Introduction

Political campaigns rely heavily on visual expression to communicate a message, whether through print, television, or the Internet. In spite of this the visual is still seen as inferior to the verbal elements of the message (Kress & Van Leeuwin, 1996; McLuhan, 1967; Mitchell, 2008); it is either a secondary concern, or simply thought of as a tool to make text and speech more attractive and eye-catching. While the presentation of information in a visually appealing way has always been important, modern technology has made visual language skills, or 'graphicacy' (Balchin & Coleman, 1966), increasingly important for political campaigners and voters alike. The greater ease with which we can reproduce, transform and share images allows the visual language to evolve much more quickly than ever before, making the already blurred distinction between words and pictures even less distinct. In my thesis I am examining the way in which visual elements are currently used in election campaigns, and articulating the tacit theories currently used to create campaign materials in this new visual environment. In this paper I look at the history of public communication and how we transitioned from an oral to a literate culture, to today where we require graphicacy in addition to orality and literacy. I will then use co-design methods to apply this knowledge and develop and test theories concerning the ways in which graphic design may help to inform, engage and persuade voters.

Graphic design here refers to the process of including, excluding, and arranging type and pictures on, but not limited to, the page, poster, billboard and the screen. In using the term "graphic design", I refer to the way in which visible campaign materials are put together. The choice between illustrations or photographs is a graphic design decision, as is the choice of typeface, colour, or the prominence given to text and picture on the page. While my focus will be predominantly on print and digital materials created by campaigns, I will also look at the overall use of imagery in political communication, and how the campaign's graphic design choices fit within the broader visual language.

I have worked on every state and federal election campaign in Western Australia since 2004. In this time, I have observed that graphic design is not being used as well as it could be as a method of communicating ideas, information and arguments. For example, a colour, or format, is chosen simply because it was used on a previously successful campaign. There will be a wide range of reasons for this, but

my working theory is that it largely comes down to two possible reasons: the person(s) responsible for the design of the materials lacking the knowledge and skills to use graphic design effectively, thus relying on tradition and personal taste; and the prioritising of text and subsequent de-prioritising of visual images as a communication tool in their own right. I will seek to show that a better use of graphic design has the potential to create more informative and persuasive political campaign material.

Towards the Global Village

Plato argued that the size of a city should be based on the number of people who can hear a public address. Radio, and later TV and other electronic media, have changed the way such a concept can be understood (McLuhan, 1964, p.335). As the Internet brings us closer to what McLuhan predicted would be the 'global village', removing limitations on how we can express ideas, it also creates more scope for multi-directional communication, breaking the top-down tradition in which governments and the media communicated and the audience received their messages (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p.317). FDR used radio to bring his 'fireside chats' into the homes of voters, allowing a more personalised version of politics than could be achieved through print. The Museum of Broadcast Communications records the following quote:

> 'I never saw him - but I knew him. Can you have forgotten how, with his voice, he came into our house, the President of these United States, calling us friends...' (Carl Carmer, April 14, 1945).

FDR used radio to speak to voters in their own homes (Mankowski & Jose, n.d). JFK used the growing medium of television to great effect during the 1960 presidential debates, while his assassination and funeral were broadcast to the nation. Television personalises politics, allowing people to feel as though they are participating in events, rather than reading second-hand accounts of them (McLuhan, 1964, p.337).

O'Neill (1993, ch.6) has developed a modern ethical theory of society, drawing on the theories of Aristotle and John Stuart Mill about what constitutes the 'good life'. For all three theorists, the main goal of a society is to allow each individual to flourish and reach their full potential. Society helps us do this in a number of ways: by giving us

the pleasure of human relationships; by giving us a wider range of interests and knowledge; and by allowing us to take pleasure in achievements of others – achievements that we could never achieve ourselves, through lack of time or ability. Pluralism and a free exchange of ideas are essential for society, as the best ways of ensuring that our beliefs are true.

In responding to fears that the increase of media would lead to 'bad' culture, culture that is popular with the faceless masses, pushing out the 'good', Raymond Williams argued that more media and greater access leads to an expanding culture where there is more 'good' and 'bad'. Culture is not limited to the art created and consumed by the elites; culture is everywhere, it is our lived experience, and technology makes all of it more visible (Williams, 1958). The Internet removes the limitations of space and time on older media, such as print, radio and television; not only in terms of distance, but also in terms of the printed page and set broadcast times. It also allows people to create their own material when the gatekeepers do not provide what they want – a shift from 'read-only' to 'read-write' (Flew, 2008, p.10).

