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**Title:** Book review : David Machin (ed.), Visual Communication

**Year:** 2016

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Hiippala, T. (2016). Book review : David Machin (ed.), Visual Communication.  
Discourse and Society, 27(2), 248-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926515619086e>

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To cite the review, please use the following reference:

Hiippala, T. (2016) Book review: David Machin (ed.) Visual Communication. *Discourse & Society* 27(2): 248–250. DOI:10.1177/0957926515619086e

If you wish send feedback to me about the review, contact me at [tuomo.hiippala@iki.fi](mailto:tuomo.hiippala@iki.fi).

David Machin (ed.), *Visual Communication*. Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014; xii + 756 pp. € 199.95/US\$ 280.00/UK£ 149.99 (hbk, ebook), € 299.00/US\$ 419.00/UK£ 225.98 (hbk + ebook).

**Reviewed by:** Tuomo Hiippala, *Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*

With 34 chapters on 756 pages, the fourth instalment in the *Handbooks of Communication Science* series sets out to cover a vast field of study: the currently blooming research on visual communication. The editor, David Machin, observes in the introduction that although the nature of visual communication has been debated for centuries, the proliferation of academic journals and publications targeting the visual is a relatively recent but timely development. Yet Machin suggests that the ‘discovery’ of the visual within various fields of study runs the risk of reinventing the wheel, for instance, by importing field-specific theories and renaming established concepts, which may have been carefully redefined over decades within other fields of study. Unfortunately, this process of discovery rarely considers how to integrate the new perspectives into the existing body of knowledge (pp. 4–5), and consequently, the approaches to visual communication are indeed numerous, as are the topics considered, which is aptly exemplified by the current volume: in what other field can the reader encounter analyses of cider, pop music videos, and Tarot cards in consecutive chapters? This is precisely where *Visual Communication* seeks to make its contribution by bringing the various approaches into dialogue with each other. To do so, the volume attempts to explicate the theories, methods and assumptions underlying each approach.

Following a brief introduction, the volume is split into two parts of 17 chapters each. The first part presents methodological and theoretical approaches to visual communication, while the second showcases different topics of analysis currently addressed within various fields concerned with the visual. In addition to this rather broad division, other overarching themes may be identified in the volume. One such theme is critical discourse analysis (CDA), as exemplified by Konstantinidou and Michailidou (Chapter 4), who draw on Foucault to examine how immigrants are represented in Greek press photography, whereas Bouvier (Chapter 12) studies the representation of the 2012 Libyan uprising in British press photography using content analysis. Peled-Elhanan’s social semiotic analysis of layout (Chapter 27) pursues a similar critical perspective by addressing the representation of Palestinians in Israeli school textbooks. As appropriate for a reference work, the aforementioned chapters showcase various approaches to visual communication, with each chapter targeting a different aspect of visual semiosis or explicating a different theory. The chapters that are clearly oriented towards theory include Sonesson’s

introduction to cognitive semiotics (Chapter 1) and Forceville's proposal to use Relevance Theory to the study of the visual (Chapter 2). These chapters complement the case studies well, as do those oriented towards methodology. Here, of particular interest are the recent methodological advances in applying computer vision techniques to both film narratives and photographs in social media, as set out in the chapters by Bateman (13) and O'Halloran, Chua and Podlasov (25).

However, as the volume makes clear right from the beginning, visual communication is not limited to texts in print or digital media, as exemplified, for instance, by the chapters of Carlson (theatre, Chapter 19), Beard (fashion, Chapter 26), Cox (museums, Chapter 32), Teal (architecture, Chapter 29) and Jewitt (school classrooms, Chapter 16). Brougère's Chapter 10, in particular, presents a compelling analysis of children's toys and their changing functions as a part of childhood mass culture, which are often upheld, circulated and reinvented in transmedia franchises that embed the toy – a concrete artefact – into a continuously evolving media narrative. While Brougère's analysis is situated within the framework of rhetoric, Almeida (Chapter 24) continues the discussion from a social semiotic perspective, using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar to examine how children's toys are represented in the manufacturer's advertisements with the goal of teasing out the underlying ideologies and values. These underlying connections are a welcome addition to the volume, which help to bridge the inevitable gaps that are likely to develop within a field of study as wide as visual communication.

Regardless of the topic under analysis, certain established scholars feature prominently across the volume. Foundational thinkers such as Barthes, Foucault, Mitchell, Kress and van Leeuwen represent the traditional, discourse-oriented approaches to visual analysis in the volume, which treat the objects under analysis as an end product and symptomatic of the society that produces them. They are counterbalanced by the chapters that target the fundamental processes governing visual communication, which constitute the second underlying theme in the volume. Dyson, for instance, presents a psychological perspective to how we distinguish between different letterforms (Chapter 9), whereas Puhalla adopts a similar viewpoint to explicate colour hierarchies (Chapter 8). Holsanova's Chapter 14, in turn, provides a comprehensive account of the processes that guide visual perception. Throughout the volume, these two underlying themes complement each other by connecting the low-level features, such as colour and letterforms, to more abstract levels of meaning-making. This is a definite strength of the volume as a whole, which deserves to be emphasised, as it has theoretical implications to the entire field of study.

Yet those familiar with the first volume in the same series of handbooks, *Theories and Models of Communication*, will find the current volume less focused in terms of subject matter. Moreover, the considerable gaps between the topics dis-

cussed in consecutive chapters demand, at times, a leap of faith from the reader: the aforementioned analyses of toys, for instance, stand 13 chapters apart. Organising the chapters into clearer thematic areas would have benefited those wishing to familiarise themselves with the various approaches to field of visual communication, in addition to using the volume as a reference work. This does not, however, by no means reduce the value of the volume, which is likely to have a 'long tail' instead of an imminent impact. A work of this breadth and depth, which the currently most valued form of academic publication – the journal article – cannot provide, should not be expected to generate citations, but contribute to fostering a new generation of scholars in visual communication.

That being said, a close reading of the volume will reward both newcomers and more established scholars in the field. As Machin points out, founding thinkers and thought leaders emerge rapidly in new areas of research, but the speed of progress may occasionally blur the view of those contributing to the body of knowledge (p. 5). As a junior scholar working mainly within the field of multimodal research, I am well aware how such intellectual centres of gravity can skew and distort one's perspective. However, to my benefit, the chapters in *Visual Communication* contained many hidden gems, which could be easily bypassed when skimming the volume as a reference work, but coming across them made me rethink my perspective to visual communication and reconsider some of the concepts formulated within multimodal research. This is precisely where the value of this volume lies: it is not only a thorough reference work, but also serves as a firm foundation for developing visual communication as a field of study.