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## Visual Tropes and Late-Modern Emotion in U.S. Public Culture

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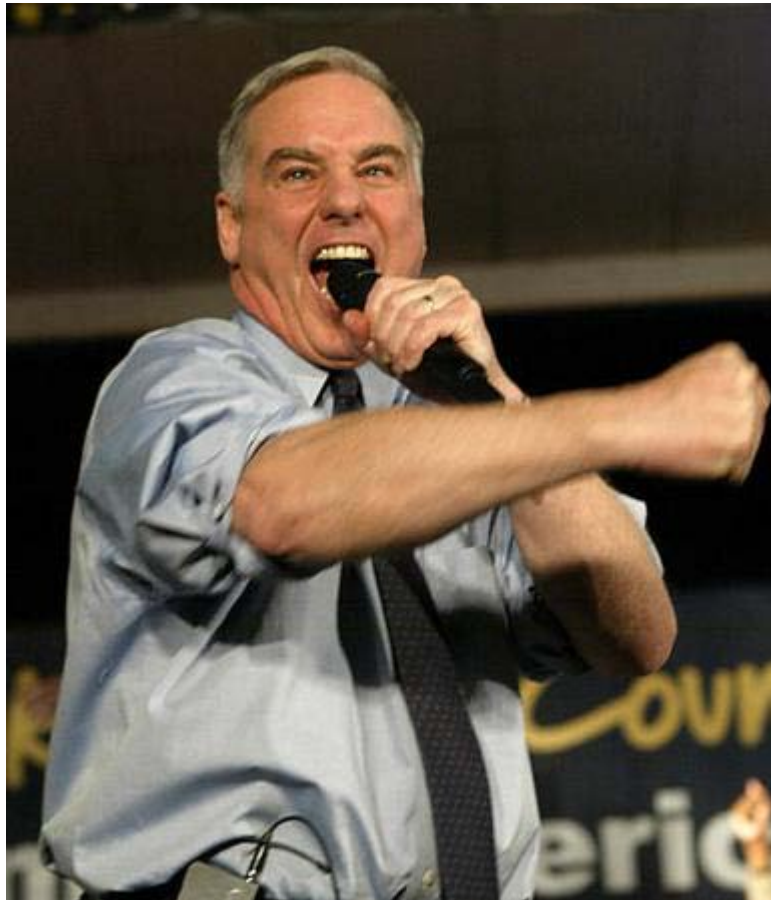
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## **Visual Tropes and Late – Modern Emotion in U.S. Public Culture**

**Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites**

*Poroi*, 5, 2, November, 2008

- 1 On the night of his defeat in the Iowa caucuses, presidential candidate Howard Dean gave his campaign workers a rousing, fire-breathing, over-the-top speech of raw, larger-than-life emotional power.<sup>1</sup>



Howard Dean

It was a great demonstration of the passionate performances characterizing

the “old oratory” of the nineteenth century, and the crowd loved it.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately for the Dean campaign, his arm-pumping, roaring, fiery-eyed performance was also captured by the national media, who hated it. The up-close-and-personal photographs of Dean letting it rip seemed to confirm commentators’ disdain; only later did a few note the distortion created by projecting a performance for a crowd into one’s personal space. Dean’s emotional explosion became his defining moment; his popular support went into a nosedive, and to this day there is a steady stream of editorial cartoons that skewer him for being so emotionally expressive.

- 2 However one might describe Dean’s performance, it is *not* what we will describe as late-modern emotion. We mention it not only for a sense of contrast, but because the near universal derision suggests that Dean crossed an invisible line defining contemporary public culture. That line will issue in part from conventional assumptions about the decorousness now expected of public speech, the emotional control required for political leadership in the modern state, and the strategic importance of “appearing presidential.” It also could reflect additional habits of emotional representation in the public media themselves. Dean’s behavior was scandalous and perhaps even incomprehensible because the media were adhering to another set of conventions for communicating emotions.
- 3 Our task here is to draw your attention to the background against which Dean seems so excessive. We cannot describe all that background, and in fact want to look at a set of conventions that are almost invisible while yet being in full view. The de facto censorship of the Dean image carries with it a set of assumptions about emotions, visual practices, and modern life. Emotions, we are reminded, are individual expressions of volatile interior passions; visual images work by directly, inarticulately, irrationally evoking those passions; such behavior and imagery is primitive rather than modern. Thus modern public life is rightly one of emotional restraint reinforced by communication practices that are rational and therefore more verbal than visual.
- 4 Contrary to this conventional wisdom, we believe that emotions are structured socially and aesthetically, that visual images in the public media can be complexly articulate, and that modern culture – even its most fully realized designs – is emotional. These ideas converge in our central claim today, which is that there is a late-modern structure of feeling that is articulated through visual images in the public media. This structure both reproduces and compensates for principles of modern design in order to manage collective experience for a liberal civil society. It is articulated by a system of visual tropes that proliferate across a very wide range of visual displays. As these tropes organize emotional experience across many media, the tropes constrain as well as create opportunities for critical reflection and civic

engagement.

- 5 This is a tall order and not one that we can fulfill conclusively in a short essay. We begin by noting several caveats and assumptions, as well as a few definitions. We are not presuming to account for all emotional representation, even within the relatively limited scope of the public media. There are many emotions and many patterns for structuring emotional experience; we are looking at one of them. That structure is not evident only in visual images; it also is found in all of the design arts and in verbal texts. The visual tropes that we feature are not the only means for communicating visual meaning; far from it. The common thread throughout our analysis is that we are attempting to see what is occluded by conventional wisdom about emotions, modernism, and visual practices.

## **Emotions**

- 6 Emotions are not one thing: they include feelings (bodily affect), cognitions, and symbolic representations; and they develop into complex negotiated responses to events and social relationships.<sup>3</sup> As a provisional definition, an emotion is an embodied disposition to action.
- 7 Emotions are created by social interaction; by performance of appropriate expressions and gestures in a social space; by representations that activate prior structures of enactment and response; or by sounds, shapes, colors, and signs that activate the affective correlates of prior relationships.<sup>4</sup> Thus the emotional life of individuals and societies alike becomes articulated through a dense web of actual and virtual interactions, ranging from saying “good morning” to watching the news, in a variety of environments that range from micro-climates such as the breakfast table to the mass media.
- 8 Emotions can be experienced as seemingly isolated feelings, but they become organized as “structures of feeling.” This term, adapted from Raymond Williams, refers to two related conditions.<sup>5</sup> First, emotions acquire internal differentiation and general coherence that reflect the patterns of experience developed over time in community interaction: for example, rural, urban, working class, upper class. Second, this patterning of affective response is articulated in an intermediate realm of cultural performance that is not identical with either lived experience or institutional discourses. Examples include songs, movies, paintings, and so forth.

## Late-Modern Public Culture

- 9 Visual practices are well suited to representation of what is partly tacit and to making connections among prevailing institutions, norms, and beliefs. Our focus is on the emotional structure characteristic of late-modern U.S. public culture. Here “late-modern” refers to the historical period beginning in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It also refers to the technological, administrative, and stylistic practices characteristic of advanced industrial societies – particularly as these are defined by norms of efficiency, impersonality, and universality. The international style in architecture and other design arts, technocratic organization of work environments, and standardized urban spaces epitomize “late-modern.”<sup>6</sup>



skyscraper picture

- 10 By “public culture,” we mean the performances, texts, images, discourses, and arts that have developed historically through modern communicative media to define the relationship between the citizen and the state. “Public culture” includes oratory, posters, print journalism, literary and other artistic works, documentary films, and other media as they are used to define audiences as citizens, uphold norms of political representation and institutional transparency, negotiate conflict, and promote the general welfare.
- 11 People who accept the idea that there is a public culture still might think it a stretch to align the public with the aesthetic of modernism. The revolutionary

aspects of modern art went well beyond public sensibilities. As modernism developed in architecture, for example, it displaced the ornamentation and civic values of nineteenth-century public life with the impersonal façades of the international style evident in the office towers of commercial corporations. Admittedly the public became a “phantom public” as culture became increasingly modern. Rather than disappear, however, public media adapted. Thus the authoritative history of newspaper design charts the transformation of twentieth-century newspapers through successive stages of modern design, culminating in their “late modern” phase.

- 12 The question remains of how people are likely to be emotional within a late-modern public culture.<sup>7</sup> The conventional wisdom would be that emotions remain expressive experiences which erupt from primitive springs within the individual and are not a part of the rational organization of modern life. Emotions might disrupt or supplement late-modern design but exist prior to it and flow across it without any change on either side. We believe otherwise. The smooth, “impersonal” background of late-modern design may in fact be entwined with emotional life, redirecting deeper currents of social energy through characteristic structures for communicating feeling. At times, late-modern design is emotional, even distinctively emotional.

### **Visual Tropology**

- 13 The art of rhetoric began as a study of how distinctive usage of words could have persuasive effect. Attention centered on the surface of discourse, on what could be seen and altered by the individual speaker, rather than the deeper rules defining language. Attention to the fine-grained patterning of the discursive surface soon produced somewhat systematic classification of specific recurring patterns having distinctive effects. Whether called “tropes,” “schemes,” or “figures,” the basic idea was the same: a distinctive verbal form could produce a special effect. Thus alliteration could tie concepts together, and antithesis could oppose them. Synecdoche would establish part-whole relationships, and irony could cut text from context.
- 14 In every case, identifying a trope depended on a perceived deviation from a prior state of standard usage. The standard or familiar use was relative, of course, but it functioned as a “zero point” or baseline from which the deviation could be recognized. If “to the well, go” is a figure of speech ( *hyperbaton/anastrophe/hysteron proteron*), it is only because “go to the well” is the expected phrasing.<sup>8</sup>
- 15 One distinction that did not matter was whether the deviations occur in speech or writing: with the exception of the figures that obviously play on distinctive properties of each medium, the classifications apply equally well to

written or spoken discourse. We may ask, however, whether they are inescapably verbal, in the sense that they cannot “translate” into non-verbal media. We can see quickly that some figures can be applied to compositions that mix image and text. We can say that “Brutus is an honorable man,” a wholly verbal statement rich in irony; or we can create an imagetext rich in irony by labeling a picture of a still-devastated New Orleans with the phrase, “You’re doing a heck of a job, Brownie.”

