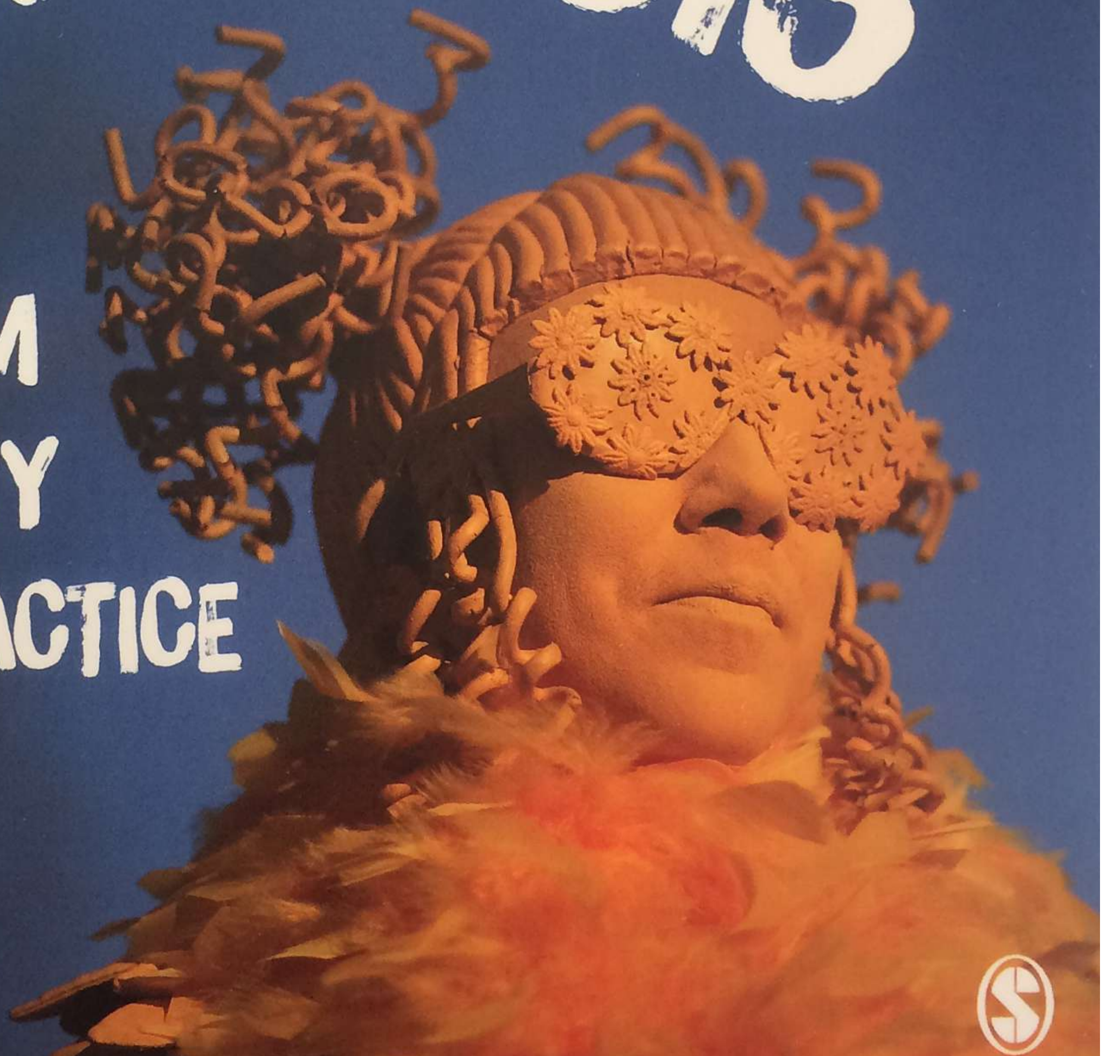
PER LEDIN AND DAVID MACHIN

DOING VISUAL ANALYSIS

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE



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1

WHAT IS VISUAL COMMUNICATION?

