



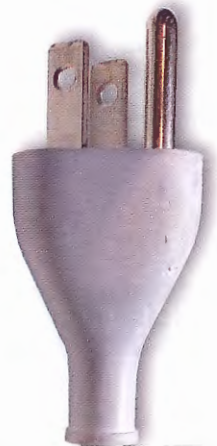
# compose · design · advocate

a rhetoric for integrating written, oral, and visual communication

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## Strategies we emphasize in chapter 10

In chapter 10 our rhetorical analysis grows out of the general observations we made about persuasion back in chapter 1 and from our observations about rhetorical analysis in chapter 9. We also draw on the discussions in chapter 7 about the rhetorical workings of visual texts.

That background helps us consider how posters use the following primary strategies:

- **How posters work because they draw on what we already know**
- **How posters work because they create visual hierarchies—paths for our eyes to follow**
- **How posters work because they address our bodies and emotions**





# analyzing posters

## CHAPTER 10

Throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th, the bare spaces of cities—the sides of buildings as well as specially built kiosks—were covered with posters advertising auction agencies, health remedies, women's wigs, or theatrical performances; the posters might also call people to political meetings or inform them about political decisions. Posters—large color printed sheets—appeared when they did in cities for several reasons: Printing technologies allowed for large color prints, for the first time enough people could read to justify the costs of such publications, and cities had sufficient population massed together that it made sense to publicize ideas, events, and products using posters.

Without public spaces—and without a public moving about in those spaces—posters make no sense. Posters were an early kind of mass communication: They were a way for someone who could afford the costs of printing

and who wanted to reach a large audience to contact that audience. For the first time, audiences didn't hear news and information from others in one-to-one conversations or in large meetings. Instead, posters could address many people one at a time in public.

Because posters usually are used in public spaces where people are passing by quickly, they are usually designed to be scanned and read quickly. People who make posters consciously design them to get across one idea quickly and easily.

On the next pages, you'll learn something about how the visual elements of a poster are chosen and arranged to catch your attention and hold it long enough for you to understand the poster's purpose. You'll see how posters work both because they attend to how we experience the world through our bodies as well as because they draw on concepts and ideas we already understand because of where and when we live.



# HOW POSTERS WORK: Drawing on what you know

People use public space differently now than they did in the 19th century, when color posters were first published. Now in the United States, you probably see posters most often if you live in a large city: Walls around construction sites are often plastered with posters for plays, concerts, or political events. On some college campuses, telephone poles and bulletin boards are covered in letter-size flyers advertising group meetings, band performances, and sorority rushes.

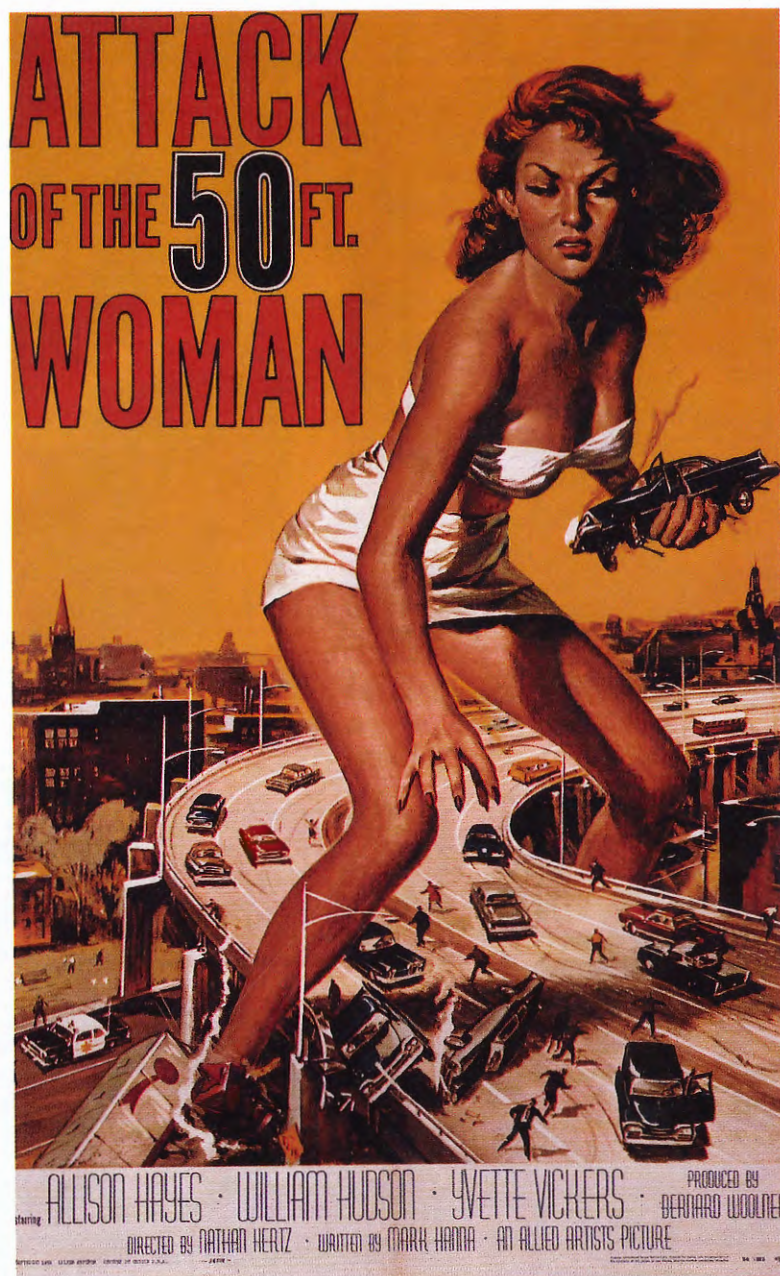
We'll start analyzing posters with the example to the right.