- 16 It is clear, moreover, that some images are themselves figural, for they contain tropes or operate as tropes within a larger discourse. Thus the many Photoshopped images at somethingawful.com create visual ironies through incongruous juxtapositions: e.g., Christ and a battle tank. Likewise Michael Dukakis learned the hard way that he could appear out of place on a tank, in an image that functioned metaphorically within public discourse to signify his unsuitability for the presidency.
- 17 The question remains, however, whether there are distinctively verbal tropes. Are there, in other words, visible deviations from visual design that have characteristic effects? Such tropes would be distinctively visual, rather than verbal – even though we could expect some transference into verbal media as well, just as there has been some transference of distinctively verbal tropes into visual media.<sup>9</sup>
- 18 As a preliminary attempt to answer this question, we offer an initial classification of several prominent visual tropes. We also identify two sets of secondary design elements that affect the figural transformation underway. We also suggest how primary and secondary elements can be inflected stylistically, that is, along a distinctively coherent path of aesthetic orientation.
- 19 Visual tropology includes, at the least, four master tropes of emotional display: the Face, the Figure, the Form, and the Sign. These can be modified by cognitive operations such as metaphor and by visual inflections such as color, entrainment, homology, and reproduction. As images articulate along stylistic pathways, they evoke and resonate with large cultural designs such as modernism, late-modernism, and postmodernism.

**Model of Standard, Modern, and  
Late-Modern Tropes, Figures, and Schemes**

<b>Tropes</b>	<b>Standard Usage</b>	<b>Modern Deviation</b>	<b>Late-Modern Deviation</b>
Figure	from closed/restrained	to open/unrestrained	to distant
Face	from blank	to expressive	to mediated/machined
Form	from familiar	to abstract	to uniform
Sign	from text/symbol	to icon	to graph

**Figures (of “speech”):** verbal tropes and figures that operate, *mutatis mutandis*, as in texts

metonymy  
metaphor  
irony  
chiasmus  
etc.

**Schemes:** design elements that enhance tropic, figural, and stylistic inflection

color  
entrainment  
homology  
reproduction

20 The model encompasses three levels of visual signification denominated as “tropes,” “figures,” and “schemes.” These terms provide nominal continuity with classical systems of classification, but their meaning is fixed here by their status relative to visual meaning. Thus irony, although usually a trope in verbal stylistics, is here demoted in order to reflect its secondary relationship to the four directly visual elements. Verbal figures are more inferential when in visual media. We can see a visual figure, face, form, or sign (against a background) without needing to infer a relationship. Schemes are directly



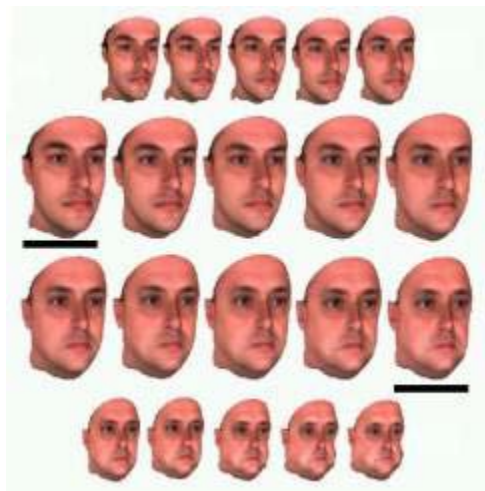
visual but secondary because they depend on prior perception of the visual tropes or other visual conventions. Thus red is used typically to color something else, and its meaning is likely to depend on cultural associations given in prior usage, as in red fire alarms. Likewise entrainment, homology, and reproduction across space, time, genres, and the like all work from prior articulation. Unfortunately this leads to using “figure” both a specific trope and a level of classification, but we hope that confusion can be avoided.

- 21 This essay focuses primarily on the operation of the four tropes as they chain out stylistically to articulate late-modern emotion. The tropes work by introducing visible deviation within a given mode of composition – Figure, Face, Form, or Sign – to create an effect. The effect involves a transformation in the meaning being articulated, according to a style of articulation. “Style” refers to the aesthetic norms governing composition and design in a particular period and place. A given image might be classical, baroque, or romantic; it might be modern, late-modern, or postmodern.
- 22 Thus the visual trope can be meaningful because it deviates in two registers: first, from an “original” position of non-distinctive usage (e.g., a body at rest, a blank face, a linear surface, a sign among other signs); second, from a less inflected position to one that is more inflected (e.g., from baroque to rococo, or from modern to late-modern). Each deviation can have distinctive effects; and as they become paired and further reinforced by additional elements of design, they can have strong effects. Hence we posit that visual images containing late-modern tropes can produce a late-modern structure of feeling.
- 23 In this case, stylistic inflection follows the path through two phases of cultural modernism as it has been evident in public arts. Thus the trope of Face operates by deviation from an initial blank state (the equivalent of a body at rest) to greater degrees of expressiveness. These deviations create the modern subject that is realized through individual expression. Continued deviation along that path could lead to crazed, chaotic diffusion, and this is one reason madness is a powerful trope in modern art. Instead, as guided by the historical development of modern technology and modernist aesthetics, it leads to a second transformation into mediated duplication and extension of the real. Likewise a visual Form can have a distinctive effect: first, via deviation from familiar objects in familiar settings into abstraction; and then again, from creative but potentially illegible abstraction into standardized units in uniform environments.
- 24 To illustrate the basic configuration of the model, consider the following images in succession. The Face trope begins with the facial mask in a state of rest; a state that can be represented by a literal mask of a blank face:



blank-face mask

Or as they are displayed at the Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratories, faces may become templates for video-game design:



many faces

A face begins to operate socially and emotionally as it becomes expressive. Consider the faces on a chart drawn from sociological experiments that test cross-cultural interpretations of emotional expression:



emotional faces

- 25 Any deviation for blankness is a tropological movement, of course, but not necessarily marked as such. The marking also reflects cultural differences: what is blank in one society might be highly expressive in another, and the reverse can hold as well. As a face becomes increasingly expressive, it becomes distinctively deviant enough to be seen as stylized. A Chicago Bears fan is a case in point:



two-tone face of Bears fan

This photograph does double duty here. It shows facial deviation through the wide eyes and, most notably, the distended lips that display the full set of teeth. It also shows the visual modifier of color.

26 The next picture adds the modifiers of duplication and homology:



three faces of Bears fans

The facial grimace – with its combination of primal snarl and good-humored grin – is replicated (with small variations that reinforce the whole) across three faces and three bodies entrained for the camera. The same holds for the color scheme. It is extended homologically across the rest of the wardrobe, which in turn extends the design across two generations since the picture is of a father and his two sons. The duplication of the first picture by the second (in the order presented by the *Chicago Tribune* slide show), along with their reproduction here, extends the design further through reproduction. Within the paper's coverage, the photos also operate as a layered synecdoche for the carnival of tailgating and the city's celebration of Super Bowl week.

27 These increasingly sophisticated deviations begin with the blank face that somebody might have on the street during the walk to work in an ordinary week. As a face moves toward greater expressiveness, it follows a stylistic path. The path need not involve modernism, as many Bears fans demonstrate:



Bears hat

Such bear hats and costumes – as well as other, more exuberant displays of carnivalesque silliness – all move away from the abstraction and uniformity of modernism.

- 28 But other displays do go down the modernist path. Take this Chicago Bears Fan Face Mask, available for purchase on the Web:



face mask for Bears fan

The face and color scheme are still there, but now they are explicitly mediated by our technology and economy. The face, though still expressing a cheerful

snarl, is becoming routinized as it acquires a second life as a mask. The result is not the original condition of blankness but a second-order representation of the expressive face. Hat, hair, costume, and body itself have been removed; the coloration is uniform; and the face itself is a smooth, relatively abstract, machined surface. Notice, too, that a sign has been added: the face has become a signboard as well. The primal emotion is still represented by the facial features, and the Bear icon may reinforce the affect, since it is relatively primitive compared to the standardized fan mask. Still that expressiveness is being channeled through a late-modern trope of visual articulation.

- 29 If this is getting a tad depressing, just think of another face from the late-modern pantheon . . .



happy face

. . . and have a nice day.

### **The Field of Visual Meaning**

- 30 The four master tropes of visual meaning can articulate a wide range of emotional experience. As tropes, they each function through successive variation on more standard, even primitive states of social intelligibility. (People saw faces as faces long before they became modernists.) These tropes can operate independently and in other structures. Nonetheless their coordinated articulation over time creates a dynamic field within which a significant range of emotional experience can be directed, intensified, and constrained. When images are inflected along the stylistic path from familiar to modern to late-modern design, they come to articulate a late-modern structure of feeling.
- 31 In what follows, we merely touch on Figure and Form, hoping to return to them in more detail in a later project, while we focus more on Sign and Face.

