

Class 9: How to Conduct Visual Analysis

Length: 80 mins

In the Previous Lesson:

- Students are introduced to their second paper, the Lens Analysis, for which they will interpret a visual advertisement using our core text, “Monster Culture” by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and a secondary text, Jack Solomon’s “Masters of Desire.”
- We discuss the goals and expectations for the second paper, and then practice analyzing an advertisement as a class (focusing in particular on interpreting its intended audience and the assumptions it communicated to/about that audience). Students work in groups to make an argument about the advertisement using quotes from “Monster Culture.”

Learning Goals:

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss Solomon’s interpretation of advertising in “Masters of Desire,” apply his interpretation to advertisements chosen by the professor.
- Learn the basics of visual analysis and practice analyzing visual texts.

Materials:

- “Masters of Desire” by Jack Solomon
- C.R.A.P. Handout
- “Building Visual Literacy” Handout
- 5 or 6 Different Visual Advertisements

Activities:

Freewrite (5 min): How does Solomon describe the “two sides” of the American Dream? Do you agree with his interpretation?

“Masters of Desire” (15 min): Instructor notes responses on the board.

- Ask students to summarize Solomon’s argument: How does Solomon argue the two sides of the American Dream are represented in advertising? Why does he think that’s important?
- Were you convinced by his argument? Why?
- What insights did you gain about advertising?
- What did you think of Solomon’s writing style? How does it compare to Cohen’s? Which do you prefer?

Intro to Visual Analysis (20 min):

- Students read “Visual Analysis” handout.
 - **Justify Why it Matters:** Our reaction to a certain issue or product (think about political ads) might be influenced by visuals we pay attention to for only a few seconds. This project asks you to **slow down and look at visuals closely**. You’ll be working **like a crime scene investigator**, paying attention to small details,

understanding how different visual components work together to influence their audience.

- Acquaint students to the C.R.A.P. principles.
- **Plato's Quote:** "Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men."
 - If this is true, what do you do to ensure your mind isn't so easily ruled?
 - Ask students to assess their rhetorical perception: On a scale of 1-5 how good are you at seeing through the C.R.A.P. in advertising?
 - Make the connection back to **Logos, Ethos, and Pathos.**

Analyzing Ads (40 min):

- Students practice visually analyzing the advertisements provided by the instructor.
 - Freewrite:** Ask students to jot down their initial reaction to the advertisement. What do you notice about its C.R.A.P.?
- **Group Work (20 min):** In groups of 3-4, students practice analyzing advertisements using the prompts on the "Building Visual Literacy" Handout.
- **Presentations (20 min):** Each group is asked to describe their advertisement to the class, and discuss the major insights they gleaned through visual analysis. Professor asks groups to explain how Solomon might interpret their group's advertisement. How does the *message* of their advertisement connect to Solomon's *message* in "Masters of Desire"?

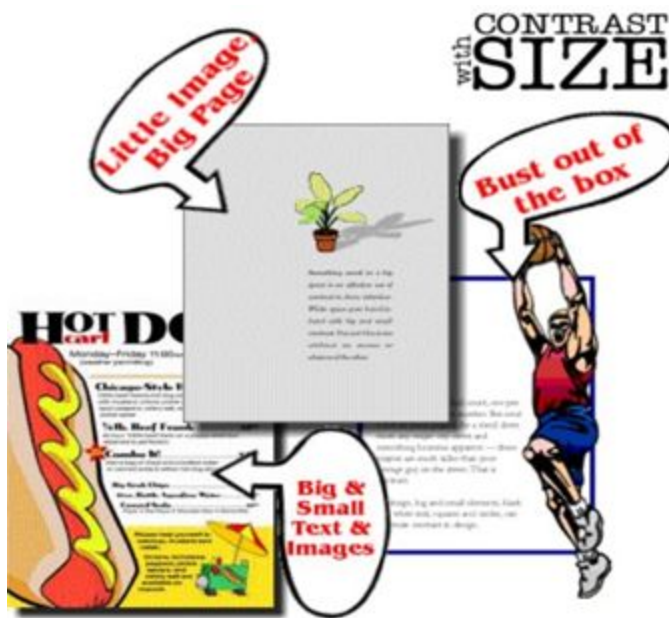
For Homework: Students are asked to choose the visual advertisement they'd like to use for their lens analysis, and then fill out a clean copy of the "Building Visual Literacy" handout. Their chosen advertisement, and the evidence they gathered using the handout, will be used for in-class writing in the following lesson.

C.R.A.P

Vocabulary for Describing Formal Elements in Advertising

“Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising” - Mark Twain

Contrast: The measurable amount of difference between all the elements on an advertisement’s page. Contrast adds visual interest to the page. It also provides a means of emphasizing what is important and directing the reader’s eye.



Size: Advertisers often manipulate the size of images, type, and white space on the page for various effects. What do you notice about the relative size of objects on the page? What’s big and what’s small?

Type: Different fonts and text placement are used for various effects. Are there different styles of font on the page? How are they contrasted? What’s big and bold? What’s tiny? What are the consequences of that contrast?

Other contrasting elements you can think about are **color** and **value** (what’s light and dark).

Repetition: Ties the visual elements of the advertisement together. Repetition helps control the reader’s eye and keep their attention as long as possible. Some elements that can be repeated include: decorative designs, font type and size, alignments, shapes and colors, the placement of details, etc.

Alignment: How text and graphics line up on the page (neat, or not!). Aligning things creates order, and generates visual connections. Remember, advertisements try to communicate a lot of information quickly and efficiently. Are the images in the center of the page? Are they pushed to the right or left? What’s the focal point? What effect does this have on you as a viewer?

Placement: Where are things placed in relation to each other? There’s a principle in advertising called ‘The Rule of Proximity,’ that says related items should be close together physically, and opposed objects farther apart. The spacing itself is a visual clue as to what’s related, and what’s not. Plus, it makes the advertisement easier to scan and digest.

Building Visual Literacy I

Famous ad-man Leo Burnett (the guy who invented the Marlboro Man and Tony the Tiger) once said, “good advertising does not just circulate information, it penetrates the public mind with desires and belief.” Use these principles as a guide to help you analyze advertisements and decipher their messages.

Decipher the message:

- What is the visual text saying? Based on what you see, what claims are being made?

Identify the audience:

- Who is the targeted audience? How do you know? What design choices are made in the artifact to appeal to the audience?

Identify the context:

- Where is this visual text seen? How might this affect how it is interpreted?

Look at the significance of contrast:

- Anything especially prominent? What reactions are solicited from the colors used? What do the colors symbolize?

Notice any repetition:

- Do any visual details or key words (“new and improved!”) appear more than once?

Observe your eye flow and focal point:

- Pay attention to how the page is designed to manipulate your eyes. What do you notice first, next, third? Why are things arranged in that order? Any significance?

Look at the alignment and placement of the objects:

- Where and how are objects grouped and spread out? Why are they arranged that way? What are the effects of their placement?

Identify the rhetorical appeals:

- What rhetorical appeals are being used? Identify all. How do they relate to and reinforce one another? What is used to create *each* appeal?

Examine the appearance, pose, and gesture of the model (if applicable):

- What reactions are evoked from their appearance and pose? What message is conveyed?

Analyze the background in the visual:

- What is in the background? What does it convey?

Note what's left out:

- What information or perspectives are left out? What effects does this exclusion have on how the audience will perceive the text?

Probe the assumptions and values behind the visual:

- What cultural values or philosophical beliefs does the text reinforce?