- What visual aspects of this poster tell you that it is probably for a movie?
- When do you think the movie publicized by this poster was made? Why do you guess the time period you do?
- What kind of movie is being publicized here, a comedy, a horror film, or a sci-fi film or ...? What visual aspects of the poster encourage you to make the judgment you do?

Look at how much you knew in order to understand what's going on with this poster.

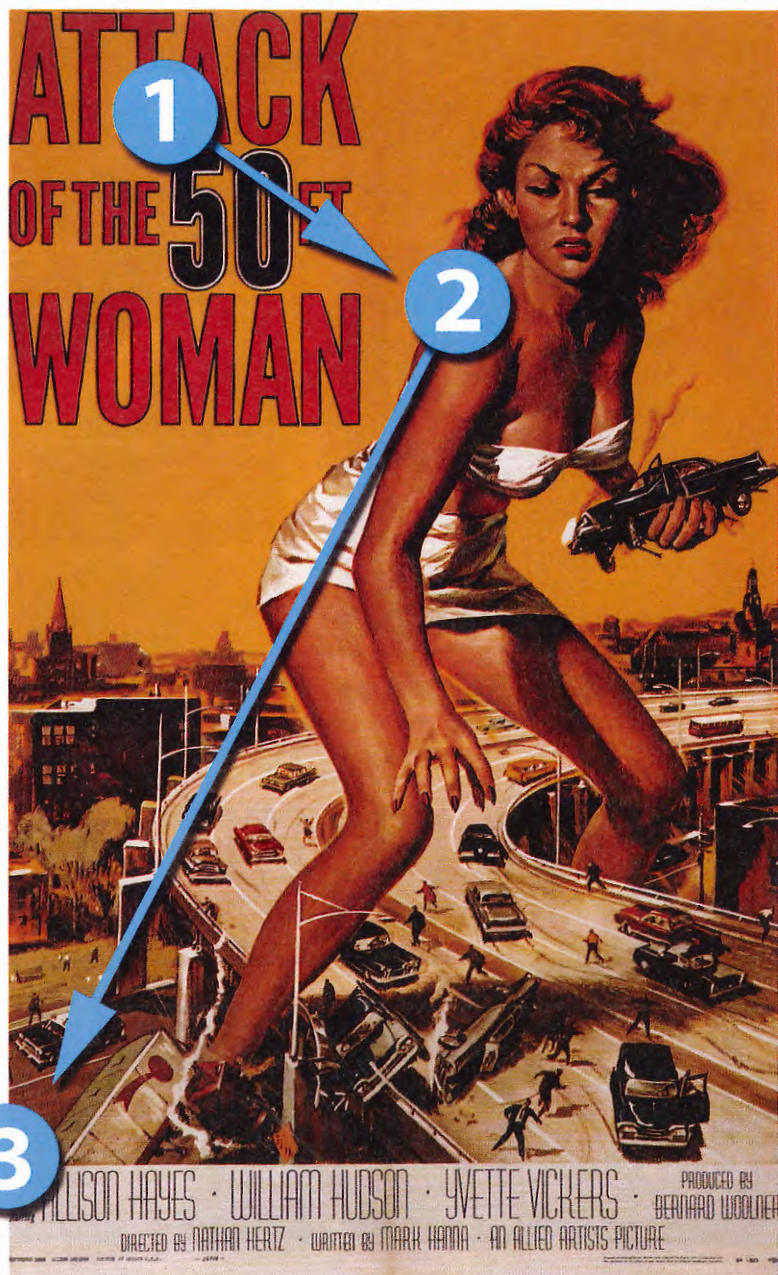
List all you had to know—about the medium of posters, about the place of movies and moviegoing in the United States, about the kinds of pictures used in posters, about genres of movies, and so on—in order to understand what the designers of this poster were hoping to achieve rhetorically with the poster.