Introduction

We often hear that society is becoming more visual, that we are becoming dominated by 'the image'. It is certainly true that technology has made it much easier for us to produce and distribute images. It is also the case that the development of consumerism has led to new levels of visual sophistication in the production and dissemination of advertisements, through social media, the Internet and on our mobile devices. If we just compare the technical standard of commercials and promotional material that we find now to that of 30 years ago, the changes are staggering. But in fact this idea of the visual is rather restricted. Those who research the visual have argued that this is problematic (Smith, 2008), that the visual involves so much more than photographs, commercials and film clips. This book agrees with this position offering a very specific kind of tool kit for analysing a much wider range of visual communication. We say more about the book and how it sits alongside others which provide introductions or methods of visual analysis shortly. But first we want to say what we mean by visual communication. What does this book take as the visual? This has huge importance as regards how we approach and carry out visual analysis.

This idea of the increasing impact of images is not as clear as we might think. Images can be pictures, but we also have mirror images, images in our minds and dreams. Even writing on a page presents an image including the kinds of typeface used and the texture of the paper upon which it is printed that may bring certain kinds of associations to the reader. If we look at the two menus in Figure 1.1, they are a kind of image or visual wholes used to communicate. The menu on the left for a gluten-free burger kitchen is printed on a rougher type of paper than that for the fast-food restaurant to the right where everything looks shiny and smooth. The gluten-free menu has no pictures, whereas we see photographs of almost shining burgers in the fast-food case. But why is this so? Why might it be inappropriate

for the gluten-free menu to also carry these? Also the two use colour, fonts and spacing in very different ways. Visual communication in this sense comprises objects and things that we experience as wholes, which are part of everyday life activities and which are built up of observable qualities.

At a superficial level a casual observer might say that the gourmet-kitchen menu looks more ‘up-market’ than the fast-food menu. They may say it looks more ‘serious’ than the more ‘lively’ fast food. In this book such menus are the kinds of data for which we provide tools for analysis. Both of these are instances of visual communication that are intended to communicate ideas and values about burgers. In marketing terms one of these must communicate ideas of a consumer experience of something more ‘natural’, ‘unprocessed’, perhaps ‘authentic’, while the other must communicate ‘lively’, ‘quantity’, ‘immediate’. What we want to show in this book is that these forms of visual communication can be broken down and analysed in details. While the viewer may experience the menu or other forms of visual communication as a whole, as a physical thing, it is at this level of detail that we can begin to understand how they work. We will be highly specific as to how these ideas of ‘natural’ or ‘lively’ can be communicated. And the tools that we present that allow us to do so can allow us to

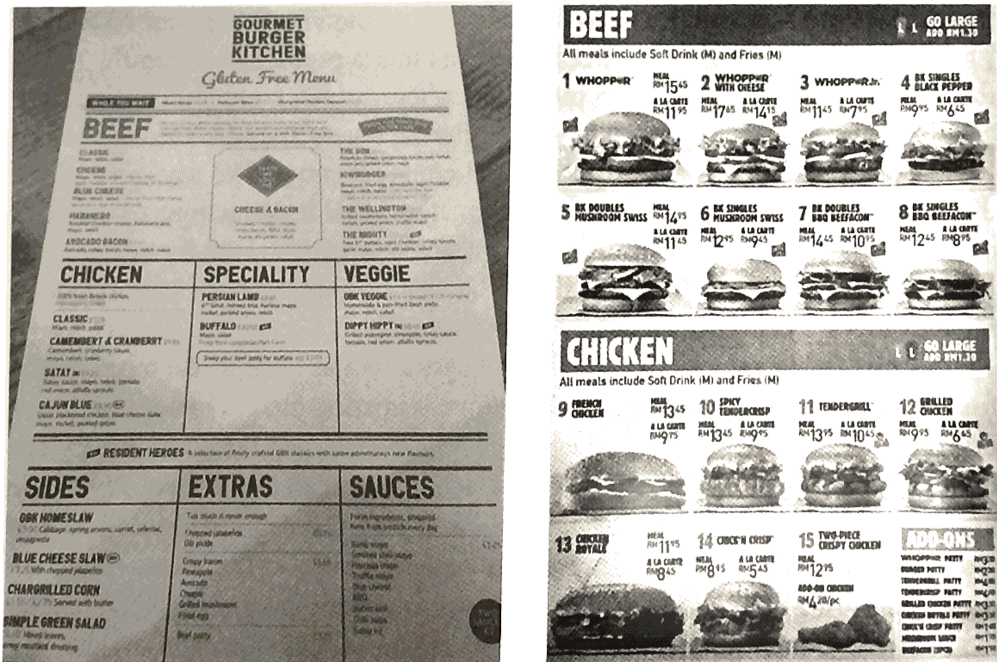

Figure 1.1 A gluten-free burger menu (left) and a fast-food Burger King menu (right)

