Introduction: Researching Visual Politics

In early 2020, when we were first approached to edit this volume, such a work seemed extremely timely. The 2019 UK election and subsequent departure from the European Union had seen nationalistic symbolism brought to the fore. In the US a frail looking Harvey Weinstein was convicted of rape and sexual assault, the MeToo movement developing its own symbolism to mark their victory (Trott, 2021). But by May the images from around the world were of overwhelmed hospitals, temporary mortuaries on the streets of capital cities and the solidarity of citizens living through a pandemic. Political leaders attempted to portray themselves as possessing the qualities required to reassure their citizens while also being seen to stand with them. The image of the British Queen sitting alone at her husband's funeral was one that showed most were all in it together, although this was quickly juxtaposed with images of politicians who did not obey rules. By summer 2020 it was the image of a homicide, a US police officer deliberately kneeling on the neck of George Floyd until he died, captured on video, which reverberated around the world (George et al, 2021). The spectacle of the Black Lives Matter protests, with their own unique symbolism expressed in posters, graffiti and acts of vandalism against symbols associated with white supremacy built a narrative of the many fights against racial injustices. The work of journalists and citizens who captured images from the pandemic and the protests shaped public discourse around these events (Walsh, 2020).

While the pandemic shaped much of 2020 and 2021 the US election offered further spectacle, in particular as Trump refused to accept defeat. Protesters once again took to the streets, fighting for and against Trump. The storming of the US Capitol building on January 6 2021 was the visual spectacle of what seemed the final chapter of a tumultuous time in US politics (Jeppesen et al, 2022). But of course visual communication was not simply images of politicians and protests. The

US election spawned a war of memes and citizen-created satire. When Rudy Giuliani, Trump's attorney and former mayor of New York City, asked for evidence of voter fraud he used the slang term first coined during the Watergate scandal: 'ratfucking'. His demand for evidence of this led to a counter campaign where he would be sent images of amorous rodents rather than election fraud. Not all political communication is strategic but uses humour to emphasise the bizarre aspects of politics (Momen, 2018). As we were finalising this work we were faced with a further spectacle, war in Europe. Images of the destruction of town and cities and streets littered with dead Ukrainian civilians highlighted the injustices of war. Media and commentators focused on the heroism of ordinary Ukrainians defending the major cities. The appearance of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's president, dressed in full battle gear was used to hail him the epitome of a war leader (Steinbock, 2022); Putin meanwhile was the target of memes collated under the hashtag #fckputin. Still others used images juxtaposing images from Ukraine with those showing the plight of citizens in other conflict zones, Palestine, Syria and Yemen in particular. These posts argued some conflicts and some lives seem to matter more. While all these events have lasting impacts and will reverberate long into the future they highlight the importance of the visuals and the differing ways they are used in politics. Images provide evidence of events taking place and give events a significance that words and statistics never can (Lübecker, 2013), even if the images do not actually portray what is claimed they can have a lasting impression on their audiences (Giotta, 2020). Hence visuals play a fundamental role in political communication, however it has been only recently that their importance has been recognised.

Visual Studies: the creation of a field of research

It has been well documented that the road to the formation of visual studies as a distinct academic area widely regarded as worthy of investigation has been long and tumultuous. An anti-visual bias has long been dominant in Western thought, as evidenced by the prominent role text has persistently been given over that of the image (Bicket & Packer, 2004, cited in Thompson, 2021: 2). The secondary (or subordinate or inferior) role that photography hold in journalism best exemplifies the logocentric approach in the late modern era, where the text is seen as central to the narrative as opposed to any accompanying images which were often few in the early days of press journalism. It was not until the 1920s that press photography was more meaningfully embedded into the routines of news reporting, as a result of editors' need to enhance the credibility of written

reports through the use of images as 'bearing witness' (Barnhurst, 1994; Vobič & Trivundža, 2015). This invigorating approach to images reduced the older dominant practice of using pictures as secondary illustrations to the written text and contributed to the further expansion and professionalisation of photojournalism (Hicks, 1952; Barnhurst, 1994).