In chapter 1, pages 28–29, we discuss the interpretive scheme we use here—understanding visual texts, first, through how they resonate with our experiences of moving in the world and, second, through the cultural knowledge we bring to them.





# HOW POSTERS WORK: Principles of visual composition



Like most posters of any kind, this movie poster does not have many elements: The poster has a title and then a representational image (a painting in this case, but you've probably also seen posters that use photographs), and then more text. Those are the only components of this poster, and so a viewer can scan the poster quickly and understand its purpose.

The poster's elements have been arranged logically to create a path through the elements that your eyes probably follow—a visual hierarchy (see pages 256–259) as the numbered elements to the left show:

- 1 The title is at the top left of the poster—at the spot we expect if we have learned to read in the top-to-bottom, left-to-right motions of English. The title is large relative to the other elements, and it is in a simple sans serif typeface.
- 2 The woman has been made much larger than the other elements (so much so that she would be much taller than 50 feet if she were real) and placed so that we see her second. Notice, however, that the colors of the poster do not contrast very much, so that the woman doesn't "pop" out of the poster as she would were she (for example) tinted blue. Notice too how the shape of the woman's body draws your eyes down the page: Chances are your eyes move from the title to her face and then down her right arm to her right leg—which leads your eyes down to the left bottom edge of the poster, where you see a car crash and the remaining typographic information.
- 3 Finally, at the very bottom of the poster, in an unobtrusively thin typeface, is the information about who is in the movie.



# HOW POSTERS WORK: Drawing on what you know

At right is a poster for a movie you may have seen.

- Why do you think the poster's designers chose green and black as the main colors? How would the poster be different if it were bright pink and white or violet and black?
- Why might the designers have chosen to show the people turned with their backs to viewers and their bodies fading away at bottom—but with their faces turning toward us? What sense of space does this help create in the poster? What sort of emotions does this help create?
- Why might the designers have decided to mix a photographic with a painterly style? Why might the poster not have as much to look at as the poster for *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman*?
- What do the poster designers expect audiences to know about the earlier *Matrix* movies?
- What are all those slanting lines? How do they contribute to your understanding of the poster?

Again, look at how much you already knew in order to understand this poster: You know about how we use black and a certain shade of green in our culture and how we think about turned bodies and about illustrations instead of photographs.

*The Matrix Revolutions* poster is publicizing a movie that has some similarities to *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman*: Both movies are about situations that (most of us believe) do not happen in real life. Does one poster look scarier to you than the other, or does one look sillier? How do the posters encourage you to think differently about the two movies?





# HOW POSTERS WORK: Principles of visual composition



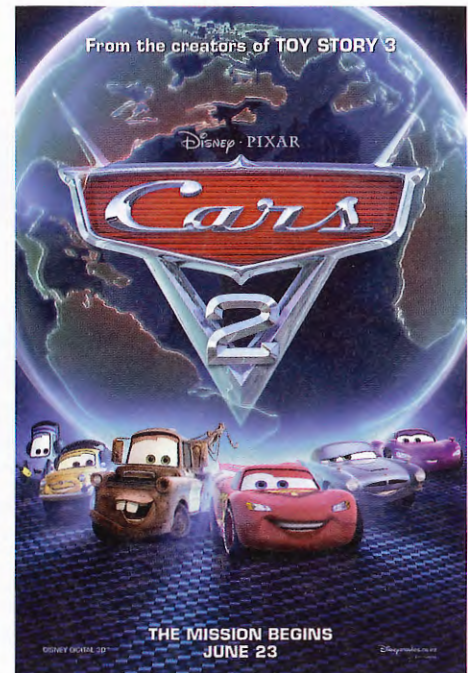
We think the poster for *Matrix Revolutions* is composed to have a visual hierarchy something like this:

- 1 Unlike the poster for *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman*, this poster has no large words at the top. Instead, we think this poster's center has been designed to catch our eyes first: The poster's main colors divide it in two diagonally; in the middle of the poster, placed on top of that dividing line, are the two people. No other people are in the poster, only text—and so our eyes are probably drawn to the center by our interest in people and by their placement.
- 2 After we see the people, the poster's design suggests two other directions our eyes can follow:
  - The text at the poster's top gets brighter to the right, ending in a flash of light. The line of the second character's head and up-pointed arm move in the direction of that light. These two features direct our attentions upward.
  - The poster gets lighter at the bottom right, so our eyes will be drawn there. The lines of "rain" all point in that direction—and the movie title is there at the bottom, too.

To us, this poster seems to have been designed to keep our eyes moving back and forth from the top to the bottom, from darkness into light and back again—and the light is on the bottom right, suggesting both the ground as well as where the story is moving, since we are used to reading from right to left. If you have seen the movie, how does this movement fit with what you know about it?



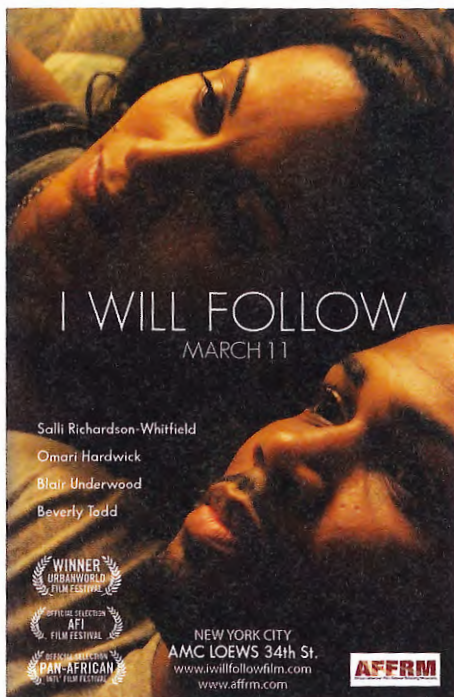
## TO ANALYZE: Movie posters from the United States



■ **WRITE:** Above are several movie posters from the United States. Use what you know and what you read on the preceding pages to write a short paper in which you answer the following questions about at least three of the posters:

- When do you think these different movies were made? On what visual evidence or other knowledge do you base your estimates?
- What genres of movies (comedies, romances, sci-fi) are being publicized by these posters? What evidence do you use for making your judgment?
- Why do you think the designers of each poster chose the colors they did for their poster?
- What is the visual path your eye follows through these posters? Why do you think the designers “ask” you to see the elements of the posters in the order you do?
- Try to explain the overall effects of each poster by bringing together your responses to the previous questions.





■ **WRITE:** From the examples here or others you find, choose two or more posters for the same film genre. (For example, you could look at posters for comedies or for romances.) Analyze each poster's visual arrangements and what the designers expect you to know already in order to understand it. The following questions can help you with your analysis.

- What differences in the posters do you see? What do those differences explain about the distinctive effects the designers of the posters sought?
- How do the different strategies used in the posters connect to the varying purposes of the posters?

Then ask what the posters have in common:

- What similar strategies used in the posters help you see that the posters are in the same genre?



**TO ANALYZE:** Wartime posters from the United States and elsewhere







■ **Discuss with others:** These posters were printed during different wars in the United States and elsewhere. Use what you know and what you read on the preceding pages to respond to the following:

- When do you think these different posters were made? On what visual evidence or other knowledge do you base your estimates?
- From what countries do the different posters come? Try to use visual clues other than language to support your judgments. (Just because a poster is printed in English doesn't mean it comes from the United States!)
- Why do you think the designers of each poster chose the colors they did?
- What is the visual path your eye follows through each poster? Why do you think the designers of each poster "ask" you to see their elements in the order you do?



## HOW POSTERS WORK: Using faces

Notice the way the various wartime posters on the preceding pages use similar—but not the same—strategies of visual composition as the movie posters.

For example, the wartime posters have very few elements, and their elements are arranged to provide viewers a clear visual path from top to bottom.

Notice, however, that the first element in the wartime posters you see—the element at the top—is a face (or, in one case, a hand) instead of words.

Why do you think the designers of these posters decided to place a face as the first element for you to see?