## Figure

- 32 Professional golfer Phil Mickelson had been dogged by the press as ‘the best golfer never to have won a major tournament.’ Long one of the two or three best players in the world, and at times the top money winner, Mickelson was acquiring a reputation as unable to win the big one. He was someone who choked under pressure, the nice guy who would never be tough enough to finish first. At last, on April 11, 2004, he won the Masters, perhaps the premier tournament in golf. The next day, his image filled the half page above the fold of the *New York Times* sports section:



Phil Mickelson

- The headline reads “Mickelson has finally made the major leap.” Although Mickelson was known as even-tempered and a little soft around the edges physically, this image shows a man almost leaping out of himself. His feet rise into the air, both his arms pump upward, his mouth opens in a shout of triumph: this is a highly physical, emotional, expressive moment. Both character and plot enhance the expansive release of emotion. Someone who is affable but self-restrained in public, and who has come close but missed many times, now explodes upward in glorious release of tension building for years. The double pun of the “major leap” in the headline ties the physical act to the organizational accomplishment: this single act of pure expressiveness enacts the long, four-day struggle of the tournament and the eleven-year quest for a major title. (Note that the pun is at once a verbal and a visual figure, doing double duty by also tying the two modes of representation together.)
- 33 The image as we have it so far exemplifies the trope of the bodily figure. The figure places an individual person in the center of attention. The body represents the person, and the centrality of individual subjectivity is reinforced by positioning this body as the figure in the figure/ground distinction that defines ordinary perception. The visual foregrounding of the

individual is a principal convention of visual representation in a modern, liberal society.<sup>10</sup> The individual is sovereign: the unencumbered self, the rights-bearing subject, the single entity through which experience can be defined and to which protections or rewards are given.<sup>11</sup>

- 34 This visual isolation of the individual also corresponds to the conventional wisdom in liberal societies on the nature of emotion. It is assumed to be an individual subjective state, accessible primarily through private experience and expressed more than communicated. Foregrounding an emotional display through the figure of a single individual thus continues an analogy between the social construction of emotions as if they were individual attributes and the self-understanding of a liberal democratic society as if it were a collection of sovereign individuals. Both the emotions and polity are localized in private life.
- 35 Emotions are not entirely private, however, and the Mickelson photograph is a particularly rich image in augmenting its central representation of emotional release. Note, for example the entrainment by the fans: massed bodies moving in unison suggest at once a strong single current of physical energy and an implicit discipline, socialization, or culture. The homology evoked as the fans mime Phil in others ways reinforces this figure.<sup>12</sup> They are roughly 30 to 50 years old, fit (though carrying a few extra pounds), and dressed according to the same fashion code (but more casual as befits their status as spectators). They are attractive, affluent, leisured, relaxed, white, and homogenous. They are comfortable in seeing a prestige event among their own kind. Like Phil, these are society's winners.
- 36 If we stop here, we remain in a modern but not yet late-modern moment. But whatever happened on the green that day, the newspaper representation of the event did not stop at this point. Instead the image of Mickelson leaping is matched with another, introducing a further visual trope and a larger structure created by their combination.

### **Sign/Graph**

- 37 Public and academic commentary on the media often presumes that public representation consists of nothing but texts and images. There is a third category, however, that consists of signs functioning with more salience and meaning than they would have as part of a text. These signs can be verbal, such as university initials on a t-shirt; they can be graphic, such as the star on a battle tank; or they can be both at once, as with many a trademark logo.
- 38 The emergence of trademark signs, their dependence on and importance for the modern design arts, and ever greater ubiquity in the media environment suggest that there is a distinctive space for signification between text and



image. This development bears a distinctive inflection as well. From a baseline condition where signs emerge from text, there are ranges of articulations: from abbreviated texts such as “Don’t Walk” to graphic illustrations such as the barred stick figure; from “ATT” to the trademark ATT globe; from the Nike brand name to the Swoosh. The general path is evident in the history of technical instructions for consumer goods: from full texts, to text plus graphic illustrations, to illustrations with textual captioning, to iconic directives.

- 39 In short, signs operate in public media not only as texts (if verbal signs) or pictures (if visual illustrations) but also as a separate modality of signification. Visual signs become tropes when they follow successive deviations from conventional text or image production, making them relatively transparent elements of a text or image. The transformation from text to sign, to icon, then to graph, is a key trope of late-modern visual meaning. We call this the Sign/Graph, because we are most interested in the late-modern articulation of the graph.
- 40 The superb photograph of Mickelson leaping is at once exceptional and recognizable. It could suffice as the visual complement to the verbal news report. Yet there is another image, pointing to a further trope. Running vertically down from the lead photo, a graph charts the scores of Mickelson and the second-place finisher across the eighteen holes of the tournament’s final day. Titled “A Fight to the Finish,” its caption reads: “Phil Mickelson and Ernie Els made the back nine a finish to remember.”

### A Fight to the Finish

Phil Mickelson and Ernie Els made the back nine a finish to remember.

LEADERS ENTERING FINAL ROUND

**Mickelson -6**

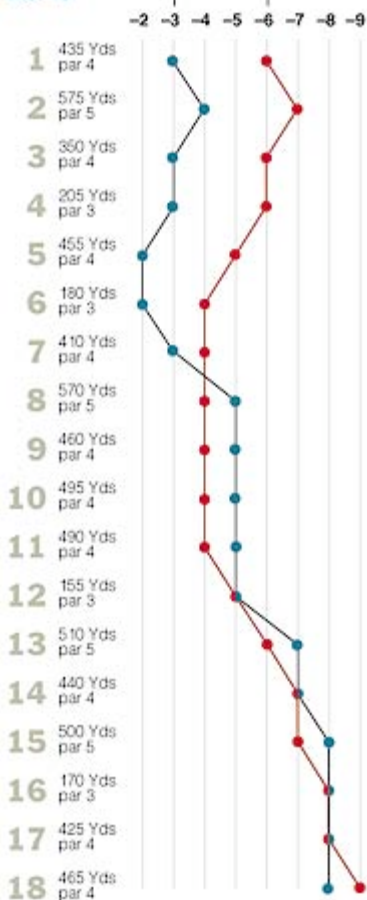
DiMarco -6 (finished at -2)

Casey -4 (-2)

Langer -3 (-3)

Choi -3 (-6)

**Els -3**

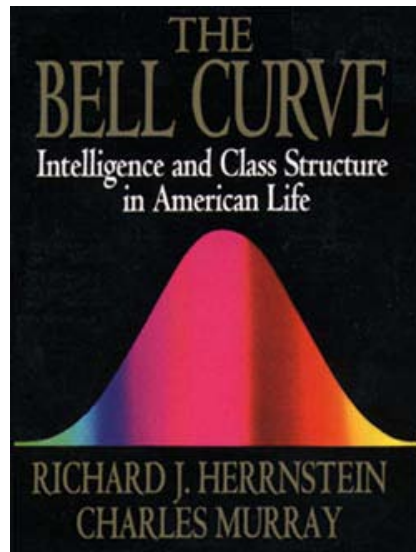


A Fight to the Finish

41 “Fight” is highly emotional, evoking bodily struggle, suffering, resolve, and aggression. Yet the graph has two lines parallel one another, weave together for a while, then end in two evenly spaced points. Its depiction of a fight is not similar to Mickelson’s leap. The drawing is mechanical rather than organic, presenting data points across time. The diagram meets standard criteria of graphic design, including accuracy and clarity, as well as not drawing attention to its craft.<sup>13</sup> These can seem cognitive standards, and the image “in itself”

would not seem to be an emotional image. Without the label, it could signify production figures, stock prices, or any other measure of standardized accounting. So the title does more than restate action separately graphed; it helps constructs the action and thus the graph.

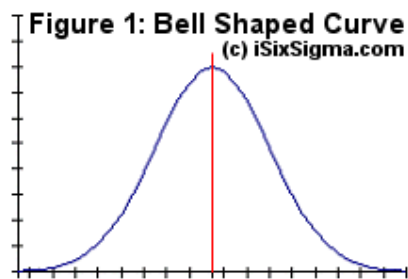
- 42 This suggests how the graph is emotional, as an analog of the action, and that it structures emotion. The graph exists not just to present complex information for visual perception, but also to convert embodied experience of emotionally trying conditions and events into a uniform, orderly, abstract model of collective, often statistical conditions.<sup>14</sup> The extent of this transformation can be grasped by recognizing that many graphs present experiences that are individually terrible or at least disturbing: deaths in Iraq, cancers, poverty, crime, bankruptcies, deficits, and so forth.
- 43 The graph converts individual events into statistical patterns. It is the premier form of visual abstraction in our public media.<sup>15</sup> Every graph is visually “cool,” in McLuhan’s sense of the term, superbly suited to a culture built around the circulation of information.<sup>16</sup> The graph also connects the press to that larger culture. It is an authoritative trope in textbooks, technical reports, instructional manuals, and other documents dedicated to the transmission of knowledge and expertise. As with the Mickelson example, moreover, graphs can be emotionally muted while still carrying more directly affective inflections. Much of the art in graphic design goes into creating such double effects. The structural role, however, is to translate covert individual experience into the aggregated data of collective behavior. Graphs are visual enactments of the administrative and technological regime of modernism.
- 44 Consider a few other examples. One is strategic. *The Bell Curve* is a book that claims to demonstrate race-based differences in cognitive ability. Its cover provides an image of scientific rationality but then colorizes it with a (distorted) rainbow of hues that suggests a celebration of diversity.



The Bell Curve

The explicit embellishment works in conjunction with a deeper appeal of the curve itself, which is to translate troubling social problems into a model of scientific management.

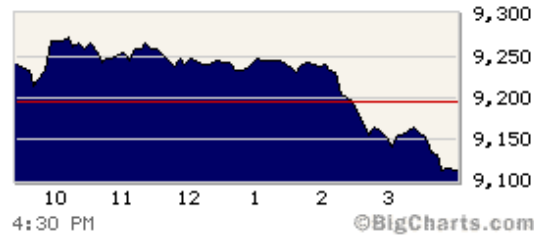
- 45 Such a strategic use highlights the emotional potential of graphic display, through both the conversion of experience into numerical abstraction and the use of color as an affective modifier to enhance or to compensate for the implications of the employment. Other, politically neutral displays have the same emotional potential. Indeed they provide the graphic point of departure for the more strategic uses.