Despite securing some distance from the standpoint of stiff iconoscepticism, the pace of change had been slow given another challenge, that of the field of visual studies being exceptionally interdisciplinary in nature (Thompson, 2021; Moriarty & Barbatsis, 2005). However, with eminent scholars increasingly acknowledging the importance of the visual and its societal effects, its study started gaining prominence among researchers from across a range of fields. In 1967, Guy Débord asserted that the world had turned into a 'society of the spectacle'. Subsequently, Martin Jay (1988; 1993) emphasised the term *ocularcentrism* to examine notions of picturing in Western societies. In 1988, Paul Virilio published his transformative study, *Vision Machine*, and it was in 1992 that W.J.T. Mitchell argued for a 'pictorial turn' in the humanities, registering a renewed interest in images and the increasingly diverse visual culture. Against the backdrop of such discussions, new scholarly communities and journals focusing on the study of the visual in the humanities and social sciences made their appearance and contributed to the development of the field thus far. Such were the Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA), the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA), and the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA) (Barnhurst, Vari & Rodríguez, 2004). With a clearer focus on communication, the Visual Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) was founded in the 1970s, followed by the International Communication Association (ICA) Visual Communication Interest Group in 1993 (Barnhurst et al., 2004). With a growth in research consequently defining the field, other communication-allied groups focusing on the visual started appearing, such as the Visual Culture Working Group of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). In the same vein, visual communication journals were established – some with a clear disciplinary focus, such as *Visual Sociology* [now *Visual Studies*], *Visual Anthropology*, and the *Journal of Visual Literacy;* and some with a more interdisciplinary approach, such as the *Visual Communication Quarterly* (founded in 1994) and *Visual Communication* (founded in 2002) (Thompson, 2021). A recent addition has been the *Journal of Visual Political Communication* [previously titled *Poster*].

In their review of the field in the early 2000s, Barnhurst et al. (2004) argued that they discerned four broad categories of books in visual studies: philosophical, sociological, psychological, and technological. In their own words:

> "*Almost a quarter of the books are philosophical [...]. Another quarter take a sociological view, considering images in the mass or popular media in relation to society, political economy, and history, often through a feminist lens. A larger share focuses on issues at the psychological level, including perception, literacy, and visualized information, and a smaller group focuses more narrowly on technology and new media*." (Barnhurst et al., 2004: 618)

They also referred to increasing concern among scholars regarding favouritism towards a few prominent theorists and dominant texts that could jeopardise the expansion of the field (Barnhurst et al., 2004). Within this context, and in a rather strict manner, art historian and critic James Elkin (2003) criticised the over-reliance on theorists such as Barthes, Benjamin, Mitchell, Foucault, and Hall, and the over-emphasis of specific concepts, including fetish, gaze, spectacle, simulacrum, and scopic regimes.

Interestingly, as demonstrated in Barnhurst et al.'s (2004) mapping of the field of visual studies apropos communication, the visual was a mainly peripheral concern in political studies. As they argue (2004: 630-631): "The studies mention images and use visual materials but are visual only in a nominal sense. [...] [T]he studies employ methods that rely on language, whether manifest or latent. The researchers rarely cite previous visual studies or build visual theory in any way, even though the topics, titles, and tasks they undertake demand an understanding of visual research and theory." Similar concerns had already been raised by other researchers in their review of the field of political communication (Griffin, 2001; Johnson, 1990), with some scholars subsequently contending that such hesitation over meaningful engagement between the two disciplines was predicated on a long-standing anxiety around the role of aesthetics in politics (Aiello & Parry, 2015).

The Trajectory of Visual Politics: A Brief Overview

In response to calls for political research to further engage with the visual, the field has grown considerably. Eight years after their first review of the area of activity, Barnhurst and Quinn (2012) acknowledged a surge in literature around the visual in political communication. Despite the growing body of research focusing on visuals in political communication, scholars urged for more research, both theoretical and applied, that would employ diverse methodologies and expand the foci with regard to areas of investigation and genres for examination (Barnhurst & Quinn, 2012; Schill, 2012). Moreover, these reviews argued that despite the arrival of the Internet, the great bulk of political research, approximately up until 2011, still focused on text, not images.