## HOW POSTERS WORK: Considering more closely what we already know when we look at posters



The “I Want You” poster with Uncle Sam was first designed just as the United States was entering World War I, and it was such an effective poster that not only were more than four million copies printed between 1917 and 1918 but the poster was brought out again during World War II. In addition, the representation of Uncle Sam (the poster designer, James Montgomery Flagg, used himself as the model) has been reused in many different ways—as in the examples on the preceding pages.

Uncle Sam’s pose in this poster was derived from a British poster that used an illustration of

Lord Kitchener, a military hero in 19th century Britain because of his campaigns in Africa. The illustration of Kitchener pointing directly at the viewer appeared on a magazine cover in 1914, and the British Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (in order to make a poster to encourage men to enlist) changed the wording to turn the magazine cover into the poster you can see on the middle of page 340.

The success of the Kitchener poster in Britain led to the “I Want You” poster in the United States and then to all the other posters that have appeared since that draw on Uncle Sam’s pose.

As with the movie posters, understanding these wartime posters thus requires us to understand (whether knowingly or not) many things before we can respond to the posters in the way their designers were hoping. As we wrote earlier, you can think about what we need to know about posters—as about any visual composition—as fitting into two general categories:

- 1 what we already know because we have bodies
- 2 what we already know because we live in particular places and times with other people



## HOW POSTERS WORK: What we know because we have bodies

The effectiveness of the Uncle Sam poster—and of the Kitchener poster on which it was based—depends in large part on how the figure is positioned to appeal to a viewer.

In the full-size poster, Uncle Sam is almost human size. His body is painted to seem close to the poster's front—as though he were leaning toward a viewer—and his facial expression is serious, with his eyes focused a few feet directly in front of the poster. The poster would hang on a wall at almost eye level, and so—if we were to walk by—it would be hard not to feel that Uncle Sam is looking us directly in the eyes. Those caught up in the patriotic fervor prevalent in the United States going into World War I must have felt emotionally compelled by Uncle Sam's closeness and gestures.

Designing this poster, James Montgomery Flagg thus used his understanding of how the poster would be hung and, importantly, of how we tend to respond to gestures aimed directly at us (even when they are printed). We understand some of what is going on in this poster because we know—from our embodied physical experiences—what Uncle Sam's gestures and (perceived) physical closeness indicate.

## HOW POSTERS WORK: What we know because we live in particular times and places

To analyze the Uncle Sam poster, we need to understand not only the postures of human bodies but also who Uncle Sam is.

Just what do you know about Uncle Sam, and how did you learn it? And what do you have to know to understand why Uncle Sam is dressed in red, white, and blue? Will those colors carry the same emotional weight for someone in (for example) Italy as for a citizen of the United States?

In addition, Uncle Sam is an older white male. How do you think your responses to this poster would change were Uncle Sam *Aunt Sam* instead? There is one poster on pages 340–341 that has a woman in it, but notice that she is not the same age as Uncle Sam—why do you think that is? How is the appeal built by these posters changed when the person shown in the poster is not older or male? What cultural expectations about gender shape your understanding of the appeal being made in the poster?

Why do you think Uncle Sam is white? What cultural understandings of ethnicity seem to be at work in these posters' representations of people?

We bring our understandings of gender and ethnicity—like our understandings of class—to

making sense of these posters. In addition, what people are wearing as well as our knowledge of what was happening at the time these posters were made certainly shape how we understand them.

As you look back over the posters made for audiences outside the United States, what (in addition to language) do you think you need to know about the other country and its culture if you are to better understand how the posters work?



## TO ANALYZE: Wartime posters

- **Discuss with others:** Look at all the posters on the preceding pages and analyze how the body positions of the people represented in each are intended to appeal to the poster's audience.

Which posters attempt to pull you closer, and which come out at you? Describe how the body positions, gestures, and facial expressions create these effects and why you think the posters' designers would make these particular choices. What overall purpose do you think the designers of each poster had so that they chose the design strategies they did? (These are primarily strategies of pathos, as we discussed in chapter 3.)

- **Discuss with others:** Make a list of all that you need to know to understand the different wartime posters. What does this suggest to you about considerations you need to hold as you design for others?
- **Discuss with others:** How would the wartime posters be different, do you think, if they had used photographs instead of drawings and paintings? What associations do you have with photographs as opposed to paintings and drawings? How might this change the kind of appeals the posters are making?