ask and answer all kinds of research questions. For example, a research project may take an interest in the marketing of 'healthy' food, in other words in how food stuffs that are quite ordinary are dressed up to appear 'natural', 'traditional' or 'honest'.

The materials of visual communication

When analysing visual communication in this book we do not use the notion of 'images' which is fact very vague and not useful for analytical purposes, but the idea of 'semiotic materials'. This has the advantage that it captures the 'stuff' of which all kinds of visual communication is made. Semiotic materials can be photographs, office spaces, commercials or food containers. All these artefacts have materiality, a physical presence and a design that make them into the wholes that we experience, like the menus, or like the room or place where you are sitting. This idea of semiotic materials is fundamental for how we approach such artefacts, such instances of visual communication. It captures how we experience them in everyday life, how we use them, and how we can explore them as researchers. It also helps us to think about how these materials are manufactured and designed in our societies for specific reasons and how they shape what we can do with and through them.

To help us to think about materiality and wholes, we can use the example of a shampoo bottle. This is a semiotic material that we take to be a whole. A shampoo bottle has, of course, a physical shape. If manufactured for a female consumer group, they are often tall, slender and slightly rounded, suggesting elegance and smoothness. The texture may also be very glossy to indicate the results once used to wash the hair. You would not want a jagged and uneven surface. This surface is used to brand the product, using letter forms, colours, an icon that resembles an item of fruit and a small scientific-type diagram. We immediately recognize such a bottle on the shelf in a grocery store and relate to it as being a form of visual communication. We take it to be an artefact that sets up and codes social meanings. In this case the meaning relates to 'elegance', 'natural', 'ingredients', 'smoothness' and of course 'femininity'.

But other shampoo bottles may use shape, texture, colours and fonts to tell us that the product is for men, where we find a matt black finish, a squat-shaped bottle and more angularity in both shape and the use of fonts. These material objects are experienced by people as whole things that are interrelated with ideas about 'naturalness', 'beauty', 'masculinity', 'technology', and so on, as well as simply regarding the nature of personal hygiene. And fundamentally, on another but interrelated level, such objects are part of a longer history of the growth of the

commodification, standardization and commercialization of goods in society and the technologies that are used in these processes. These objects are therefore part of wider forms of social meanings, ideas and types of social interaction. A person from 150 years ago would not really understand what they were looking at. They would not really know what kinds of visual communication these bottles were, nor would they grasp the meanings that would come so naturally to us regarding things like nature and gender.

The notion of visual communication we are getting at here is one that encompasses the design of a menu or a bottle that holds shampoo. It is also related to the clothes we wear, children's toys, how we design our office and home spaces, and the way a school building is constructed to suggest things like 'conformity' or 'creativity'. Visual communication is done and shaped through computer software, the look of weapons, the construction of your bicycle, or the meaning given to the configurations of stars in the night sky or the scientific models used to show how it works. And it is not so much that we simply look at this communication. It is a part of our world into which we are infused. It is how we express ourselves and forms the realms through how we can do this as prescribed by the available tools, technologies and shared understandings. This visual world is not just pictures that we look at but is the very world of meanings in which we live. And crucially, for all forms of communication this is not necessarily a consensual world, but one where different interests compete to define how things are and how they look.

Semiotic materials and social behaviour

In Figure 1.2 we find three pictures of IKEA kitchens from IKEA catalogues. A simple observation would be that the former ones, from 1975 and 1985, look 'old fashioned' as compared with 2016. But the word 'fashion' can conceal the way that objects can communicate very specific kinds of ideas. As with the menus and the juice carton we can think about the way that a different fashion in kitchen design involves different social meanings.