Beyond such concerns, a significant body of scholarship has been developed with research topics ranging across politics, social issues, and media practices. An important body of work focused on theories and methods for visual analysis (Pauwels and Mannay, 2020; Rose, 2016; Machin, 2014; Sartwell, 2010; Chandler, 2001; Mirzoeff, 1999). While it is not possible to do justice and refer here to all relevant studies, the aim is to offer a brief overview of those that intersect the political and the visual, and that draw on different themes and methodological traditions in doing so.

Works varied from broader approaches on politics and democracy (Azoulay, 2001) to the more discipline-focused, such as regarding international relations (Bleiker, 2001). However, election campaigns, candidates, and television news have been among the most prevalent areas of examination. The main currents in political communication revolved around the role of images in framing, priming, and agenda setting (Barnhurst & Quinn, 2012). Studies have demonstrated the potent role of images in political communication and campaigning, whereby visuals offer candidates and campaigns the opportunity to influence the news agenda by providing media outlets with attention-grabbing images (Wanta, 1988). Expectedly, television had been at the core of many studies. Iyengar (1991) used experiments to explore visual framing on TV, and Bucy and Grabe (2007) examined the coverage of different U.S. presidential elections by network television news, demonstrating the prevalence of image-bites in election coverage (see also: Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Moreover, much research has been conducted on image management and the personalisation of politics, showing how visuals can provide heuristic cues regarding the candidate's background and

personality and how these can shape a candidate's public image. Through a variety of different practices and visual strategies, such as by focusing on candidates' personal lives (Holtz-Bacha, Langer & Merkle, 2014; Stanyer, 2013) and capitalising on facets of compassion or ordinariness (Corner & Pels, 2003; Grabe & Bucy, 2009), politicians obtain influence over the construction of their personae and the impressions this has on audiences (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011).

A significant body of work on audience studies has offered valuable insights as to the persuasive power of visuals (still and moving images) and to consumption mechanisms. Audiences process visuals faster and more efficiently than written text, visuals could contain more information than other forms, and images are also more memorable (Brosius, Donsback & Birk, 1996; Edwards, 2004). Doris Graber was a pioneer of studying audience perception of political candidates in TV news and demonstrated how visuals affect the ways citizens/viewers perceive candidates (Graber, 1987), how visuals contribute to information dissemination (Graber, 1990), and how audiovisual material aids better recall of information as well as how viewers may become more emotionally involved in politics (Graber, 1996). A considerable number of works in this larger body of studies paid particular attention to how visuals activate emotional responses and encourage reflection and action (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014). Experimental research on TV political ads has furthered understanding of the interplay between visual information, viewers' emotions, and their ability to recall information (Lang, 1991); visuals are also found to increase the likelihood that politicians' posts are engaged with on social media (Koc-Michalska et al, 2021). Other psychological approaches and analyses of semiotic structures have also been employed to examine political communication practices eliciting emotions in viewers (Bucy, 2000; 2003). Studies adopting a visual rhetoric approach have proliferated among those examining the interactive meaning-making of visual material, drawing out dynamic persuasive processes (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996; Newhagen, 2002; Zelizer, 1998; for a review of the visual rhetoric literature, see: Kenney & Scott, 2003). A preponderance of visual rhetoric approaches has a long tradition within the field of visual studies, dating back to the 1950s (Barnhurst et al., 2004), and has also been extensively employed for the examination of political caricatures and cartoons (Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981; Plumb, 2004).

