**Photography in Society**

The photograph’s trace or reflection of the 'real' is what allows the photographic image to immediately attract our attention as viewers. However art historian Jonathan Crary says that as technology developed, the photography gradually imposed a normative vision on its viewers. A normative vision is a particular *way* of seeing, one that a society or culture prefers, and one that may suppress other perspectives.

Scholars have voiced concerns about the dangers of a society saturated with pseudo-images. We can think of “pseudo-images” as made-up images without an original source, posing dangers of deceiving viewers with publicity and illusion. The concept of pseudo-images was developed by sociologist Jean Baudrillard in 1970, who warned of a "postmodern condition" in contemporary western society—a condition characterized by uncertainty and questioning of tradition.

Baudrillard coined the term *simulacrum* to describe this new type of reality, a 'hyper-reality'. It contains artificial images that no longer reference that which is 'real' but exist only in relation to one another. Consider, for example, how memes and other digital content have effortlessly moved into our lives, evoking engagement and merging into our conversations with others. We’re able to understand the meaning of such memes because we recognize other images that they refer to.

In a 2016-2017 study of the most popular memes on the Internet, one of the most common memes on Twitter was Evil Kermit, a screenshot of Kermit the Frog, the well-known Muppet character, standing next to a Sith version of himself (borrowed from the *Star Wars* films). Its caption read, "me: sees a fluffy dog / me to me: steal him".

Within 10 days after its first upload, thousands of retweets and likes catapulted it into popular variations. In less than two weeks, pop culture and news sites Pop Sugar, Cheezburger, and Buzzfeed broadcast the trending images. This triggered variations with Miss Piggy, further reported and promoted by more pop culture news sites and blogs. As Baudrillard diagnosed much earlier, the *virtual* representation–manipulated, opinionated, persuasive imagery–became celebrated as *experience* and representations of the 'real' had become rooted in everyday life.

