

IMAGE
A USER'S MANUAL

PETER B. KAUFMAN

THE MOVING IMAGE

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For Paul Gerhardt

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about three things: 1) how important the moving image is; 2) how to better use it; and 3) how to make it—which is to say the system of its production, distribution, and preservation—less fraught with perils than the world of print has become.

It appears now for three reasons. First, video, quietly, almost elusively, has become the dominant medium of human communication. There are hundreds of billions of cameras out in the world recording and producing the moving image as I write. Two-thirds of global internet traffic is video; that number just continues to climb.¹ Although print, if we date that medium back to Gutenberg, has had a four-hundred-year head start, Americans get their news and information more often through screens and speakers and video-enabled media platforms now than through ink on paper.²

¹“Phenomena: The Global Internet Phenomena Report,” Sandvine, January 2023, <https://www.sandvine.com/global-internet-phenomena-report-2023>.

²Johannes Gutenberg printed his first bible in the 1450s. (See “Library of Congress Bible Collection,” <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bibles/the-gutenberg-bible.html> and “Global Spread of the Printing Press,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_spread_of_the_printing_press. The Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, Germany will take you on a virtual tour of his times [“Zietreise Gutenberg,” Gutenberg Museum, <https://www.gutenberg.de/zeitreise/>].) Some 440 years later, the Lumière brothers first screened one of their films in public. (See “History of Film,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_film. The Musée Lumière in Lyon, France, awaits you, too [<https://www.institut-lumiere.org/musee/pr%C3%A9sentation/presentation-english.html>].) Things have moved fast since then. The Pew Research Center tells us that “Americans turn to radio and print publications for news far less frequently than to digital devices and television.” “When asked which of these platforms [digital devices, television, radio, and print publications] they prefer to get news on, about half of Americans say they prefer a digital device (53 percent), more than say they prefer TV (33 percent). Even fewer Americans prefer radio (7 percent) or print (5 percent). These percentages have stayed mostly consistent since 2020.” Naomi Forman Katz and Katerina Eva Matsa, “New Platform Fact Sheet,” Pew Research Center, September 20, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet/>, emphasis in the original.

Second, even though the moving image has reached this juncture so quickly—indeed, perhaps *because* it has gotten here so quickly—there are no mainstream usage guides that respect its leading role in our culture or knowledge ecosystem or the rapidity with which it has arrived. There are no popular manuals of style or usage handbooks that focus on how we should be using video in modern communication, which is to say how we should best be producing it, citing it, distributing it, and, ultimately, archiving and preserving it, especially given the vital role it now plays in knowledge dissemination and in politics, culture, and society.

Third, one cannot help but notice, if one has been involved at all in publishing, education, or any form of media production, that the world of print today is a hot and unholy mess. If you were to design a book or journal or magazine or newspaper universe that would respect the rights and roles of creators and investors and underwriters but also serve society's interests, such a system would not, it's fair to say, be the one we have in operation today. Five publishers control 80 percent of the trade book market; five publishers control the academic market; Amazon controls US retail book sales. The tightening concentration of ownership is particularly concerning for the scientific and scholarly publishing sector, where knowledge that is often essential for society's advancement gets distributed (or gets suppressed).³ One can see this hyper-consolidation of power accelerating across all of the communications industries—film, music, television, gaming—and across social media and the web.⁴

If freedom, as people have said, involves participation in power, we are losing our grip on both. And that grip will disappear entirely if we let go of our control over the moving image.

³ Caroline Winter, "Market Consolidation and Scholarly Communications," Open Scholarship Policy Observatory, March 17, 2023, <https://ospolicyobservatory.uvic.ca/2023/03/17/market-consolidation-and-scholarly-communications/>.

⁴ "The Future of Media Project," Harvard University, <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/futureofmedia/index-us-mainstream-media-ownership>; Abigail Freeman, "The World's Largest Media Companies, 2022," *Forbes*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abigailfreeman/2022/05/12/the-worlds-largest-media-companies-2022-netflix-falls-in-the-ranks-after-subscriber-loss-disney-climbs-to-no-2/>; and Constance Grady, "The Planned Penguin Random House—Simon & Schuster Merger Has Been Struck Down in Court," *Vox*, November 1, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/culture/23316541/publishing-antitrust-lawsuit-merger-department-justice-penguin-random-house-simon-schuster>.

Once the preserve of a rarefied few—a media elite with money, access to equipment, and control over communications networks—the moving image has now become a *lingua franca* all around the world. It is our new vernacular, a medium—the medium—that billions of people use to produce and consume information every single second. The moving image is video, film, and television. The movie. The motion picture. The silver screen. Television. Live sports and its endless replays. YouTube. Instagram. TikTok clips that go viral. Even Zoom—some of which can be sublime. (See the Zoom poetry reading by Ada Limón, poet laureate of the United States, linked in figure 0.1.) It can bring us the world. This book is about that excitement and promise.