Research on the visual has not been limited to formal politics such as elections and politicians. A great bulk of research has also focused on visual news framing of war and terror (Perlmutter, 1992; 1999; Stuart, 2011). Yarchi et al. (2013) examined international news coverage of terrorism, and Fahmy (2010) compared images of conflict from the English- and Arabic-language transnational press. Such research has demonstrated how visual reporting is influenced by the political and cultural environment of different societies, in how visual frames affect viewers' understanding and response to information. Other topics of interest range widely, from gender and racial media representations' influence on group identity formation (Stange, 2003; Valentino, Hutchings & White, 2002) to contentious collective politics. An extensive body of work includes studies on how visuals construct ideals of femininity (Smith, 1999), not least Mulvey's (1975) compelling study on the male gaze. Drawing on feminist film theory, Mulvey analyses female representations and how men's sexualised way of looking empowers men and objectifies women. Research on protests and social movements with respect to the visual have flourished. Various aspects have been covered, such as the impact of visual material on viewers' evaluations of contentious issues (Arpan et al., 2006), the use of persuasive imagery and art by protesters to galvanise public attention and reach a wider audience (Rovisco, 2017; Patsiaouras, Veneti & Green, 2017; Olesen, 2015; DeLuca, 1999), and the work of photojournalism (Veneti, 2017) and how this can shape media representations of protests and demonstrations (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). Moreover, a stirring body of research on humanitarian communication has drawn on issues of visuality and visibility (Chouliaraki, 2006; 2013).

Not surprisingly, much research has broadly focused on media practices and, more specifically, on interrogating issues of truth and authenticity in visuals. From Boorstin's coining of the 'pseudo-event' in 1961, there has always been a general suspicion towards media imagery's reliability as a representation of reality. Scholars have looked at how images have been manipulated and used in a deceptive manner (Messaris, 1992), and how particular practices of manipulation, such as editing and special effects, affect viewers' perceptions (Kaid, Keener & Chanslor, 2005; Scheufele, Kim & Brossard, 2007). Studies debating whether images are a reflection or a construction of reality monopolised a great part of research during the 1990s (Barnhurst, 1994; Gamson et al., 1992; Schudson, 1989). Continuing in this tradition, more recent literature has also focused on issues of objectivity and image production processes (Veneti, Lilleker & Reilly, 2018; Veneti, 2017;

Hattingh & Gaede, 2011; Machin & Polzer, 2015; Perlmutter, 2004) as well as photojournalists' professional ethics (Mäenpää, 2014; Grayson, 2013). While it is not possible to refer to all the themes that have been covered, it is worth mentioning that the latest technological developments have opened up new research areas, some of which provides insight into the enhanced role of the citizen in news production and dissemination (Allan, 2015; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013). In this vein, studies have explored the extent that citizens can be better placed to document events as they happen than professional journalists or photojournalists (Walker, 2021)

Recent Developments in Visual Politics and the Role of Web 2.0

The introduction of Web 2.0 and, relatedly, various social media platforms characterised by an emphasis on user-generated content, enhanced creativity, interoperability and social interaction, and a strong focus on the visual, presents researchers with fresh challenges. Digital media provide new aesthetic forms and enable novel ways to repurpose older media for political purposes (see for example, Farkas et al., 2022; Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson, 2016). Over the last decade, a considerable number of books and journal articles engaging with digital media have been published, yielding useful insights with regard to the production, circulation, and consumption of digital images and their implications for political and social life (Kuntsman, 2017; Serafinelli, 2018; Denisova, 2019; Frosh, 2018). During this period, a significant number of studies have been drawing on new media technologies as well as applying new methodological approaches to a reinvigorated study of the visual. While a fully rounded review of these publications would be useful, it would require systematic research that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, the alternative approach adopted here involves drawing on 'recent' English-language monographs and edited collections, which despite its limitations can help detect the trends that underpin the field.

New publications at the intersection of politics and the visual include Bleiker's (2017) edited collection, which offers a comprehensive overview of the role of visuality in various areas of global politics, as well as other, more country-specific monographs, such as Shim's (2014) work on North Korea, Khatib's (2013) study on the role of visuals in political struggle in the Middle East, and

Jiménez-Martínez's (2020) research on the 2013 protests in Brazil and how these impacted the image of the nation. Moreover, there is an increasing number of publications that examine specific issues through the lens of the visual, such as studies on climate change (Nocke & Schneider, 2014), war (Saleh & Knieper, 2017), and contentious politics (McGarry et al., 2020; Kraidy, 2016; Werbner et al., 2014).