Bell-Shaped Curve

This second bell curve has no content other than its mathematical equation, yet it can evoke a reassuring sense of order.

- 46 Another non-strategic use provides a quotidian example of how graphs have emotional meaning. The *New York Times* graph of the daily Dow Jones Stock Exchange activity is a model of graphic emotion.



Dow Jones Stock Exchange

On the one hand, it is nothing but a plotting of aggregate activity in a commercial market. On the other hand, it is read with great emotional intensity by millions of day traders, financial analysts, lenders, borrowers, and not a few politicians around the globe.

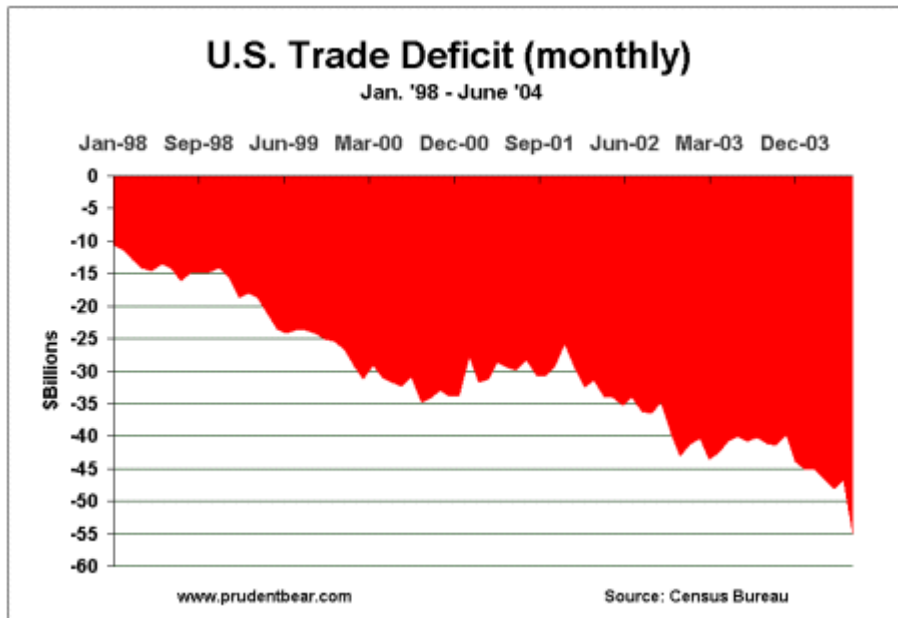
- 47 Regardless of the day's particular "content," this recurrent graph can reflect both good and bad news for different bettors. This emotional range is suggested by its color scheme. The blue data flow rises or falls in relation to the red line at the center, and these together reproduce contrasting tones of cool and warm affect. The primary referents, however, are not the individual fortunes that depend on the rises or declines but the collective formation of the market itself and the collective behavior of a national economy which can never be experienced directly. As with any image, this graph channels a narrative: in this case, the history of economic booms, busts, cycles, and the traumatic past of the crash that inaugurated the Great Depression.



The Dow-n

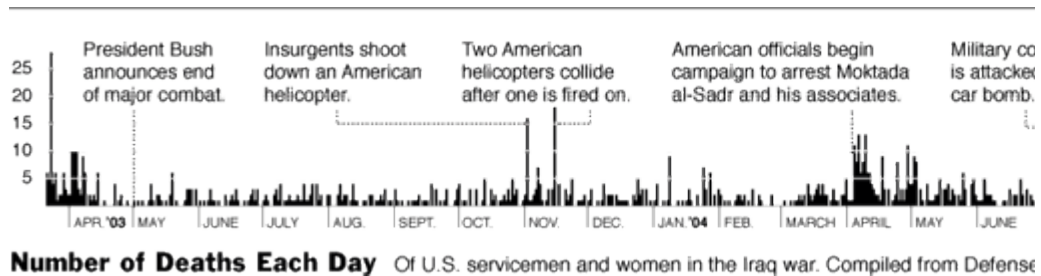
Its emotional meaning comes from its iconic status as a measure of aggregate behavior that is at once potentially disastrous yet also safely abstracted. Updated continuously throughout the day on the Web, the graphs function as nothing less than a medical register of the health of the body politic.<sup>17</sup>

- 48 With the stock report as background, governments and other organizations provide many graphs of economic activity that are intended to have both cognitive and emotional resonance. It is unlikely that the red in this graph of the trade deficit was chosen by someone comfortable with a continuing imbalance in trade:



U.S. Trade Deficit

- 49 On the other side, obvious damping occurs as vivid colors yield to more neutral hues. This graph of the Marine advance into Falluja gives the chaotic nature of battle the emotional resonance of a city-planning document.



Falluja graph

- 50 Between our two images from a sports page are two poles of a structure of feeling. The figure and the graph constitute a field of meaning for individuals and members of an aggregate who need not identify with a community. These let us believe that emotions are individual even as they abstract harrowing events that are no respecter of persons into impersonal knowledge that is still emotionally legible. This is a liberal dance. Individuals are rightly the focus of emotional response; while markets and publics are largely denuded environments rightly administered by large, rational, administrative organizations. The comprehensive structure allows identification with specific expressions of feeling by individuals while also diffusing identification with social and economic conditions through models of rational organization.
- 51 Both Sign/Graph and Figure can be manipulated strategically, and this demonstrates their persuasive viability, yet much of the enactment and response stays unconscious. These functions are filled out further by the tropes of Form and Face.

### **Form**

- 52 The emergence of visual form in a public medium is exemplified most notably in a famous image by Edward Weston:



Edward Weston Green Pepper

The sinuous form appears to be a representative piece of modern art: it might call to mind the sculpture of Henry Moore. Yet it photographs a pepper. The title – “Pepper, 1930” – clarifies the referent, even as the artistic effect comes from transforming a familiar object into an abstract form. As *Life* adds, quoting J. Carter Brown, Director Emeritus of the National Gallery of Art, “It is abstract and beautiful just as a form, yet also deeply human, and something we can relate to.”<sup>18</sup> Brown captures the middlebrow sensibility along with the conjunction of abstraction and emotional resonance that lets the photograph embody how formal abstraction operates as a trope in public media. So it is that a vegetable can be “deeply human.”

53 The Weston photo remains a work of art, however, while a more diffuse sense of modernist abstraction permeates the décor of late-modern society. We will be misled only if we look only for the artistic *piece de resistance*, as with the Weston image. Visual “Form” is, ironically, the most amorphous of the four tropes. By “Form” we mean not merely a strong, artistic sense of shape or line in a pictorial composition but also a technique for channeling a modernist aesthetic through images into the public media.

54 A few images might illustrate this. Look first at a work by the painter Barnett Newman:



Barnett Newman painting



What does this represent? The top of a tuning fork? The psyche? Despair? What one can do with black and white? We see a dark and ghostly image that marks subconscious allusions to troubling emotions that do not seem able to articulate themselves fully and cleanly. They overlap with one another more than they clash. Yet they seem controlled by the rectilinear design, the symmetrical organization, and the somewhat decisive white line that bisects the image. Even the darkness arrays symmetrically: the field on the left appears darker, with dark on light; the field on the right appears lighter, with light on dark. An emotionally evocative field of perception has been contained by techniques that operate as purely formal elements of composition and as the design grammar for the machine age. The Freudian unconscious might be lurking behind the murky dark/white image, but it already has been organized into a visual vocabulary. The painting becomes an abstract expression of an emotional field. More important, the primary representation of emotional experience has become abstracted, reconstituted as a matter of form.

- 55 To suggest how this aesthetic is carried through middlebrow public arts such as photography, consider Ansel Adams' widely distributed "Monolith – Face of Half Dome":



Ansel Adams, "Monolith"

It offers the same design principles but in a different medium: the “mechanical art” of photography. That mechanical substrate is masked by the content of the photo: Instead of the rigidly mechanical framing in Newman’s painting, the scene is natural, showing how the hard surface of granite can be given organic shape by wind and water.

- 56 Yet correspondence with the Newman painting is striking. It begins with the line formed by the edge of the mountain down the center of the image. Alternately white and dark, the line bisects the darkness on either side. The symmetrical alternation of dark and white tones reverses that of Newman’s painting, but to similar effect, both evoking a dynamic tension between enormous forces beyond individual control. The tension is elaborated further by the contrast between the clustering of objects in the right foreground against the expansive space opening up in the left rear of the scene. (There is no use of perspective – a realist convention – in the Newman paintings, which can stand as one difference between the fine and middlebrow arts of the time.) A portrait of “nature” is also a study in visual form.
- 57 These few images suggest an emerging vocabulary of emotional articulation that extends across a range of visual media. In each case, an emotionally powerful “content” is constrained by formal composition. Despite the manifest referential contents of the photographs, emotional experience becomes articulated through visual abstraction, just as in the abstract painting. The result can be a strong sense of emotional identification, we would never rule that out, but it also can extend a visual tropology that makes emotional experience itself a process of abstraction.
- 58 We are not arguing that this abstract expression of emotions somehow degrades a more authentic experience. On the contrary, there is much to be learned about emotional life from abstract art. The trope of abstraction is a specific type of emotional articulation that has its own value and limitations. Nor is it limited to fine art as it operates, generally unnoticed, in public media.
- 59 Consider, for example, an image we have discussed at length elsewhere: the iconic photo of the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle.<sup>19</sup>



Challenger Space Shuttle

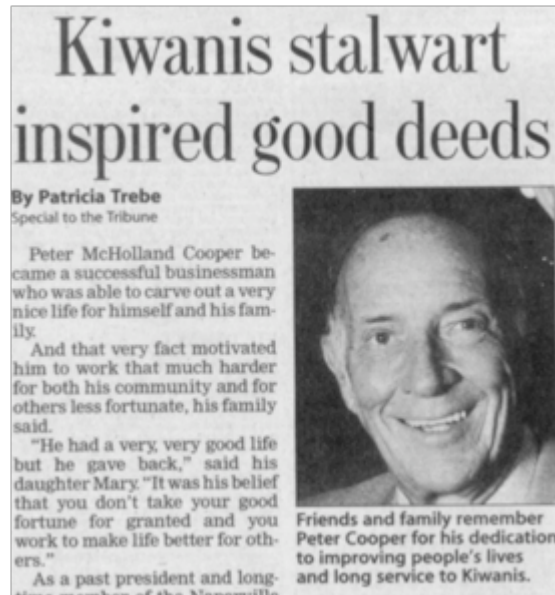
*Sans* caption, as we have explained elsewhere, the image could double as a largely decorative instance of modernist art.<sup>20</sup> Instead of figural representation, we see a white image against a blank blue background. There is little sense of perspective or scale, while the whiteness combines several pleasing symmetries – first of the oval center then of the two trajectories arcing outward, all of it nicely centered in the frame – against the uniformly blue canvas. The powerful explosion at the center of the picture is contained by these formal techniques and above all by the abstraction of emotions activated by knowledge that those within the craft enveloped by the explosion are dying. In other words, a traumatic event is contained emotionally by formal properties of its composition that infuse the emotional experience with the cool, impersonal affect of modern art.