In her 'Cyborg Manifesto' Haraway (1985) describes an interconnected humanity, in which boundaries are broken down and broad alliances can be formed, advocating the embrace of a structure that can be used to change the way politics happens, and an embrace of technology for political aims. Haraway argues for a politics that embraces difference, forming multi-directional alliances rather than trying to promote one over-arching identity. As the restrictions of space and time collapse, we are forming 'image tribes', in which we can take advantage of technology to move beyond the limitations of geography and make connections based on shared ideals and interests. 'Physical distance is becoming less and less a concern'; media companies target consumers based on tastes and interests, and people 'may increasingly feel that links to individuals in their immediate space and time…are not nearly as important as their far-flung virtual communities' (Turrow, 1997). Social media is bringing oral skills back 'into the public sphere' (Madrigal, 2011).

The Visual Language
The ability to easily reproduce photographs and artworks has led to a more image-saturated culture; we can remove images from their original context, and use them in new ways, to create new meanings. The new tools have made boundaries between

art, commerce and politics increasingly porous (Berger, 1972). Images 'span the social realms of popular culture, advertising, news and information exchange, commerce, criminal justice, and art', and are 'produced and experienced through a variety of media: painting, printmaking, photography, film, television/video, computer digital imaging, and virtual reality' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p.11). Throughout the twentieth century, art movements such as the Dadaists, the Pop Artists, and the postmodernists have worked to blur the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p.11). The boundaries between art, commerce and politics are also less distinct. Electronic media allowed 'uniqueness and diversity' to flourish more easily, allowing people to escape the rigid roles the mechanical age encouraged (McLuhan, 1964, p.345). Commercial and 'street' culture overlap, where 'street art in the contemporary moment borrows from and re-tools more traditional capitalist branding strategies as part of both representation and politics' (Banet-Weiser, 2011, p.646). Artists such as Shepard Fairey brand themselves as 'anti-brand', while working with brands such as Levi's, and creating works for use in the Obama 2012 presidential campaign (Banet-Weiser, 2011; Thomas, 2010).

There is an increase in privately owned spaces - shopping malls, superstores, and branded villages - and a subsequent decrease in public space, where 'unlike the old town squares, which were and still are sites for community discussion, protests and political rallies, the only type of speech that is welcome here is marketing and other consumer patter' (Klein, 2000, p.203). Opportunities for political communication in spaces where the public gather is usually limited to those who can afford the costs of advertising, but more importantly to those who do not offend potential customers. This has important implications for political campaigns and the voting public. The definition of censorship as limited to state-imposed restrictions is becoming 'drastically outdated' (Klein, 2000, p.183). But while there is cause for concern, there is also greater opportunity for people to use the ubiquitousness of brands against them. As brands become more visible they become part of everyday language, and can be more easily targeted for criticism, for example through culture-jamming, or targeted boycotts (Klein, 2000). And at the same time, technology gives us the ability to create new public spaces online in contrast to a diminishing public sphere. There is great potential for creating alliances and connections across old class, gender, geographical and political divides (Haraway, 1985; Turrow, 1997; Madrigal 2011).

Political campaigns are starting to understand the new environment and have begun to see the importance in understanding popular culture, with mixed results. In 2005, the British TV show 'The Thick Of It' has a minister being given a 'zeitgeist tape', in which staffers 'boil down the week's television, cinema, music, so on'. The storyline echoed a time that Prime Minister Tony Blair joined a campaign to free an imprisoned character from 'Coronation Street' (Cohen, 2005). In 2006, Labor leader Kim Beazley confused comedian Rove McManus with US Republican strategist Karl Rove, in a disastrous attempt to be part of the celebrity news story of the day (Bell, 2006). But in 2011, when Transport Minister Anthony Albanese fought for exemptions to regulations that were preventing Dolly Parton's tour bus from traveling the country, the event ended in a double political win for him, with the states finally agreeing to nationalise transport regulations (Polites, 2011).