Figure 0.1
Ada Limón reading her poem “The End of Poetry,” <https://youtu.be/DsQ5vvJvhC0>.



Watch the video.

But when we're not using it to educate or entertain ourselves, the moving image can bring us violence, too—savagery, even—and a billion daily humiliations. We don't dwell too deeply or too often—certainly not often enough—on the threatening roles that it plays in modern society. But it is far and away the most effective medium to make us think what the people who produce it want us to think—and of surveilling us when we don't.

This book is also about those dangers.

Prompted by the apparatus of rules and conventions and style guides and usage manuals that has emerged over almost six centuries of the printed word, *The Moving Image: A User's Manual* is thus being published to put forward some guidelines for video usage and style; set forth initial systems of moving image citation and reference; illuminate some of the leading methods of preserving and archiving such a powerful and yet seemingly ephemeral medium; and interrogate the legal and rights regimes that appear to govern its publication, transmission, and distribution. Even at its young age, the moving image has become a primary source of knowledge and evidence. The health of deliberative democracies has become dependent on the truths (and fictions) that it delivers to us over the screen—so much so, in fact, that it is incumbent upon us to understand and promote ways of enhancing its fixity and persistence so that it might be cited in many of the same and essential ways in which print can be referenced.⁵ Preservation is a critical subject, too. Who knows how many of the links that we use in this book—uniform resource locators, or URLs, as they're called, and the associated quick-response (QR) codes you will see (links to platforms including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, platforms over which most of us have no real control)—will still be functional in a year or two? Without more attention—direct and urgent attention—paid to its preservation, we risk seeing video and the entire knowledge base it contains disappear, and along with it the evidentiary universe of who has said what to whom, who has done what to whom, who has benefited, and who has suffered.

The Moving Image: A User's Manual, in other words, looks to make some sense of this medium as it starts to inherit the mantle that print has been wearing for almost six hundred years.

⁵ See Ann Grimes and Peter B. Kaufman, editors, "Tech, Tools, and Media: Designing for Trust through Authentication," *Commonplace* (June 2023), <https://commonplace.knowledgefutures.org/series-31>.

That world of print, which grew fast, also began in chaos. As Harvard University Librarian Emeritus and the eminent historian of the book Robert Darnton has written, “When the printed word first appeared in France in 1470, the state did not know what to make of it.” It, too, was new—a novelty, even. In France, Darnton writes, “the monarchy reacted at first by attempting to extinguish it. On January 13, 1535, Francis I decreed that anyone who printed anything would be hanged.”⁶

For the moving image today, with all of us on our iPhones, the modern cognate of hanging anyone recording or sharing video would seem a little extreme (also I’d have no readers). But in the long view of things, we too, comparatively speaking, don’t yet know what to “make” of this new medium of ours. One can picture a man sitting in his cold wooden house by the Rhine (or even by the Charles) in the 1600s, seeing a first, then a second, and then a third broadsheet sliding under his front door—three sheets, in one week!—and thundering in tarnation that he’s being overwhelmed with too much information.

What to make of it, indeed!

The epistemological nightmare we seem to be in, bombarded over our screens and speakers with so many moving-image messages per day, true and false, is at least in part due to the paralysis that we—scholars, journalists, and regulators, but also producers and consumers—are still exhibiting over how to anchor facts and truths and commonly accepted narratives in this seemingly most ephemeral of media. Yet the moving image is likely to facilitate the most extraordinary advances ever in education, scholarly communication, and knowledge dissemination. Imagine what will happen once we realize the promise of artificial intelligence to generate mass quantities of scholarly video about knowledge—video summaries by experts and machines of every book and article ever written and of every movie and TV program ever produced. This book ends with a meditation about what AI and video together can do for human understanding.

★ ★ ★

⁶ Robert Darnton, *Pirating and Publishing: The Book Trade in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 13.

Public access to knowledge always faces barriers that are easy for us to see, but also many that are invisible. Video is maturing now as a field. Could we say that it's still young? That it still needs to be saved—constantly saved—from commercial forces encroaching upon it that, if left unregulated, could soon strip it of any remaining mandate to serve society?

Could we say that we need to save *ourselves*, in fact, from “surrendering,” as one notable scholar wrote, 60 years ago now, “our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, [such that] we don't really have any rights left”? Before we have irrevocably and permanently “leased our central nervous systems to various corporations”?⁷

You bet we can say it, and we should. For most of the 130 years of the moving image, its producers and controllers have been elites—and way too often they've attempted with their control of the medium to make us think what they want us to think. We've been scared over most of these years into believing that the moving image rightfully belongs under the purview of large private or state interests, that the screen is something that others should control.

That's nonsense.

This book exists for all these reasons, and it addresses these challenges. And these challenges have everything to do with the general epistemic chaos we find ourselves in, with so many people believing anything and so much out there that is untrue.

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994 [1964]), 68.

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