There is also an increase in the examination of the visual in the broader field of political communication. Among the most popular areas of investigation are impression management and the crafting of the political image (see for example: Cheles & Giacone, 2020; Archetti, 2014; De Vries & De Landtsheer, 2013) as well as political campaigning, especially but not only regarding online environments (Haßler et al., 2021; Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2017; Holtz-Bacha, Novelli & Rafter, 2017). Veneti, Jackson, and Lilleker's (2019) edited collection covers various areas of visual political communication, such as campaigning, governance, citizen-led forms of political communication, and current discussions of theoretical and methodological approaches with a stronger focus on the current hybrid media environment. Two recent additions that offer valuable insights into the understanding of media images are the monographs of Thomson (2019) and Aiello and Parry (2020). The former sheds light on multiple factors that shape the production of news images and how these affect their reception, and the latter uses a wealth of theoretical and methodological approaches to analyse contemporary case studies, from celebrity videos on YouTube to protest images. Works also being into focus the importance of the visual in political satire, and the functions of humorous imagery from newspaper cartoons through to the viral meme (Momen, 2018; Zidani, 2021)

What is visual political communication and how can we understand the terrain

The study of political communication is the study of how ideas and opinions are formed and exchanged between citizens, media, political institutions, individual politicians and the range of charitable, protest and social movements which operate within and across nations. Research in the field covers all aspects of discourse within and between political entities and often has a particular focus on information is converted into a manipulative rhetoric in order to achieve often narrow political goals. Visual political communication is a subfield of political communication, focusing

on the ways in which imagery is used within the flows of political information. In a political context, visual communication is used to portray the values, the character and the outcomes of policies of individual political actors, political parties, the broader non-governmental political organisations and movements. Hence the study of visual political communication seeks to offer understandings of the ways in which politics is depicted: how depictions can be understood, studied and measured and the ways in which images are used across a range of contexts as a means of political communication. This volume draws together an international team of scholars to shed light on the political uses of the image, offering a single source for theoretical, methodological and practical insights into the role of visuals across the various contexts of politics.

The volume is structured around five thematic areas through which we organize the study of visual politics.

The first theme focuses on key theories and methodologies for understanding visual political communication. In the first chapter Miles discusses visuals as a form of rhetoric, exploring how to understand and analyse rhetorical devices with a case study of a controversial far-right US faction. This is followed by Rodriguez and Dimitrova introducing visual framing, using government pandemic messaging as the lens to explain how this methodology can be utilized. The work then moves on to look at innovative methodologies. Marquart explores the opportunities and challenges associated with learning about user responses to visuals by employing eye tracking technology. Peng and Lu analyse automated visual analysis, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of using big data approaches for understanding visuals and using software for visual analysis. The section closes with a unique chapter which explores the use of comic-style imagery to communicate complex issues within data science. Alberda and Feigenbaum offer theoretical and practical insights into the application of humanising research through visualisation promoting the notion of data comics

The second theme focuses on the depictions of power within politics, taking a historical and longitudinal approach to the topic placing visuals within a wider framework of understanding. Koulouri's opening chapter focuses on artistic representations of monarchs, offering insights into image management within an era of minimal mass media. Moving from classical art to the most modern forms, Ahmad explores the propaganda and imagery used by the extremists who combine

under the Islamic State banner. Jiménez-Martínez meanwhile explores the branding of nations, and drawing on examples of recent protests in Latin America and the United States, shows how modern technologies challenge the hegemony of political elites' attempts to define the nation as a homogeneous whole. While Jiménez-Martínez questions who has power, Steffan explores image management strategies employed by leaders while Cheles exposes similarities in leaders' use of iconography across time. Finally under this theme we return to the question of power as Salvatori explores innovative practices used by activists to produce and popularise new narratives on gender-related issues. Hence we move from image management and modern day masculinity through to artivism and feminist empowerment through the reclaiming of public spaces.