- **Write:** Look back to the "I want you" poster with a woman on page 341.

Write a short paper in which you analyze the similarities and differences between the poster with a woman and the original Uncle Sam poster.

Use your analysis to argue whether the two different posters seek the same purpose through different means or seek different purposes through different means.

- **Write:** Look back to the "I want you" poster with a skeleton on page 340.

Because it uses the same overall arrangement and words, this poster in some way asks its audience to respond to it as they would to the original poster with Uncle Sam. By using the skeleton, however, it also asks its audience to think differently about the purposes of the original poster or to respond differently to the original poster's call.

Write a short analysis paper in which you compare the original poster with the skeleton poster, using your analysis to explicate how the similarities and differences in the posters point to different purposes.





# THINKING THROUGH PRODUCTION

- Reread the description of the meeting of the Fast Car team in chapter 1. Given the purpose of the group and their audience, design a poster that will encourage women to come to a meeting. Then write a short paper justifying your design decisions (especially your decisions about what words to use as well as all your decisions about the visual aspects of your poster).
- Use the conventions of the Uncle Sam recruitment poster to design a poster that presents your position on the draft.
- Use the discussion of typography on pages 252–255 and 262–265 in chapter 7 to analyze how the typography and illustrations of any of the posters in this chapter—or a poster for a current movie or event in your community—work together to create an overall rhetorical effect. If you have access to a scanner or digital camera and image-processing software, scan in the poster and modify its typography or illustrations to see how changes in one or the other change the overall effect.
- Design a poster to interest people on your campus in a nonprofit organization that matters to you. Use the steps in chapter 3 to develop a design plan; also use the research recommendations in chapter 4 to help you learn as much as you can about the organization so that your poster can be appropriately informative.

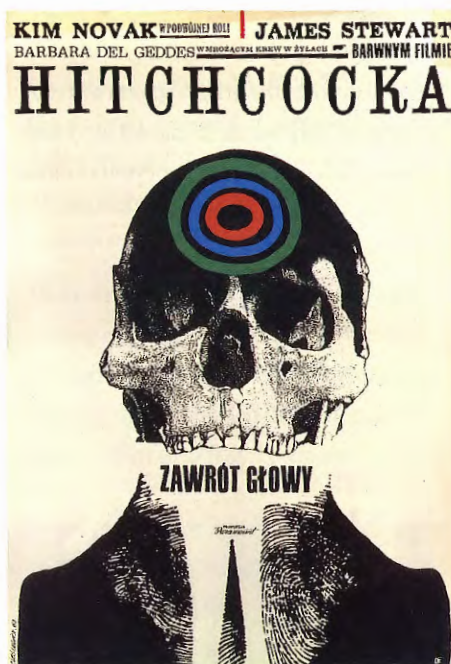
Produce your poster using the technologies available to you.
- Redesign one of the posters shown on these pages (or another to which you have access) as an announcement that would fit on a webpage. Given the relatively small size of webpages, and the possibilities of creating links to other pages, what changes do you need to make to the original poster to keep its original purpose but to make it work well online? Write a justification of your choices.
- On the following page are posters from different countries for the Alfred Hitchcock movie, *Vertigo*. There are also questions to help you think about how the visual composition of posters—and what you need to know to understand them—changes from country to country. Use the questions to make observations about these single examples from different countries, and use your observations to speculate about what the designers think will appeal to audiences in each country. Pick two of the countries to compare, and—in the library or online—find at least five other examples of movie posters for the same (or a similar) genre from each country. (Online you can find many examples of posters from other countries.)

Write a paper comparing the posters from the different countries, using your analysis of all the posters to see if your speculations are supported.



■ Write a rhetorical analysis comparing the visual compositions of the posters on this page, all for the Alfred Hitchcock movie *Vertigo*; in your analysis, also consider the *Vertigo* poster on page 338. These questions can guide your analysis:

- What differences do you see between the examples from other countries and the example from the United States?
- Compare the photographs and drawings shown in the different posters. What various senses of the movie do the different photographs and drawings give to an audience?
- What changes in these posters when a designer chooses to use a photograph instead of a drawing or vice versa?
- In the posters that use photographs, compare the relationship shown between the man and the woman. What do the different posters—with their various relationships—lead audiences to expect about the movie?
- Based on what you know about color and how it works, what do the different color choices in each of the posters indicate to an audience about the movie?



The posters come from the following countries:

Top left: Japan

Bottom left: Poland

Top right: Italy