If we look at the photographs we see that the kitchen from the 1970s was personalized and by present standards fairly randomly organized. It is a practical place inhabited by an everyday family eating but not interacting. In the 1980s this has changed as all parts of the kitchen have become fixed and integrated as a whole. There is an emphasis on everything being the same kind of shape. Here interior design began to become normalized. In this image we also see a single place set to eat, with a glass of white wine. So unlike the earlier kitchen which was a place to get things done, the 1980s kitchen begins to say something about you as a person. At this point we begin to sense the rise of what came to be named

'lifestyle marketing' where products become more aligned with issues of taste and the ideas people have about themselves.

In the 2016 kitchen we see something different again. Here, on one level, there has been a reduction of order and integration. The units are now designed for flexibility, to be multipurpose. This is part of the marketing approach where it is emphasized that furniture can be moved and adapted to a range of needs. In the catalogues the kitchen is no longer an isolated space but open-plan, linked to other living spaces. We find a shift to more natural materials and textures. And the activities depicted in the kitchens tend to be social or creative. These activities often foreground 'solutions' and point to the way that the kitchen can help manage typical life challenges. Here the design as it is presented not only hints at taste but lays out very clear scripts for how the kitchens meet the needs of contemporary family life, where for example, as in the 2016 kitchen, dad and son enjoy 'quality time'.

What we can see in these examples of kitchen designs are not only changes in fashion but the coding of domestic space with different social meanings. We see how semiotic materials can structure how we behave and interact. The kitchen designs, as a form of visual communication, are semiotic materials shaped into a whole. We can then ask what kinds of ideas about domestic life are communicated? What kinds of identities are valued or devalued? While the 1985 kitchen is ordered, modern, uncluttered and aligned with taste, the contemporary kitchen is rich with organic textures and full of earth-tone colours, yet also incredibly designed. Looking at the image, colours are carefully matched to create a kind of coherence amongst plants, surfaces, object and clothing. These kitchens are sold for people who need solutions, who need to manage their lives better. We might ask why it is so. Why was it simply not important in 1975 to seek out solutions or to think about your selection of kitchens as part of a life-management project? And why has there been a rise in this kind of

Figure 1.2 Kitchens in the IKEA catalogue from 1975 (left), 1985 (middle) and 2016 (right)

coordination of semiotic materials, where the colour and texture of children's clothing may match with that of work surfaces and cooking utensils? As we show in this book semiotic materials tend to have certain social meanings built into them. But how they are used in contexts relates to ideas and values present in a particular time and place.

In Figure 1.3 we see another semiotic material designed as a whole, which also shapes behaviour and social interaction but in a very different way. This is a PowerPoint slide containing a diagram. It is taken from a presentation at a 'leadership' meeting attended by one of the authors. The diagram was used as part of a workshop where management explained how collaboration amongst colleagues and quality on teaching and research could be improved if everyone more carefully described their roles and what they do. Yet the diagram, while on the one hand 'explaining' things, also conceals other things. It uses semiotic materials to carry out a form of symbolism to hide a number of things that in fact make the proposed idea both pointless and also highly problematic.

If we look at the diagram we can see that the three stages presented by the management sit on an arrow that grows in width from left to right and that also moves in an upward direction. From left to right we have 'role clarification', which leads to 'cooperation and coordination', and then to better quality of work and work environment. The diagram does not explain how one stage leads to the next but symbolizes this sequence of causality through the arrow. The slide also carries a