Orality, Literacy, Graphicacy

In uncovering the most effective ways of using graphic design in election campaign material, it is worth exploring what graphic design is, and how it differs from other methods of communication. First, we might contrast it with text, that is, words with pictures. Lupton and Miller break down the distinction between pictures and text, tracing the history of hieroglyphics to the phonetic alphabet that we use today, showing how difficult it is to say easily where the line between them is. The phonetic alphabet works as an abstract visual representation of sounds, sounds which themselves are abstract representations of words. Rather than a dividing line between text and image, there is a continuum from realism to abstraction on which photographs, hieroglyphs, pictograms and the phonetic alphabet sit. A photograph may be less abstract, and may rely less on a person's level of literacy to be 'read', but this is a question of degree rather than kind. (Lupton & Miller, 1999). And a recent experiment by the New York Times showed that different typefaces influence the believability of a statement (Morris, 2012),

From the other direction, Ong (1982) breaks down the distinction between the written and spoken word. Delving into the differences between oral and literate cultures, he shows how language itself evolved in the transition from an oral to a literate culture. Words in an oral culture are an event: they are spoken and then they are gone. People acquired techniques to help them commit ideas to memory. With the

development of the phonetic alphabet and the ability to store words on parchment, people had less need to rely on other methods of remembering and processing thought. Literate cultures in a sense outsourced memory, providing the means to develop new skills in their place. Plato, writing at the point of transition from orality to literacy, said of writing:

> 'The discovery of the alphabet will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external characters and not remember of themselves.' (quoted in McLuhan, 1967, p.113)

The discovery of the use of repetition and formulaic stock phrases in Homer's works, caused shock in literary circles, where originality and variety of language were highly valued (Ong, 1982, p.20). While Plato may have been correct in seeing the potential for 'forgetfulness', once they were completely absorbed into the literate culture, it seems that far from regretting the loss of that ability, people in fact 'forgot' that they ever relied on it. Looking from a literate to an oral culture, academics judged as inferior those very same techniques that gave people the abilities that Plato feared we would lose. A recent study confirms that this phenomenon has increased with the Internet, suggesting that people are less likely to try to remember a fact if they know they can access it online if and when they need to; that we are 'growing into inter-connected systems that remember less by knowing information than by knowing where the information can be found' (Sparrow, 2011).

Rather than separating and ranking the different methods of communication as these apply to political campaigns, it may be more useful to view orality, literacy, numeracy and graphicacy in McLuhan's terms. Every new technology extends another aspect of the body and provides us with different ways of communicating: the printing press helped us become a literate society, while radio and television brought us into what Ong calls a 'secondary orality'. The Internet, particularly social media, has extended us further: 'We won't return to an oral culture, but our literacy will never be the same' (Madrigal, 2011). Greater ease of reproducing, editing and sharing images makes graphicacy an increasingly important skill. A 'formalisation is occurring in the realm of images parallel to that which occurred in writing' (Lupton & Miller, 1999).

Visual Politics

Below are three examples of the way technology has changed the way we use images in political campaigns, which demonstrate some of the new problems that campaigns face.

Figure 1

An immediately identifiable example of the new visual language is Shephard Fairey's "HOPE" poster. Created after a call for artists to contribute to the Obama campaign, who intended to sell them to supporters as a fundraiser, it soon became an icon of the 2008 election. It also became a symbol that supporters, opponents or the politically neutral could reproduce and transform to communicate their own messages. These transformations use the authority of the original to give weight to their alternative message (Berger, 1972, p.129). The high visibility of the image increases its power as a weapon to be turned against the original (Klein, 2000, p.309-466).
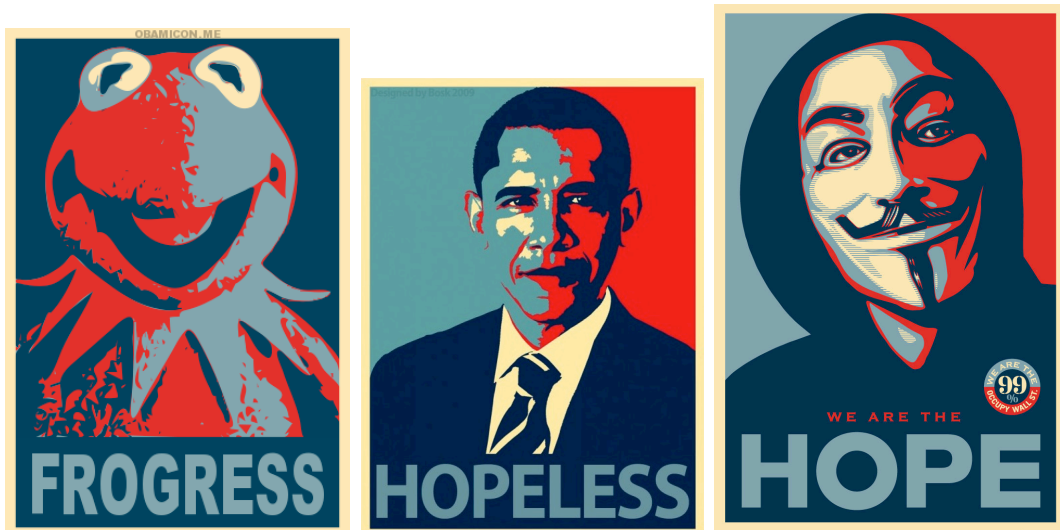
Figures 2-4.