### **Face**

- 60 The face is the most obvious visual trope. Indeed what needs to be said? The face is considered the most expressive part of the body; the surest expression of individual personality, mood, intention, and response. The face is what we see of the person. The face has been given special status within the modern visual arts, e.g., from Rembrandt's study of eyes to the many close-ups in the masterpieces of the cinema. In meditating on how we see faces, James Elkins notes that the face ties closely to feeling and style. In fact, he sees the face as the original source of all attempts to identify style. Attributions of style to other sources, he says, are somewhat misplaced attempt to see how "the coherent mind becomes an image," something found exactly so only in a

face.<sup>21</sup> Thus the face would seem to be the master trope for expressing individual emotion.

- 61 The faces that accompany obituaries might be the surest examples of this idea: as the personality shaped by an entire life might be summarized in a single photo. The image below is particularly evocative:



Kiwanis Stalwart

The image leaves no doubt that Peter Cooper was the person described in the obituary: a truly good-hearted man, a thoroughly social human being, one who truly enjoyed being with others and making them smile. His face is the image of a person who distinguishes himself by being with and giving to others.

- 62 Faces can be powerful testaments to grief, anger, and other emotions that are both deeply personal and rightly public. The following photograph of a "Miner's daughter" speaks volumes about her personal anguish and justifiable anger following the mining accident that killed her father.



Miner's daughter

His portrait is on the wall behind her. The duplication of their faces reinforces the family tie. The contrast between the soft focus in the background and her sharply etched features in the foreground captures the profound difference between death and life. It also suggests the gulf between the joy of their family life together and the irremediable loss she now experiences. As the microphone signifies, though, she is grieving while also speaking publicly to demand corporate and government accountability for better occupational safety.<sup>22</sup>

63 This photograph exemplifies a familiar modernism. The social types, personal expressiveness, and specific appeals of each image reflect well-known yet still powerful conventions of emotional performance. This is what it means to be happy or sad, and this is how those emotions are shown in the public medium of the newspaper. As we move along the stylistic path toward late-modernism, however, the faces begin to change.

64 As we foreshadowed, the direction of change in modern aesthetics is from the blank facial mask to individually expressive faces to machined or mediated expressiveness that is represented by masks. The theatrical mask, a replica of a face, becomes a metaphor for the face. Madonna remarks that “Rita Hayworth gave good face,” marking both art and an economy of desire.<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari refer to the “abstract machine of faciality,” a phrase at

once sophistic and modern.<sup>24</sup> “Save face.” “Put a good face on it.” “I have to put on my face.”

- 65 The face is always a subject for discussions of emotional sincerity and deception. It is always a place for negotiating the boundaries of public and private life. Eventually it becomes more available and more suspect in the modern media.<sup>25</sup> Andy Warhol knew this, and he multiplied silk screens of Marilyn Monroe, Mao Tse Tung, and others to enact artistically how the face changes through dissemination of identical faces:



Andy Warhol's nine Monroe faces

To get a sense of the plasticity of the image, go to <http://webexhibits.org/colorart/marilyns.html> and manipulate the colors for this figure's hair, skin, face, mouth, and background. The digital site makes explicit what is latent in the artwork: in the modern world, the face becomes a facial machine.

- 66 The deconstruction of the face occurs in tandem with media of dissemination. This may begin with theater, but it accelerates greatly in late-modern times. Two images suggest this trajectory. The first is famous from the early history of cinema: through celluloid artistry, the man in the moon is depicted with a large bullet (supposedly a space craft) in his eye.<sup>26</sup>



Man in the Moon

One modern technology shows this folk figure getting it in the face from another modern technology. This image of defacement is a parable of two forms of colonization: landing on the moon and colonizing the imagination. Not to worry, however: since the man in the moon is only a face, there is no possibility of retaliation. The audience need do nothing but laugh.

- 67 A more serious image also involves projection of a face, this time in tandem with effacement:



burqa and monitor head

This image comes from a regional newspaper at a time in the development of the digital arts that might be equivalent to the place of the man-in-the-moon joke in the history of the cinema.<sup>27</sup> Once again, a modern technology is set over the cultural form of a more traditional society. Here the liberation is more explicit, with the defacement imposed by a traditional garment. A woman who would be completely effaced by the burqa is liberated, restored to individual personhood, by projection through her computer. Although her entire body is also in the room, it is the digital image of her face that is the sole marker of her identity. That face, however, is an image; unlike the women behind the mask, it cannot see, and it can be reproduced indefinitely or eliminated by touching a key. The irony is that the face lives in the modern technology but acquires a greater vulnerability for that fact. We can anticipate that continued global modernization will liberate women now in burqas, but the fate of women now in the West is less clear. That we may hope for a third alternative is one indication that the artist has done her job.

- 68 The trace of imperialism in these photos is not the subject of this essay, but a later image highlights how much Western identity is invested in the trope of the face. The most famous image of a face in recent decades has been the Afghani girl portrayed on a *National Geographic* cover.

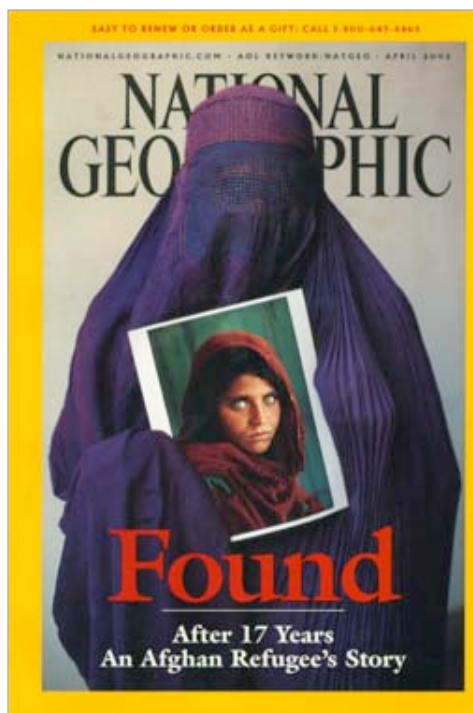


Afghan girl



There is much more to say about this image, but for now we may settle for observing that it does a lot of work with such *National Geographic* conventions as using a young woman to symbolize hope for national development, portraying the third world as both exotic and degraded (notice her colorful yet frayed garment), and maintaining the belief that “their present is our past.”<sup>28</sup>

- 69 Above all, however, the combination of the individual portraiture and her wary look, as if the camera and the civilization it represents were a predator, creates an emotional drama. Does living in a “primitive” and “dangerous” society make her wary when facing the West? Is she unaccustomed to the camera or to being valued as an individual? Will she smile eventually? Will her life provide the resources that her unrealized human potential deserves? The combination of caution and receptiveness in a single facial expression must have been part of the appeal to the many readers of the magazine who lauded the photo.
- 70 *National Geographic* later found the girl again, producing another and less satisfying story, even though a follow-up might seem bound to disappoint in comparison to an image of undefined futurity. (Such narratives are conventional supplements to iconic images in liberal-democratic public culture). The issue’s cover is telling:



Afghan woman

The woman has gone under the veil, and the face has become an image of a face. It represents personality yet alienates it from the body by displacing the face onto a representational medium. We see the grown woman inside the magazine; but the result is anti-climactic or depressing, depending on our sense of a life bound within a poor, traditional, Islamic, patriarchal society. To sustain the drama, the magazine had to create the cover image of effacement, which foregrounds the modern visual practice while contrasting it with the “primitive” culture.