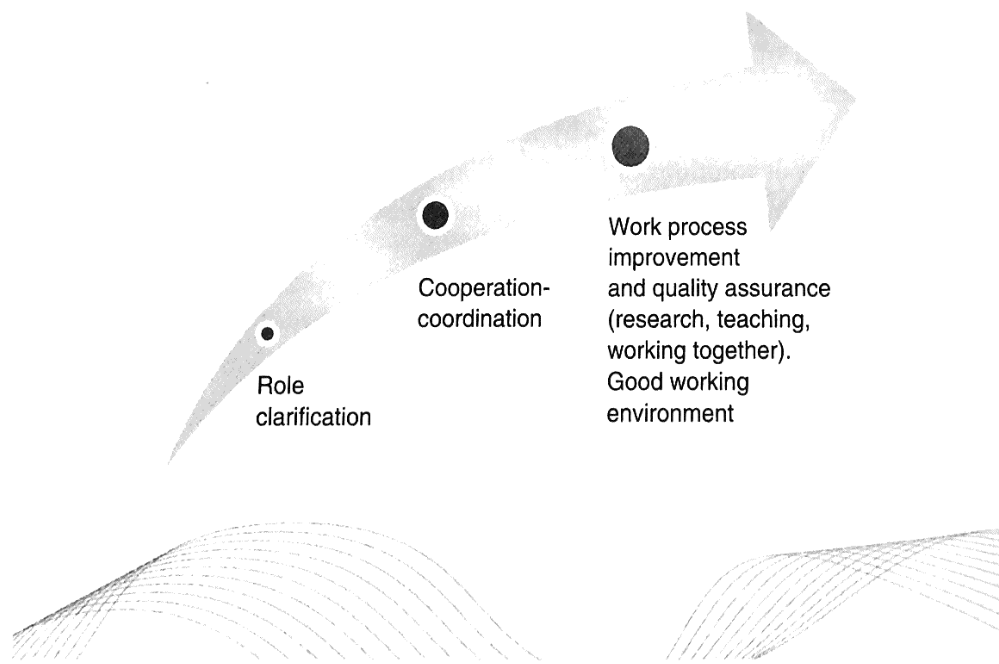

Figure 1.3 A PowerPoint slide from a university meeting on 'leadership'

'wave' at the bottom comprising fine lines (and is part of the graphic profile of the university). This symbolizes a kind of light, easy, constant movement. At no point are these ideas communicated in language, yet this becomes part of how the process is presented.

One present characteristic of public institutions is a growing bureaucratization as part of processes of marketization, where outputs must improve and increase. If you work in such an institution you will be constantly showing how you are doing things better, improving qualities. Management must demonstrate that they are steering work processes in ways that will lead to such improvements, and the PowerPoint slide is part of such a performance management. But researchers have shown that these bureaucratic processes often do nothing to actually change the work environment but rather create extra work and distract from actual institutional priorities (Power, 1999).

In fact there are many concrete and practical obstacles to improving quality at the university. The majority of staff at the university simply have no research time factored into their contracts. Describing their role will not change the quality of research. And there had been problems with heavy teaching loads where many staff had become stressed and overworked. Many staff also work on temporary contracts which does not lead to the kinds of settled work environment that fosters quality. Of course, the solutions to such things are costly and relate to deeper budgetary problems in the institution and factors within the Swedish educational system. But nevertheless management are required to show what they are doing to improve outputs. So these often happen in ways that exist at a bureaucratic level only. The above PowerPoint is one such example. If we all define our roles better at different levels of management then we will all work together better and the quality of everything will improve. The causal process is communicated visually through the arrow that rises, meaning higher quality, and that gets thicker, somehow suggesting 'more'. The wavy lines at the bottom help to communicate that it will be light and easy and part of a 'dynamic' process. Like the menus, shampoo bottles and kitchens the PowerPoint slide deploys semiotic materials to communicate social meanings. And this also communicates about actions and social relations. If you like, the ideas and values of marketization, of quality assurance, are built into the diagram.

This diagram also points to one important way that visual communication has changed. While society may not have necessarily become 'more visual', a new design culture has evolved. We saw this in the details in the burger menus where ideas about the food are communicated by fonts and colour, the 2016 kitchen with its 'rhyming' between different kinds of semiotic materials. And we see it in the PowerPoint diagram. It has been argued that in society we now tend to rely less on writing to communicate (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). The menu designs could

be thought about as part of such a change. But such a shift means that things like process, causalities and identities may no longer be so much explained as symbolized. The naturalness of the burger is not explained but symbolized through fonts and textures. On the PowerPoint slide, causality is communicated by an arrow and a wavy line. In such a case writing, as in the words 'role clarification', is not linked to 'cooperation and coordination' by language but by a graphic shape. In the new IKEA kitchen design there is much greater use of a variety of semiotic materials to tell us about naturalness, to communicate 'creativity', 'flexibility' and 'solutions'. The way that writing has become more integrated with other semiotic materials has been called the 'New Writing' (van Leeuwen, 2008a). But throughout this book we show in fact that this shift is more of a 'integrated design' of which language is one semiotic material.