A second example shows how dangerous mistakes can be for political campaigns in a culture of easy sharing and reproduction. The Romney 2012 campaign released a series of 'Venn diagrams' designed to illustrate what they argue is a gap between Obama's promises and the reality four years later.
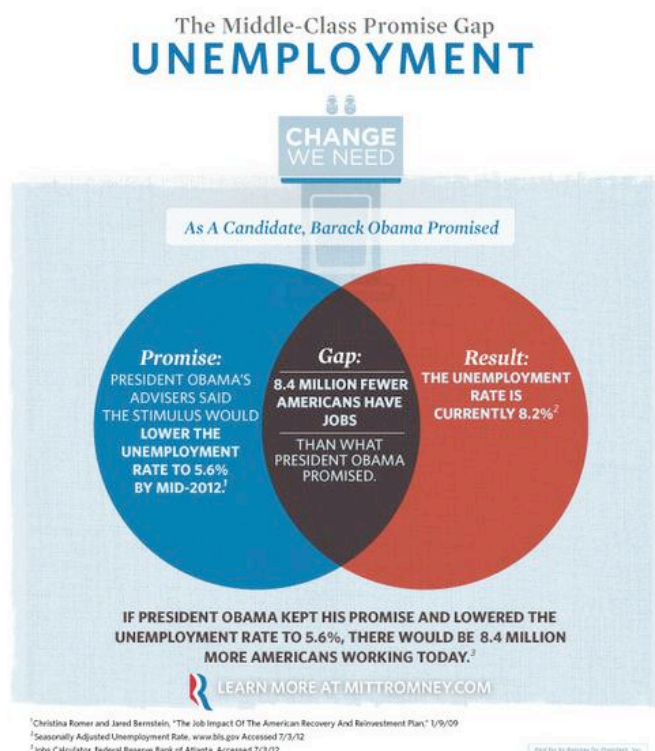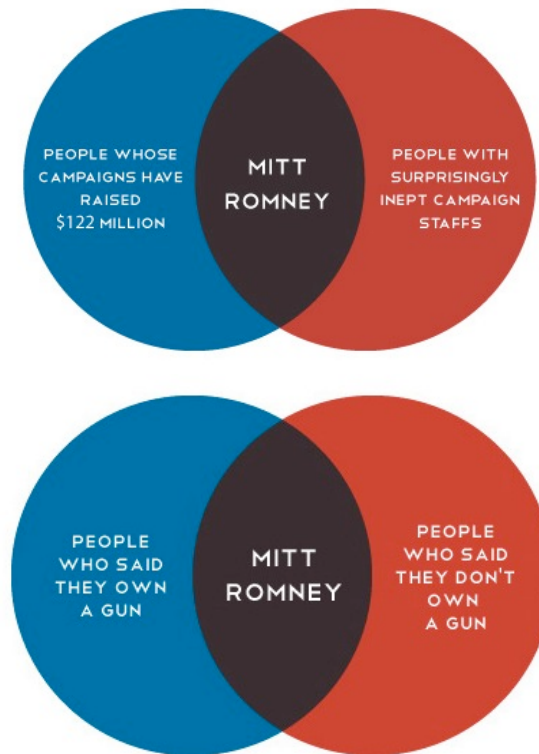

Figure 5

Media such as *Forbes*, *The New Republic*, and *The Rachel Maddow Show* pointed out that these were not Venn diagrams, then the Tumblr mittvennandnow.tumblr.com

was set up to receive satirical Venn diagram submissions designed to mock the campaign's lack of graphicacy, as well as making other political criticisms of the candidate.

