Brett Ommen is Assistant Professor of Communication in the Department of English at the University of North Dakota. He received his Ph.D. in Communication Studies from the Rhetoric and Public Culture Program at Northwestern University. His research focuses on the changing complexion of rhetorical theory in the face of advancements in media uses and technologies. He is interested in examining how these changes alter the ways we speak to and about publics and communities. He has published on topics ranging from the rhetorical production of contemporary Catholic doctrines to magnetic ribbons on automobiles to graphic design as a mode of public address. His interest in visual communication can be seen in all of these projects: the visual signification of the individual body, the visual practices of personal display, the relationship between publics and visual communication.

He is currently working on a visual culture project that explores the ramifications of living in a world increasingly filled with visual communication and argues that the field of graphic design has become a predominant mode of public address for contemporary liberalism. A second project concerns itself with the ways media technologies obfuscate the role of authority in public discourse and hopes to discover both the consequences of unauthorized public speech and the role for rhetorical scholarship in the face of displaced authority.

Central to Ommen’s approach to visual communication is a reluctance to consider the visual communication transaction as limited to visual images themselves. Instead of approaching the image as a constellation of rhetorical inventions, Ommen interrogates the rhetorical implications of visual address as opposed to other forms of public address. Most notable among these implications is a radical reorganization of the imagination of an increasingly visually oriented, addressed, and performed public.

Such an approach forces Ommen to differentiate visual communication according to its variable material practices (bodily performance, graphic design, digital video, etc.). To support this articulation of visual communication, Ommen’s work relies heavily on the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, John Dewey, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and most prominently, Walter Benjamin. In an effort to articulate a contemporary and particular account of visual public address, Ommen brings these conceptual projects into conversation with the disciplinary discourse of Graphic Design.