To ask and answer research questions

In this book we show how this way of viewing visual communication, as the deployment of semiotic materials to communicate specific social meanings, can provide the basis for posing and answering concrete research questions. Each chapter provides a set of tools for carrying out research on different kinds of visual domains. The examples we have used so far begin to explain what we mean by visual communication and point to what such research questions might look like.

As regards the menus in Figure 1.1, this could relate simply to asking what different kinds of designs are used to sell foods in different ways. The gluten-free menu is interesting as there is now a huge boom in different kinds of 'healthy' foods. Many of these claim to be 'wholefood', have 'natural ingredients', be 'simple' or 'honest'. Such ideas may be communicated directly in language through slogans, such as a fruit juice called 'innocent'. But they will also, and mostly, be communicated through packaging designs, through semiotic materials such as shape, colour and texture.

As regards the kitchens in Figure 1.2, a research question could relate to how space is represented and organized and what ideas and values this communicates about how we should behave and what kinds of social interactions can take place there. For example, the local library where one of the authors lives has been redesigned. Whereas it used to have rigid rows of book shelves and a row of reading tables at the side with hard upright chairs, shelves are now different shapes and sit at different angles, created by flexible interlocking units. They are arranged in a more 'creative' way, more integrated into relaxation areas and play-reading areas. One reading corner with comfortable chairs gives the impression

of sitting in a nineteenth-century book room. There is a café where there is great fresh coffee and cakes. Overall the meaning of the library space has changed. The meaning of reading here has shifted from something austere, silent and individual to something more engaging, related to comfort, pleasure and fun. The layout itself suggests 'exploration' and 'discovery'. A research question could relate to the changing designs of specific kinds of public spaces and what kinds of social meanings these communicate. The aim in the case of the library would be to show what kinds of ideas about literacy are communicated by the design. Here we will need tools that allow us to describe and analyse the semiotic materials that are used in designed space.

The PowerPoint diagram in Figure 1.3 could form part of the data for a research question that asked how work processes in a particular organization are represented. The study might make a collection of all documents used to represent increasing quality of work in that organization and then ask what semiotic resources are used to accomplish this. From this the analysis might show, as we indicated above, what kinds of processes, causalities, things and persons are included and that are either absent or that are symbolized. Such analysis could have the practical consequence of pointing simply to why such a management plan was failing.

We have also begun to hint at some of the things we would need to analyse in order to answer these kinds of research questions. In the case of the menus it was things like typeface, borders and texture. In the kitchens, which could be applied to our library example, it was about partitions, making the room more or less closed and open, and about the way that this positions people and gives different possibilities for interaction. In the diagram, graphic features such as arrows and wavy lines become important. We need to understand visual communication, therefore, as regards the semiotic materials that are used to carry social meanings.

In each chapter of this book we explain in depth what kinds of tools we need to carry out systematic analysis of semiotic materials such as film clips, packaging, photographs and interior spaces. In each case we show how semiotic materials have social meanings built into them. To some extent semiotic materials may always be used in fresh and creative ways. But to a larger extent they are deployed in ways that have become historically established and that are routinely employed for specific purposes. In this sense when each of us encounters an instance of visual communication, such as food packaging, the design of a room, a graphic representation of data, we know what it is doing, what kind of typical, what we call 'canonical', use it is. And this too, as we show, is an important part of visual communication.

What we have begun to suggest in this introduction is that it may be possible to look more closely at specific instances of visual communication to ask *what* exactly is being communicated and also *how* it is communicated. Or, to put it another way, what kinds of semiotic materials have been harnessed by a designer, or team of designers, to do a particular job, to communicate a specific message? Of course visual designs should be to some extent functional. A menu must serve the function of allowing a customer to choose what they want to eat. A kitchen must be designed so that you can cook in it. A carton of orange juice must be designed to transport and store its contents and later allow them to be consumed. But in each case the functionality is achieved through design choices. And it is the idea of visual communication as being about design choices done for specific ends that is the basis of this book. This allows us to construct research projects that ask questions about which choices are used for which end.

Guides to doing visual analysis: what is unique and special about this book?