Figures 6-7

Another consequence of the ability to reproduce and share images is that it allows the public to see patterns in campaign techniques, and analyse them, in ways that may have been invisible to them previously. Today, the Internet removes the limitations of space and time on older media, such as print, radio and television; not only in terms of distance, but also in terms of the printed page and set broadcast times (Flew, 2008, p.10). Techniques developed by political campaigns to respond to old restrictions, now leave them open to mockery in the new environment. In July 2011, an ITV News correspondent posted a complete video interview with Labour leader Ed Milliband online, so that it could 'be laughed at along with all the clips of cats falling off sofas'. Milliband, who gave the same answer to six different questions, was responding to a need to ensure that his view was aired, regardless of which part of the interview was 'grabbed' for the evening news (Sweney, 2011). In the Australian context, the Tumblr site tonyabbottlookingatthings.tumblr.com makes a similar joke out of the particular contexts in which politicians are frequently photographed.
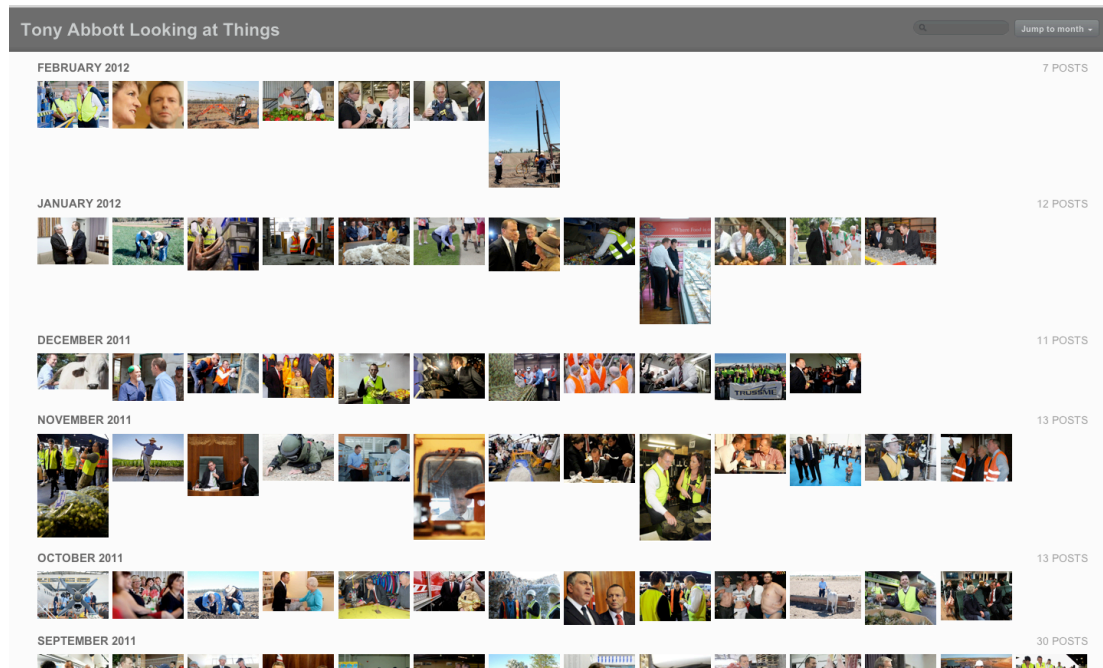
Figure 8

Conclusion

My research will look at how graphic design is currently understood and used by political campaigners, using co-design techniques – 'designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process' (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) – to find new ways of designing campaigns in the future. The aim will be to better understand the new technological landscape and how we communicate today. In using co-design techniques, the aim will be to question the basic assumptions made by election campaigns. For example, rather than focus group testing a range of designs for how-to-vote cards, co-design may focus on understanding why some voters are undecided before entering the polling booth and how they make their final decision, then apply this knowledge to design materials for the voting booth. The research will focus on both political campaign staff as well as voters, with the goal of discovering what it is that voters want to hear from candidates, and the way they prefer to communicate with their elected representatives, to find ways of using graphic design to communicate clearly, honestly and informatively.

Technology provides us with greater opportunities to transcend space and time and communicate with each other more quickly and across much greater distances. Meanwhile the ability to reproduce and share images with ease means we all must acquire the graphicacy skills to understand and use the visual language. Political

campaigns must develop the ability to communicate effectively in an increasingly diverse yet inter-connected society in which speech, text and image are equally important.

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