representations, many of them visual, we can see that our social worlds are constantly under construction through our interactions with images. Rose (2012) uses the term "scopic regime" and defines it as "the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed" (p. 2). Visual culture is often criticized as turning society and human life into a spectacle and that the move from analog to digital culture not only allows for endless replication, but itself is different and worse than, say, traditional photography. Thus, Rose concludes, "The modern connection between seeing and true knowing has been broken" (p. 4).

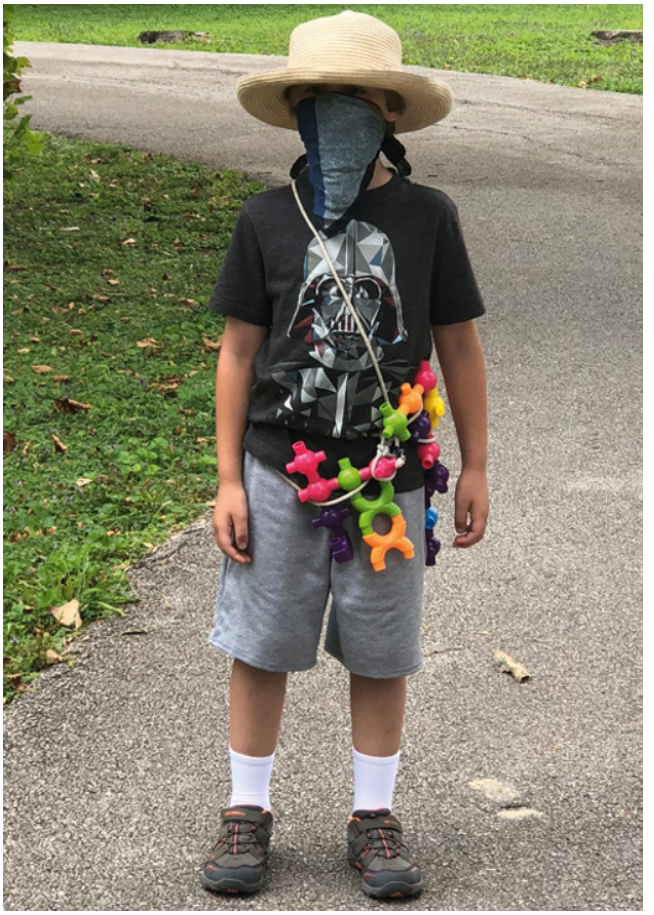
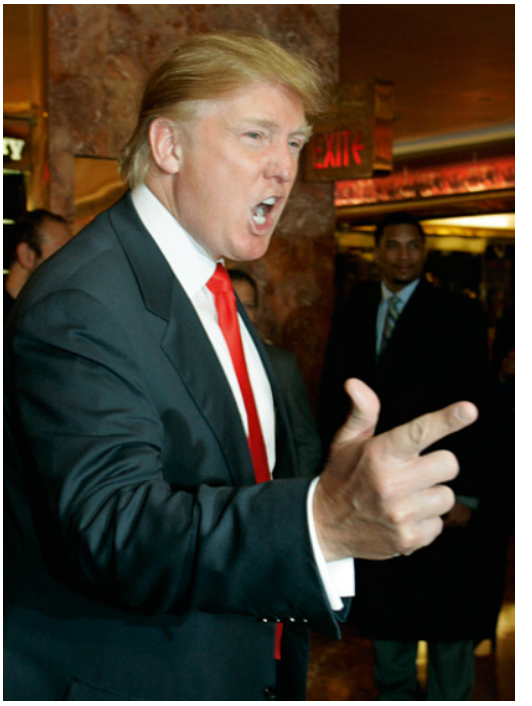


Figure 1.2 Everything we use and wear carries meaning.

FOCUS: Trump's Hand Gestures

Some scholars attribute the success of Trump's candidacy in the 2016 Republican primary in part due to its value as comedic entertainment. One study, "The hands of Donald Trump: Entertainment, gesture, spectacle" (Hall et al., 2016), analyzed the populist candidate's comedic performances during the Republican primaries. The study proposed that in an era when style attracts more attention than content, Trump took this characteristic to new heights. The authors concluded that Trump's unconventional political style, particularly his use of gesture to critique the political system and caricature his opponents, created a visual spectacle. Through his exaggerated depictions of the world crafted with his hands, he succeeded in

ignoring political correctness and disarming his adversaries – elemental to bringing momentum to his campaign. Among Trump's many hand gestures, the study notes Trump's use of the pistol hand, his signature gesture used on *The Apprentice* with his catchphrase "You're fired!" to fire unworthy contestants. When Trump used the pistol hand, it conveyed arrogance, sovereign power, and commanding force – as seen in the photo below:



Source: AP Images/Stuart Ramson.

The gesture is understood through its gun shape and its associated swiftness and precision of striking down an unworthy opponent. Yet the gesture is also playful: when Trump thrusts his hand forward to mimic the firing of a gun, he brings a child's pantomime of shooting to the firing of an adult in an entrepreneurial battle or the dismissing of an opponent in a political arena.

Media critic Stuart Hall (1997) writes that "culture is about shared meanings" and "primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings . . . between the members of a culture or group" (p. 2). He suggests that people who are in the same culture will tend to interpret the world in generally similar ways while warning that things or actions cannot have stable meanings. Hall tells us that meanings are produced in multiple ways: through personal interactions, through

our use of media and technology, and in what we create and how we share those creations:

> Meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural "things;" that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance. (p. 3, 4)

Human beings have always created and responded to shared and differing interpretations of reality. All societies have systems of belief that carry values and seem natural to those who are part of that society. Like all cultural products, visuals are created within "the dynamics of social power and ideology" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 22). Those with greater material wealth or socioeconomic status generally have more resources and abilities to use and influence the creation and dissemination of images and video. Thus, their worldviews are likely to have more prominence and influence than those from people with fewer resources. This means that we experience images within changing social contexts that can change rapidly and that the meanings we assign to them aren't neutral. Instead, they carry values and privilege certain interpretations over others.

Form and Content

READ THIS BOOK! That statement in all caps and in boldface, communicates something different from "read this book." How is it different from read *this* book? And why include it here? We include it because it reveals, in an unexpected way, how the form and not just the content of a simple sentence can communicate and conform to or violate cultural norms.

You probably don't think of letters and words as visuals, but even the choice of a font can make a big difference in the meanings people take away from the message. Imagine a condolence card that says "With Heartfelt Sympathy! ☺" It feels strange because it violates our cultural expectations about what's appropriate for such a message. Because type and text are so much part of our environments, we may not think of them as visual. But each typeface, each font, has a different personality and may convey different emotions and meanings. Perhaps without even being aware of it, you have certain expectations of the "rightness" of using a certain font to communicate a particular message.

Apple's "Get a Mac" video campaign offers another example of how content can be differentiated by its form (Figure 1.3). Actors and humorists John Hodgman and Justin Long posed as human interpretations of a PC and a Mac. Against a white background, Long, dressed in casual clothes, introduced himself, "Hello, I'm a Mac." Hodgman, dressed in a more formal suit and tie, adds, "And I'm a PC." Even before the characters act out attributes of each brand (a laid-back Mac and an uptight PC), we can deduce these attributes from their form: two men standing in a blank void, staring directly at us, but one with rigid posture and business attire, and the other posed and dressed casually, hands in jeans' pockets.