A number of commentators have pointed to a growing popularity in the analysis of visual communication (Pauwels, 2012; Rose, 2012). This has taken place across a wide range of academic disciplines. This can be seen by the growth of academic journals that deal with the visual more broadly such *Visual Communication*, *Journal of Visual Culture* and *Visual Communication Quarterly*, and those that deal with the visual in specific fields such as *Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine*, *Journal of Visual Literacy* and *Visual Art Practice*. All of these journals provide a wealth of material that can form a valuable resource for visual research projects that have a specific focus.

For those looking for an introduction to doing research on visual communication a number of handbooks and introductory texts have also appeared, each offering a unique and important contribution. One of the first of these was van Leeuwen and Jewitt's (2001) *Handbook of Visual Communication*, which brought together a number of scholars from different fields to show how they would deal with the visual. More recent have been Spencer's (2010) *Visual Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, Rose's (2012) highly successful *Visual Methodologies*, which offers a range of visual methods from the humanities, including semiotics, art history and discourse analysis, and Margolis and Pauwels's (2011) *Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, which brings together systematic approaches to analysis from the social sciences. There is also Machin's (2015) *Visual Communication*, which presents a collection of unique methodological approaches to visual analysis where researchers each illustrate these using data.

There have also been textbooks that are more field specific such as Reavey's (2011) *Visual Methods in Psychology* which presents the diverse ways of dealing with visual data in psychology.

Doing Visual Analysis is different from each of these for a number of important reasons. It became clear that there was a need for a textbook that dealt with the visual in a way that was designed for carrying out detailed empirical analysis of the visual for the purpose of answering research questions. The above volumes do their own unique jobs very well. But *Doing Visual Analysis*, as we have indicated in this introduction, is designed to provide students and more advanced visual researchers with a practical tool kit that allows them to analyse many different kinds of visual communication.

Doing Visual Analysis is inspired specifically by several books dealing with visual communication that are influenced by linguistics, semiotics and also by Marxist theories. The most important of these is Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) classic *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design*, along with other excellent books by these authors such as *Multimodal Discourse* (2001), *Introducing Social Semiotics* (2005) and *Multimodality* (2010). One core idea in these books, which was the great innovation of *Reading Images*, was to demonstrate that we could develop a more systematic way to break down and analyse visual communication. Much analyses of the visual until this time had tended to be more interpretive or theory driven. There was great potential in the idea that we could break images down into components and show how they work. This would be even better if such an approach could be to some extent predictive. In other words if it could provide tool kits for making meaning in different visual domains.

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen was also highly influenced by critical linguistics. Here the aim had been to show how closer analysis of language use could reveal less obvious ways that particular kinds of political or other motivated and self-interested views were being communicated (Fairclough, 1992). So the idea was that it is also possible to carry out a close analysis of visual communication to show how it can carry ideologies. An example may be the way we talked about the kitchen designs above communicating certain views about the family and domestic life. These combined influences allowed the authors to present a set of models and notions that indicated that a more systemic approach could contribute to existing ways of dealing with the visual. This new approach offered something that was more predictive and something that could help us to understand more about the strategic ways that visual communication was used.

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen has inspired what can almost be thought of as an academic field in its own right, called 'multimodality', which has attracted mainly linguists. This field has been characterized by a number

of different kinds of sub-threads. The linguistic model that greatly influenced Kress and van Leeuwen was that of Halliday (1978) called Systemic Functional Linguistics. This model had what can be thought of as two parts. One, the systemic part, was to show how language functions as a set of systems of choices. The second, the functional part, was about how language is used to do things and what parts of language are used to accomplish this. In the field of multimodality some work can be characterized more by the systemic part of the model. In, for example, Bauldry and Thibault (2006) the aim is to show how Halliday's model for language can be used to look at all forms of communication. Other work, and this is where we place *Doing Visual Analysis*, is characterized more by the desire to look at what communication is used to accomplish. In our view it is this approach that best serves the task of answering concrete research questions. In fact the more systemic approach has been criticized for being more of a process of imposing concepts onto the visual than actually showing how it works (Ledin and Machin, 2017d) and that in the end it runs the risk of treating all forms of visual communication as being of the same order, subsumed under its own concepts and terms. This process can suffer from producing lots of descriptive tools but fall short on showing how these reveal what added insights are produced (Reynolds, 2012). The labelling of phenomena, as Antaki et al. (2003) point out, is not the same as actually doing analysis and showing what the pay-off of that analysis actually is.

