**A Guide to Deconstructing a Visual Image**

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but whose words are they?

Just as an author carefully selects words and phrases to express ideas, a

photographer, advertising executive, or graphic designer composes a

photograph, ad, or layout to convey a specific emotion or message. As a

result, a visual is not simply a reflection of reality, but rather the expression

of a point of view. The following guide will help you deconstruct any image.

1. Content can be symbolic and the following elements may affect how

we interpret an image:

who or what is emphasized

facial expression

body language

the use of computer retouching

the action featured

objects

setting

colours

2. Composition refers to the arrangement of elements in the picture.

Consider:

use of blank space

juxtaposition (putting seemingly unrelated items close together

or side by side

details in the foreground and background

what is excluded or cropped

3. Camera distance and angle may indicate a photographer’s attitude

toward the subject. Consider:

high angles (looking down) suggesting vulnerability

low angles (looking up) suggesting power

close ups suggesting intimacy

long shots suggesting distance

eve-level shots suggesting equality

4. Lighting may contribute to mood and atmosphere. Consider:

brightness/darkness

top lighting

side lighting

bottom lighting

back lighting

artificial lighting

natural lighting