The third theme tackles an issue that is at the heart of many modern studies of political communication, the depictions of authenticity. Politicians, and especially those who are or seek to be political leaders seek to portray themselves as simultaneously extra-ordinary and ordinary. Many of these chapters focus the use of social media within political communication, Šimunjak starts off the section with a study of selfies and the depictions of leaders across three continents by ordinary Instagram users. Raynauld and Lalancette meanwhile look across platforms to explore Bourdieu's concept of habitus and develops a model of digital visual habitus through a study of Canadian federal candidates use of visual image cues. Campbell looks at political advertisements, which feature on television and online, but focusing on the televisual variants permitted in the UK taking a historical perspective on the portrayal of leaders. Bracciale and Martella return to the study of Instagram use, and look at how Italian leaders communicated during the pandemic. This work, and the following chapter by Mazzoni and Mincigrucci, explore the connection between authenticity and populism. Zamora-Medina meanwhile asks similar questions about the use of the TikTok platform, enquiring whether Spanish party leaders have developed new styles of personalization through engaging with its users. Closing out this theme De Vries and De Munter explore the effectiveness of depictions which portray politicians as having the suitable qualities to represent them. Hence we cover a range of aspects relating to image management, debates regarding populism and authenticity covering a range of national and political contexts.

The fourth themes focuses on a key aspect of political salesmanship and the depiction of ideas and ideologies. The first chapter focuses on simplistic images, Lilleker and Koliastasis explore the use

of simple propagandistic images which challenge state restrictions during the pandemic and promote vaccine hesitancy. Maintaining a recent context, this is followed by Tait's exploration of artivism and the work of artivists supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. Similar themes relating to identity and empowerment are explored by Lewin and Jenzen's study of LGBTQ visual activism within South African and American contexts. Chagas meanwhile explores memes within a Brazilian context framed as a form of vernacular politics: the politics of the ordinary person. The style of communication key to memes is extended by Momen's discussion of satire, incorporating work on cartoons, stand-up comedy as well as the most modern forms. Finally under this theme, Maartens explores how the US army recruitment campaigns use imagery to sell the idea of service making some important observations about ethics within the context of visual politics. Hence the section explores largely how ideas are sold, by protest and emancipatory groups, how humour is used but also how simple images can be used across a wide range of contexts from election campaigns, the socio-political campaigns of non-governmental organisations and by social movements so how visuals are at the heart of contestation over power.

The final theme focuses on depicting reality, a theme which was given even more relevance by the events within Ukraine. Stocchetti starts the debate with a more philosophical discussion of how we determine what is real and what is not. Parry follows this with the challenges of knowing what is real in the context of war and conflict, recognizing that war imagery is increasingly available to everyone online yet news organisations remain pivotal in providing an authoritative account. Veneti and Poulakidakos, meanwhile explore how symbolism is used to represent reality, placing depictions into a more historical narrative while revisiting some of the notions explored in the previous section. Jones and Macdonald change focus to explore how images purporting to be of reality are used to drive public behaviour, this chapter focuses on use of 'patients' during the pandemic. Mäenpää explores the role of photo-journalism, those responsible for capturing iconic images which capture a mood or moment and can shape public impressions. In particular the relationship between the photojournalist and the news editor in shaping how events are portrayed. Finally Reilly takes offers an interesting and novel perspective on visuals, exploring the role of surveillance in society. The unique insights highlight debates around privacy invasions through the use of surveillance tools such as drones, CCTV and facial recognition cameras and the role they play within the communication of politics as well as the politics of communication.

The volume thus offers an overview of the terrain of visual political communication. The chapters cumulatively offer insights into the theoretical foundations of political communication, and related areas of research, which underpin the study of the use of visuals and imagery in politics. The work also maps the key research methodologies, offering pointers for future researchers to pursue similar work. The volume also offers innovative insights into the rich landscape of visual political communication, from how leaders craft their images from days of portraiture to the current age of Instagram and TikTok. The chapters also explore the new territory for campaign and protest politics. From relatively new movements such as Black Lives Matter back to more established campaigns within the feminist movement, chapters offer new understandings of the way they try to engage audiences and sell their ideas. The chapters also engage with debates surrounding authenticity, of the individual and of the image itself; the connection between visual politics and populism as well as the importance of the image in terms of media reporting of events and offering a 'true' account. We would not claim that our study includes absolutely every dimension of visual political communication. However, we propose that the work touches on all the key debates, offers innovative and inclusive approaches to researching visuals and offers new perspectives for this ever developing field.

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