- 71 If there are any surprises so far, they are likely to be that the graph is a mode of emotional performance and that the face is such a compromised means of expression. Both modulations are characteristic of how these and other tropes cohere to produce a structure of feeling that is “indigenous” to the communication and design technologies of the late-modern era. Within this structure, the face is twice inflected: it is disembodied, given a separate placement via projection within the media themselves; and it is suited in this separation of face and body to putting a face on environments that have already been decried as faceless, alienated, anomic, or impersonal.
- 72 The faces of leaders, fashion models, talking heads, and celebrities become the masks that convey personality. They imply that a dialogue among individuals is occurring in media that reach blindly into the lives of millions in environments defined by geometric uniformity and abstraction. The face remains a register for emotional display and reaction; but it also functions as a compensatory device within a system that draws on still more generalized, uniform, or abstract devices. The face becomes a machine, and it functions as one part of a larger machine that exists to manage emotional life within a highly complex, catastrophically interdependent society organized around industrial and economic practices of incredible scale.
- 73 No fans of late-modern architecture, we do not wish to fall back into the social theory that produced the critique of alienation and anomie. Those judgments have their place, but we must ask how the late-modern system of visual display might also be a beneficial adaptation to the late-modern environment. The trope of the face need not convey the unique personality that Elkins wants; indeed there are good reasons to move beyond the idea that “the style is the man,” which is the nostalgic basis for his suggestion. Faces in the public media must be important since they are there so much, yet they are not really treated as a final register of individual personality. Given sufficient notoriety, individual politicians see their faces converted into masks for street demonstrations, but poses, gestures, and similar variations on the trope of the bodily figure are at least as crucial to avoiding or drawing criticism. The persistent presentation of faces is likely to be one way to keep emotions alive

within print media, but their self-containment (via miniaturization, for example) and their placement within a more comprehensive modulation of emotional response are likely to be equally important to their influence.

- 74 In general, faces are not exactly what they seem in the media. When theater was a predominant public art, facial difference was marked as a mask; now it is marked as a machine. But in any case, media faces might be more useful for emotional life precisely because they are instances of a trope.

### **Nuances of Verbal Articulation**

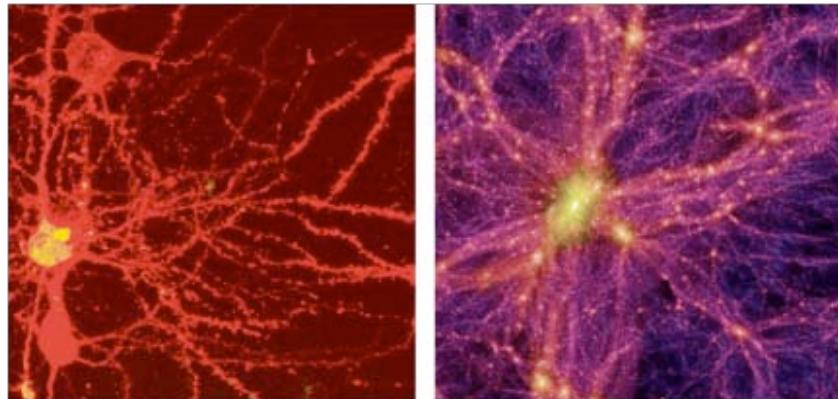
- 75 We close with a few remarks on continued development of this late-modern system of tropes. Everywhere we can see the tropes, figures, and schemes intermingle in actual usage. With its expression of relief and exhaustion, for example, Mickelson's face provides a subtle, enriching inflection to the elation expressed by his leap and the entrainment behind him. Figures and faces are often found together, of course, but their articulations can vary considerably. Just as the Mickelson caption inflects its photo by making his "leap" metaphorical, so words affect many other images. Think of "Monolith – Face of HalfDome," and notice that the following photograph of a typical modernist building is captioned "North face of Palevsky East."<sup>29</sup>



"North face of Palevsky East"

Here "face" evokes the face of a mountain. So this imagetext channels modernism while softening its hard surfaces and alienation verbally. It also endows the building with the permanence and nobility of nature. Does that help us overlook the trash left on the front lawn?

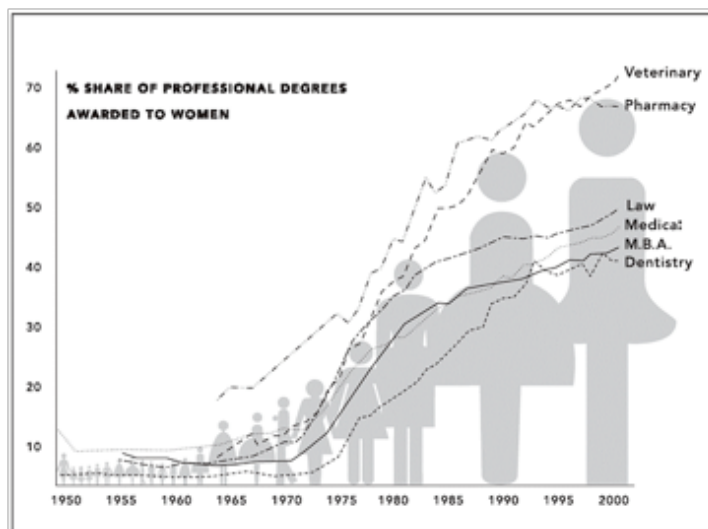
76 Nature figures prominently in another and more impressive combination of trope and figure:



self-similarity diptych

This diptych presents a formal similarity between a neuron in a mouse's brain and a computer simulation image of the universe. The two photos show organic forms that we know mainly by photography, since neither can be seen directly in ordinary experience. Then the caption invokes the part-whole relationship of synecdoche to shape the visual similarity. The comparison creates a reciprocal duplication between the microcosm of the neural cells and the macrocosm of the universe that includes the neural cells and every other thing that exists. Formal duplication inflected by a verbal figure generates an emotion of wonder.

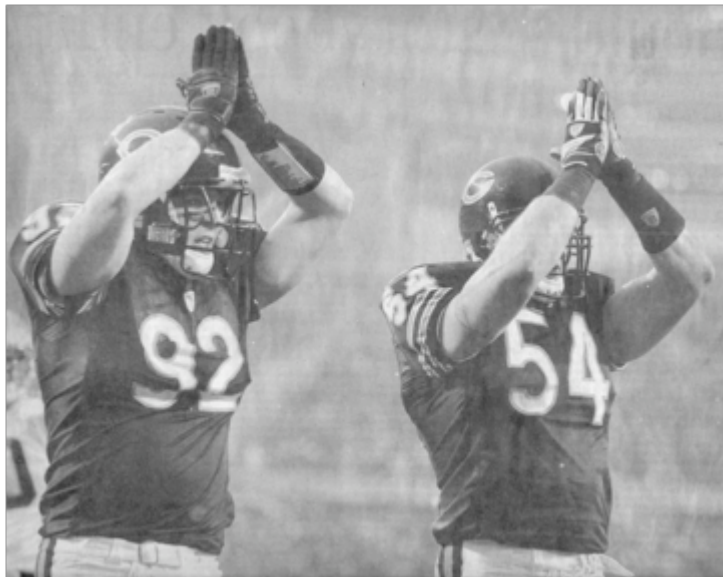
77 Another relationship between tropes occurs when figures appear in graphs. For example:



professional degrees for women

The outlines of female figures in various fashions provide a counterpoint to the rapid rise up the socio-economic scale represented by the data points. The figural inflection may be seen as reactionary or as confounding the reactionary belief that women must have become less feminine to succeed in the professions. In either case, it activates both social knowledge and emotional response.

- 78 Generally the figure – particularly as it involves pose, gesture, and fashion – might be the trope most disposed to fuse emotional response with both social knowledge and ideology.<sup>30</sup> What is most important here, however, is the fact that the figure has morphed into iconic representation. Instead of the image of an actual woman, we have the late-modern habit of radical simplification to a “universal” language of graphic symbols. The combination of graph and icon, along with the absence of color, all but completely mutes the intense controversies and personal battles of a half-century of social change in gender roles.
- 79 Other photos can use the tropes together without going so far down a stylistic path. Another image from the Bears 2007 playoff season neatly combines figure and form:



two Bears touchback

The two defensive players signal a touchback in the hope of cueing officials to make that call. The gesture is unusual; we could watch for many seasons and not see it. Along with the unconscious duplication, this makes a newsworthy picture, although not one thought appealing enough for the paper’s Webpage

photo essay on the game. The picture can remind us that tropes, like all communications, usually receive only momentary interest and that artistry can be evident without having to be significant.

- 80 Other combinations of figure and form may be less innocent. Advertising is full of examples. A bottom-and-top diptych takes us from the real condition of being burdened with allergies to the ideal state of freedom from them. The difference, of course, is provided by the drug being advertised.



Allegra ad

One argument for the drug is provided by the verbal text, which provides clinical evidence of effectiveness. The visual display also is an argument, focused on the emotional change that can follow use of the drug. Face, Figure, and Form are all present; although the change in facial expression is minimal and caught only in profile. The emotional release is communicated primarily by her extension of her body from its prior state of uncomfortable, straight-backed compression, to the elongated repose of lying on the lounger. Note, however, that her one leg remains in an inverted V, which is replicated by the landscaped bushes behind her. The landscape is entrained; and her two states reflect the shift from partial entrainment – where she models the high bushes – and complete entrainment – when she models both the high bushes and the long, low, horizontally extended bush. In the ideal state, she is both the long, level bush and the uniform series of inverted Vs (formed now by her leg and the rise of her upper body along the slope of the lounger). Figure and Form cohere to communicate an individual experience and a uniform serenity,