Doing Visual Analysis comes out as part of the need for a visual communication introductory book that is more oriented to answering research questions as well as providing a predictive type of tool kit. In this book we provide tools for carrying out research in different visual domains. We present our own model for thinking about how visual communication works, which is designed in the first place for understanding how the visual is used to accomplish things. This is a book designed for students and researchers who want to carry out research projects where they ask concrete research questions.

Outline of the chapters

Doing Visual Analysis is different from many methods books in that we present the chapters in terms of how to analyse specific domains of visual communication rather than by using each chapter to present a different method. The domains we have chosen overlap to some degree. But these have been selected as they are those domains students and researchers often want very much to research but are less sure what model to use. Many other areas could have been included such as art, computer games or graphics software. But we felt that our choices

reflect more closely areas where there is a lack of clear analytical guidance. And the chapters we have chosen offer many possibilities to be combined to adapt to a range of forms of multimedia visual communication.

2 Approaches to visual communication

This chapter accounts for the social semiotic approach that the book is based on, also comparing it to other approaches to visual communication. We depart from what we call semiotic materials as a whole when researching visual communication, be it photographs, commercials, packaging or space design. Ways we think and act are largely dependent on such materials shaped as wholes, and they have evolved historically in social contexts by the use of technologies available to certain social groups. This also means that they have affordances that makes them apt for some but not other uses.

3 Photographs

This chapter provides our first tool kit for a semiotic material, which here is the photograph. The chapter begins by looking at the importance of considering different 'canons of use' of the photograph and exemplifies photojournalism, photograph as art and symbolic images. This helps us first to address what is being done with a photograph, what is its communicative purpose. The tool kit then follows with analytical categories for settings, participants, objects, actions, colour and the position of the viewer. Throughout the chapter we show what 'doing' analysis looks like, but at the end we relate this to specific possible research questions.

4 Document design

In this chapter we look at document designs. We give examples of three different types of document design that are related to different specific social practices. These are movie posters, mobile-phone screen interfaces and magazines. This allows us to show what kinds of tools are needed for such an analysis and also to show that we need to always understand visual communication as regards specific communicative aims and purposes. The tool kit then follows and accounts for the semiotic resources of typography, line spacing and alignment, colour and borders, and possible research questions round off the chapter.

5 Packaging

Here we are interested in the packaging of commercial goods. We begin by looking at some of the ways that packaging communicates different discourses, ideas and values. We show how packaging is related to ideas of gendering, innocence

and value for money. The tool kit comprises categories for looking at materials, textures, shape, colour, writing and typography, and iconography. Throughout the chapter it is clear what doing this kind of analysis involves, but in the final section we explain how such tools can be used for concrete research questions.

6 Space design

Here we are interested in space as a form of visual communication. Space shapes and controls the positioning of bodies and communicates how and why we should behave in certain ways. This involves providing ideas and values about what should take place in that space, which we show relates to wider ideas in a society at any time. We use the examples of classrooms, restaurants and office design to draw out such social meanings and regulations. The tool kit focuses on partitions, interactional affordances, materials and texture, and colour and the chapter ends with research questions.

7 Film clips

Many students want to analyse the kinds of short promotional films and commercials which we now commonly find on the internet and social media. These short film clips tend to have a smaller number of narrative structures, or genres, that communicate different ideas, values and identities. We focus on the genres of entertaining narrative, projection narrative and recount. The tool kit comprises categories for analysing narrative genres and states, scenes, settings, characters, rhythm and sound in scenes, and language and evaluations and research questions round off the chapter.

8 Data presentation

Here we are interested in the way that data is visually communicated, which has been made much easier by cheaply available software. But while on one level such data appears to make things easier to understand or at least more visually interesting, it can also shape and transform the reality it claims to represent. In this chapter we look at different types of data presentation, which include lists and bullet points, tables, line graphs and bar charts, and flow charts. The tool kit comprises the resources of paradigms, spatialization, vertical and horizontal orientation, graphic shapes and icons, temporality and causality and research questions follow.

9 Conclusion

Here we discuss how to combine chapters or use them in different combinations for the needs of answering different research questions.