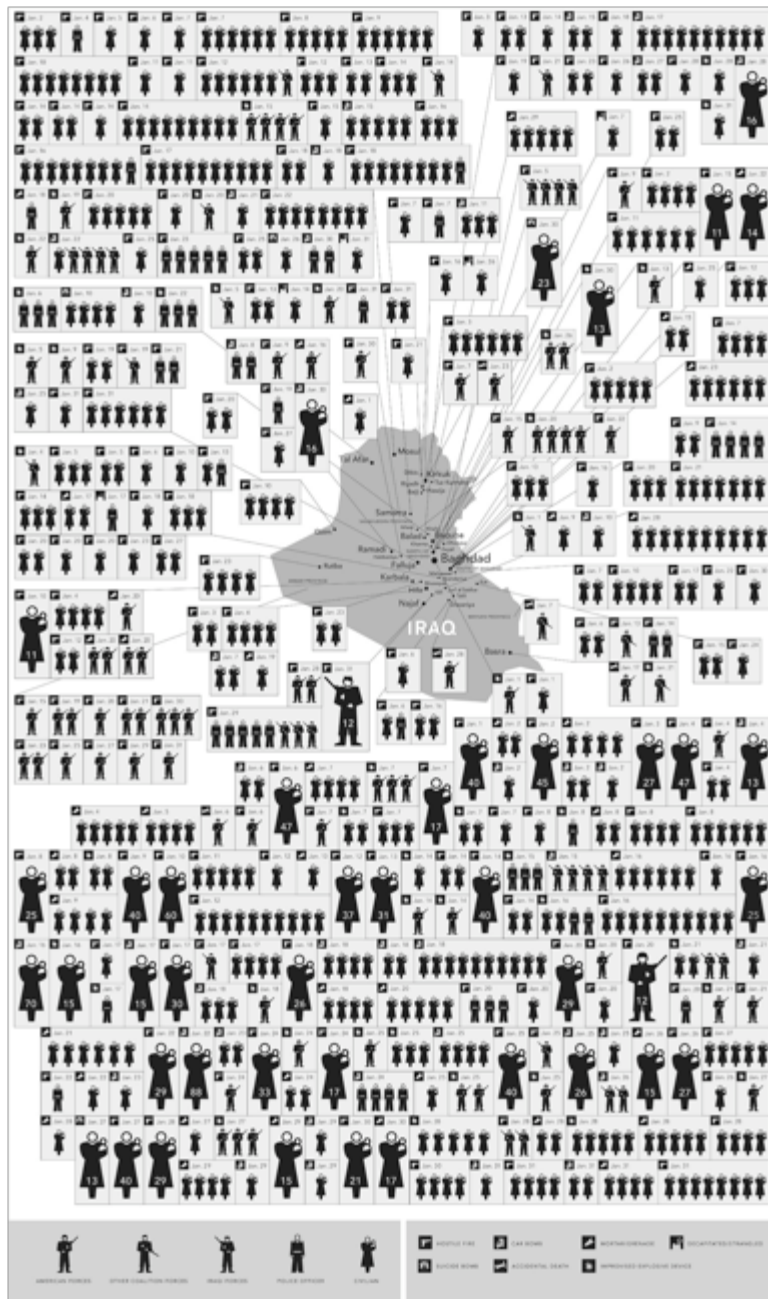
both coupled to having the right medication.

- 81 Relationships among tropes as well as between tropes and modifiers can be varied for emotional effect. Sometimes the tropes are dominant; but sometimes the modifiers of entrainment, duplication, homology, and color can become highly salient. They can cue affect, structuring more complex emotional responses, and creating appeals of their images. At some point, a figural trope might become the background to the modifying entrainment. Then the modifier shifts in status from adjective to substantive or adverb to verb, depending on how we imagine the visual syntax.
- 82 This essay cannot avoid oversimplification. Any image can be a source of emotional nuance or the object of widely different reactions. The tropes we identify can work in other ways and in other combinations than we discuss here. The public media articulate more than one structure of feeling as they serve several interests and represent a pluralistic society.
- 83 We believe emotions are not and should not be limited to private life. We find that public media provide rich images that are important means of emotional communication and means for communicating important emotions. We urge scholars and citizens to reflect on how emotions are structured in public media and how those media at times communicate powerful structures of feeling. We posit a late-modern structure of feeling that is aesthetically consistent with life as constituted within modern institutions such as financial markets, modern states, and modernist buildings. That structure, like all emotional reality, finds visual expression through conventions of representation. These are neither unique to that structure nor capable of full representation for individual emotional experiences. As they cohere, however, they create a symbolic field within which all emotions can be filtered and some distinctively modern emotions can be articulated persuasively. As media production continues, in photojournalism and many other venues, people publish images that reproduce this field. Such images can acquire additional richness from their place within the field, even when they are communicating events or values from realms of experience that differ radically from the ones reinforced by late-modern design.
- 84 How, though, do the more thoroughly late-modern emotional images relate to normative concerns of public life? If we put five or six graphs from the past week or so on a screen, the effect can be rather sobering: we might see deaths in Iraq, urban shootings, rural meth labs, rapes per capita, deaths from lung cancer, ambient radiation, malnutrition, etc. The detail can be cool, abstract, orderly – sometimes with figural embellishments so clichéd that the abstraction can seem more honest, though not a source of pride. Once we see how Form works to channel abstraction, similar results can follow. We can put up images of mushroom clouds, air strikes, firefights, famine, ecocide, or

more to see how everything becomes simultaneously emotional and abstracted, intensified yet set at an aesthetic distance.

- 85 Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the entire structure of feeling adumbrated by interactions of these four tropes of Figure, Form, Face, and Sign/Graph functions to enclose emotional life. The individual tropes also provide strategies for emotional enclosure. Individually and together, they suggest that public lives are ordered, controlled, and intelligible. Stated otherwise, one of the functions of all emotions might be to register chaotic aspects of the world, while late-modern representation then translates that knowledge into a regime of intelligibility. All emotional structures might do the same, but we have to suspect that the modern system is the most ruthlessly efficient.
- 86 This observation brings us to a familiar position in social theory: faulting capitalist use of aesthetics to anesthetize moral response and deflect political dissent. Let us not go there unreflectively, for that closes the door on too much of what is happening in the media and in everyday lives. It is more challenging to ask how abstraction also can be an emotion, even a legitimate emotional response or vehicle within modern societies. Two images might help. The first records deaths in Iraq during the thirty-one days of January 2007.





deaths in Iraq

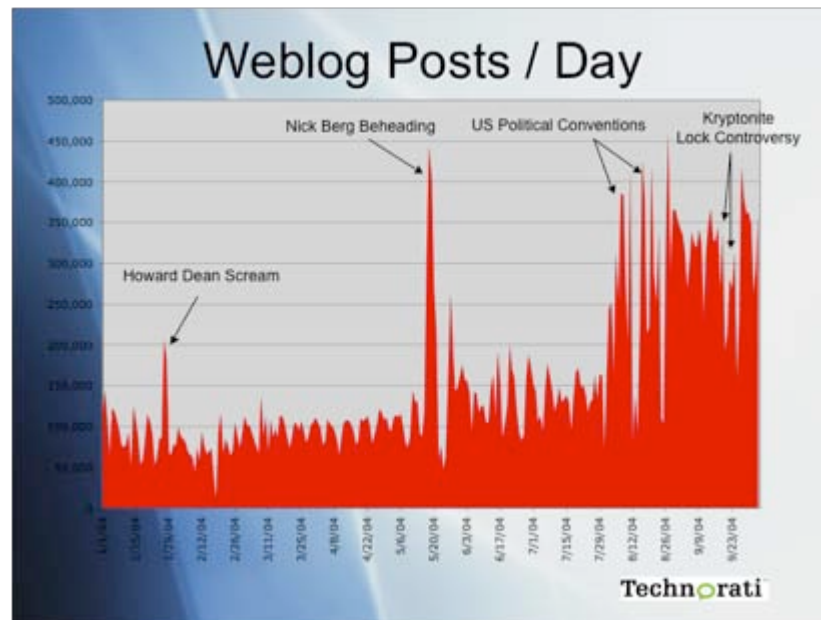
It has all the properties of late-modern depiction. Yet on a full page of the *New York Times* or even on a computer screen, its density and detail communicate powerfully the complexity and the tragedy of the war.

- 87 Full recognition of the influence of modernist composition techniques might require that we redefine what emotions are. The same goes for the importance of media, circulating images, and virtual realities. Most definitions of

emotions fuse embodiment and agency: emotions are embodied dispositions to act, with action (or inaction) following from affects that emotions exert our bodies. Emotions that operate without bodies would seem incapable of rhetorical power. Yet this might distort how, what, and why people feel and act as they do.

- 88 Our choices do not pit abstractions against more embodied and authentic realities. Instead they involve negotiations of interrelated abstractions and embodiments, all capable of better and worse uses. We must ask how this can work. Moral life can be limited by being too particularistic: think of the landlord's Christmas ham for the tenant farmer. Modern social and economic problems cannot be identified, much less solved, without using cognitive technologies and sophisticated modes of information display. Addressing modern problems also requires, we would argue, the emotions that accompany the presentation of these problems in public media.
- 89 To understand how public media shape responses to the events they report, we need to consider, among many other things, how visual images might be articulating a late-modern structure of feeling. If we discern in coverage of the Iraq war that many images coalesce to activate a particular structure of feeling, we position ourselves to ask questions important to judging the coverage and the war. We can identify how an image works emotionally by close reading of its visual tropes and deriving its place within the symbolic field. We can consider how the image and then the structure as a whole can make particular emotions more or less available or powerful. Because emotions are dispositions to act, we can begin to discern how the media structure public "opinion" and political action.
- 90 But that is not all. We need two additional steps, each reaching beyond this essay. First, we must ask which emotions should be involved. Aristotelian political theory provides one model, where the constitution of a polity depends as much on its cultivation of apt emotions as it does on the formation of just laws. Yet people committed to democracy in modern societies sustained by modern media of communication cannot rely entirely on the classical vocabulary.
- 91 Second, we should recognize that the late-modern structure of feeling can shape the policies and events themselves and not just media coverage or public response. Modern warfare depends not on anger but on abstraction. This holds for environmental policy, public healthcare, and more. Keys to a sustainable democracies might include criticism of abstraction, alienation, and aesthetic distance, yes, but also understanding of just how modern emotions can be.
- 92 Even then, we might do no more than come full circle. Wouldn't Howard

Dean's vivid performance of emotional energy still seem scandalous in a world of information management?



Weblog Posts

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## Notes

**1** An earlier version of this paper was presented as the Paul Boase lecture at Ohio University in February 2007. The images here have not been pre-authorized. This material is being used for the purpose of analysis and critique, as well as to advance the understanding of rhetoric, politics, and visual culture. The fair use of such material is provided for under U.S. Copyright Law. In accordance with U.S. Code Title 17, Section 107, this material is viewable for educational and intellectual purposes.

**2** See Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.

**3** Our perspective draws on, among others, Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II; Geoffrey M. White, "Emotions Inside Out: The Anthropology of Affect," *Handbook of Emotions*, Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland, eds., New York, Guilford Press, 1993, p. 29; Keith Oatley, "Social Construction in Emotions," *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 341-352; Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Cambridge,

Cambridge University Press, 1990; Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Emotions on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988; Niko Besnier, "Language and Affect," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19, 1990, pp. 419-451; Donald Brenneis, "Performing Passions: Aesthetics and Politics in an Occasionally Egalitarian Community," *American Ethnologist*, 14, 1987, pp. 236-250. For more extended discussion of our perspective, see Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 137-170.

<sup>4</sup> David R. Heise and John O'Brien, "Emotion Expression in Groups," *Handbook of Emotions*, p. 491: "In this [social-constructivist] perspective, displays of emotions are not uncivilized eruptions coming from deep within individual psyches, but rather amount to sophisticated social discourse that is employed to influence others."

<sup>5</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 48-71. "Structure of feeling" might seem to be a contradiction in terms, but we think it is an appropriate phrase for (and from) emotional life in a late-modern society – an environment often claimed to be without a human face. Theoretical argument should face the fact that people now have been living for some time within modern societies, and Williams' use of the term "structure" is indicative of how modern institutional vocabularies can be put to multiple uses. We hope to suggest that there is a late-modern structure of feeling that is activated by the concurrence of several tropes of visual display.

<sup>6</sup> See Charles Jencks: *Late-Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, New York, Rizzoli, 1980; *What is Postmodernism?* London, Academy Edition, fourth edition, 1996. Also see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> The following exposition could mislead the reader. To avoid misunderstandings likely to follow from our style of presentation, we add several disclaimers. First, we are not stating that there is a fixed meaning to the term "late modern" or that all examples of late-modern material culture provoke the same structure of feeling. If accepting a skeptical standard, we could not use these terms at all; but then we also could not speak at all of modernism, liberalism, or many other terms of obvious pertinence to the human sciences. We accept that there are variations in meaning for such terms and perhaps deep contradictions within the history of usage. Our focus on the relatively diffuse meanings that circulate or coalesce in the public media is not meant to account for the much more specific inflections that develop among elites in specific places and periods. We do accept that our

usage should meet the same standard that might apply to other empirical investigations of visual tropes, structures of feeling, and late-modernism. A related qualification is that study of individual artifacts, exhibitions, and local cultures can be a poor model for the study of the media and other environments characteristic of modern societies.

We also are not claiming that emotions can be transcribed comprehensively, that our use of affective terms is objective, or that late-modern emotions are universal. Like most readers, we rely on our society's conventional usage, including the assumptions that emotions exceed all means of representation but are more fully – though still somewhat inchoately – available through visual media. Indeed the most insightful analysis might come not from discerning how a visual trope shapes representation, but rather from focusing on the gaps that remain between a trope and the emotional experience it signifies. That can only follow, however, from first identifying a system of tropes. One also must discriminate between the fact that late-modernism carries within it the claim of universality, and the fact that any late-modern design is also inflected by national and other culturally and historically specific preferences. This essay is a preliminary study that is trying to identify one set of visual tropes in the U.S. print media; if others can confirm that those tropes are active more comprehensively, so much the better. It is likely that those tropes operate as a relatively uniform mechanism for translating and enclosing emotional experience, but specific artifacts and moments of response will always be influenced by other factors as well.

Finally, and perhaps most emphatically, we note that many individuals move through many different cultural fields during the course of a day, particularly as they live in multimedia environments. Media productions are by turns modern, late-modern, postmodern and many other things as well. Some of the time, however, ideas and attitudes can form at a particular moment – in response to a particular experience shaped by a particular medium, text, and image – while then becoming and remaining decisive. We hope to equip readers to understand better how some images may articulate some emotions that could be influential, and to consider how people might reflect on such influence.

**8** Recent examples include Richard Lanham: *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, second edition, 1991; *A Hypertext Handlist of Rhetorical Terms: For Macintosh Computers*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996. Also see Silva Rhetorica, <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>. Obviously a rhetor must vary the discursive surface to an extent that violates the default patterns there without violating deeper linguistic rules: “well, go the to” is not a figure because it is not yet an intelligible phrase.

**9** This transference has to be acknowledged for two reasons: First, all tropes are examples of the trope of catechresis, for signs always are artificial, indirect, and partial representations. We speak (catechretically) of a leg of a table, when the table has no leg and there is no other word that “leg” displaces when referring to the leg of a table. Second, the distinctions of text from image and of verbal from visual modalities are somewhat artificial distinctions more characteristic of modernist hermeneutics than semiotic operations. See Ernesto Laclau, “The Politics of Rhetoric,” *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, Tom Cohen and others, eds., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, pp. 229-253; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 5.

**10** Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, pp. 88-90.

**11** Collective realities are frequently depicted through the individual figure that functions as an “individuated aggregate.” Exceptions occur largely when the collectivity is being placed in a subordinate position in a political hierarchy, as when third world societies are represented by crowds. See John Louis Lucaites, “Visualizing ‘The People’: Individualism and Collectivism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 83, 3, 1997, pp. 269-288; Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*.

**12** See Barry Brummett, *Rhetorical Homologies: Form, Culture, Experience*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2004.

**13** Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Cheshire, CT, Graphics Press, second edition, 2001, p. 13.

**14** These models also double as articulations of power. In *Seeing the Newspaper*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1994, pp. 80-81, for example, Kevin G. Barnhurst notes that there are “three ways that charts work visually to establish power in society: by plotting the center of control, by showing lines of authority, and by asserting balance and equilibrium. These means depend on a notion central to all chart making: that there can be a one-to-one correspondence between the measurements of the real world and their graphic representation.” On p. 84, Barnhurst counters this conventional wisdom by arguing that “A rhetorical quality permeates all graphic forms.” See Charles Kostelnick, “Melting-Pot Ideology, Modernist Aesthetics, and the Emergence of Graphical Conventions: The Statistical Atlases of the United States, 1874-1925,” *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers, eds., Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004, pp. 215-242.

**15** Our discussion is omitting many distinctions among types of graphic display: gauges, diagrams, tables, charts, whiteprints, and more, with many variations within each category. See Ned J. Racine, *Visual Communication:*

*Understanding Maps, Charts, Diagrams, and Schematics*, New York, Learning Express, 2002; Paul Martin Lester, *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, fourth edition, 2005. The technical literature on design supplies additional and more detailed coding. These various texts typically frame and develop their aesthetic education according to cognitive or epistemological criteria, as well as commercial concerns, rather than an extended consideration of emotional articulation and response. The closest one gets is in discussion of the audience and in marking some designs as especially “aesthetic.”

**16** See Marshall McLuhan, “Media Hot and Cold,” *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, pp. 22-32. More important still is the argument of Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style*, New York, New York University Press, 1994.

**17** There are other, related uses of stock information displays. The ticker tape that runs across Times Square and various web screens provides a compensatory attitude: the market is dynamic, exciting, accelerating life, larger and faster than one can take absorb at a glance. Because people do not go to Times Square or Instant Messenger for the stock reports, the function of the data display must be symbolic – and a technique for intensifying emotional response within the media-intensive environment. The ticker-tape parades from the early to mid twentieth century have been another variant use, via the conversion of the instrumental material into an obviously expressive and excessive mode of collective emotional display. Another variant is provided by the full printout of the prior day’s closing figures in major newspapers. The informational function has been restored; but there also is symbolic depiction of a large yet orderly market commensurate with the cognitive norms of print culture along with a corresponding suppression of emotional response. It seems to us that these several displays cohere easily according to the conventions of the print media.

**18** *Life: Great Pictures of the Century*, October 1999, p. 124. The photograph also can be seen at [www.edward-weston.com](http://www.edward-weston.com).

**19** For a more developed version of the argument about how abstraction and other techniques are used to manage “modernity’s gamble,” see Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, pp. 243-286.

**20** See Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*.

**21** James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, New York, Harcourt, 1996, pp. 195 and 200.

**22** The fact that the photo is gendered gives additional power to her speech; a man would not have as much expressive license. Gender rules both empower and constrain her words.

**23** *Madonna: Truth or Dare*, directed by Alek Keshishian, Artisan Entertainment, 1991.

**24** Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, tr., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 167-191.

**25** See Erving Goffman, “On Face-Work,” *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, New York, Doubleday, 1967, pp. 5-46.

**26** *Voyage dans la Lune, Le/A Trip to the Moon*, directed by Georges Méliès, 1902.

**27** The caption is “Author Rosemarie Skaine holds an image of herself while wearing a burqa,” photo by Harry Baumert for the *Des Moines Register*, October 14, 2001, E-1. The photo accompanies Mike Kilen’s story “Behind the Veil.”

**28** Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 125.

**29** <http://www.uchicago.edu/docs/mp-site/construction/reshalls/res-finishes-exterior.html>. The caption is “North face of Palevsky East, which faces 56th Street.” Note the same use of “face” to describe the large, hard, impersonal front surfaces of mountains, as in “Face of Half Dome.”

**30** Likewise we have not commented on the use of class codes to inflect emotional identification. We are not claiming – or denying – that there are class-specific emotions or that social coding is distinctively late-modern. We have marked class codes according to our critical method of identifying significant transcriptions operating within the photograph. On the method, see the other work by Hariman and Lucaites noted above. The visual image is not only a “message without a code” but also the visual articulation of many overlapping codes arrayed without syntactical organization. Viewer response may vary according to which codes are recognized, though the image may shape response otherwise.