

# *Rhetoric in*

*Three dimensions of analysis – unity, coherence and emphasis, along with an explicit listing of denotation and connotation and a rhetorical analysis – provide a framework within which student designed logotypes are examined. Consideration of audience background knowledge and interpretive ability is a primary consideration.*

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*Visible Language* 32.3  
González de Cosío, 264–279  
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# Logotypes

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Rhetoric is the art of communicating effectively and persuasively. It implies the use of adequate elements to express correctly and convey a clear message to convince the audience. “Rhetoric,” says Robin Kinross, “would be a way of understanding the mechanisms of the visual/verbal rhetoric conceived as a development from classical rhetoric, but modified by the inter-discipline of semiotics (Kinross, 197). In fact, visual communication should take important elements from rhetoric to construct a concept, articulate it in an intelligible structure and give it an individual expression; but we should always consider the audience as one of the most important components of the communication process, by using appropriate language that allows for the interpretation of the message.

Richard E. Hughes mentions that to achieve its purpose, a work must have unity, coherence and emphasis.

*Unity* is related to the quality and number of elements chosen to communicate the idea or message. They should work together to determine what we want to accomplish with a design. Unity and fulfillment of purpose can be considered as the hypothesis of the project.

*Coherence* is regarded as the organization, or sequence of elements, in the design. It is also related to function – readability and intelligibility. Hughes talks about three different types of coherence: *logical* or *objective*, when impersonal and analytical elements are chosen to communicate the idea; *associative*, when subjective and personal relations are established between the elements; and *chronological*, where successions of time and space unfold.

*Emphasis* is given by the way the ideas are expressed, elements are employed and vitality is expressed in each project (Hughes, 1966). These three elements can also be closely related to form, function and signification as the basic requirements for an effective design project.

It is also important to consider the levels of language a designer chooses for each message. Graphic language needs to be in relation to the audience and attentive to the method of address. For example, different scales are available, such as customized language use for individuals or specific subgroups or generalized language for mass me-

dia; language as presented abstractly or concretely; vernacular or learned; and finally messages with emphasis on denotation or connotation.

### *Individual and mass language*

*Individual language* refers to words or graphic elements that refer to a particular meaning; the possibility of different interpretations is diminished because they refer to something specific. On the other hand, *mass language* is vague because it takes more than one referent in its attempt to communicate with a large undifferentiated audience. Some of these words could be even transformed into what Uwe Poerksen (1995, 8) calls *plastic words*, which “by contrast, are rarely used in a particular, precise, appropriate manner. They are used as interchangeable modules. Because of this, they lose any potential for precision, concreteness, or exactitude.” Some plastic words he mentions include *communication*, *development*, *work* and *sexuality*. These could be found in any kind of communication and are difficult to define because they refer to such broad topics.

### *Concrete and abstract language*

The second scale divides language between concrete and abstract language. The difference relies on abstract language that is associated with intangible feelings, ideas or concepts. Popular and learned language are based on the level of usage (Hughes, 2004). *Popular* refers to words or elements that are in common and direct use. *Learned*

words imply a higher level of sophistication and intricacy often associated with a scholarly discourse on a subject.

#### *Denotation and connotation*

The denotation of a word or graphic element specifies the object. Connotation is related to additional qualities that give more information or suggest additional characteristics about the object denoted. Connotation is amplified or restricted depending on the experience of the audience dealing with the term or graphic element.

Finally, I will also include the values of style that Hughes mentions: “the rhetorician aspires to create a persuasive image of himself, *ethos*, and a receptivity in his audience, *pathos*, so that an idea, *logos*, could be shared” (Hughes, 226). In communication we cannot escape from rhetoric and therefore persuasion. In even the most objective information a selection has been made with regard to type, color, materials, etc., that alters persuasive force. Even though the first goal is to convey ideas in the clearest and most effective way, we also convince our audience. Hughes emphasizes the ethical appeal of the writer that inadvertently projects his or her own image as

author of a communication. However, the function of the designer is to solve visual communication problems and direct the specific graphic solution using the codes of the audience and leaving personal style as a secondary consideration. Hanno Ehses, on the other hand, refers to *ethos* as “the finer emotions of sensibility, taste and philosophical belief... The ethical appeal focuses on the decorum and aesthetic qualities of a design, often addressing the traditional values and moral tendencies of an audience” (Ehses, 7). This is a way to focus the design problem, by considering aesthetic values and ethics to elevate the design product to a higher performance. For this study, I will consider Ehses’ approach which implies a less personal process and focuses on the need to cover the three appeals mentioned previously.

Such comparisons between verbal language and visible language should be considered essential in the work of the designer. “Linguistic analogy is stretched beyond mere analogy, to constitute an enormous extension of language itself: the world becomes a ‘text,’ to be read and decoded or deconstructed” (Kinross, 194). Let us now analyze the work that follows.

## ANALYSIS OF MEXICAN LOGOTYPES

All the examples presented are the work of second semester typography students from the Universidad de las Américas in Puebla, Mexico. The main objective was to understand the terms *denotation* and *connotation* and exemplify them in a logotype for Mexico. One of this exercise's requirements was to manipulate the letterforms in order to communicate the message,

trying not to rely on the surface of the letters, but to use the form as content.

Because the reader needs context in which to consider the effectiveness of these logotypes, information about Mexican culture and history is provided. The development of the analysis of these designs considers these issues and rhetorical figures are flagged as they are used in each example.

## MEXICO OF THE ALEBRIJES

Nadia Roldán, 1996

*Context*

The alebrijes' origin goes back to the 1950s in Mexico City. This special form of folk art was created by Pedro Linares, a craft artist who worked for several years making masks, death skeletons and other pieces using paper and straw structures covered with

glued white paper and painted with acrylics or decorated with cut paper. Some of these structures, like *piñatas*, are filled with candies and fruits and are torn into pieces or are consumed at parties; objects are consumed by fireworks like the so-called *judas*. These customs are religious in nature and

represent the destruction or annihilation of bad spirits.

This is a result of syncretism in Mexico, or the combination of different religious traditions which gave rise to new customs and traditions. For example, Franciscans and Dominicans arrived with the goal of converting the ancient Mexicans to Catholicism. The old gods were substituted by the images of saints and God. One can still find Catholic celebrations combined with pagan rites, as is the case in the Tarahumaran tribe in Chihuahua. This group celebrates Mass during Holy Week and mixes it with dance and tattoo decorations on their bodies. The religions and customs coexist.

Pedro Linares' skeletons and masks changed over time. After recovering from an illness that seemed to have affected him deeply, Linares started working on paper maché pieces with different shapes and characteristics: imaginary and fantastic animals that combined parts of fish, birds, dragons, reptiles, etc. These multicolored monsters were called *alebrijes*. *Alebrije* is an invented word that the *Diccionario de México* defines as the name given to the plastic fantasies in the form of animals and devils, made out of formed paper. The alebrije maker says that alebrijes are "what one is looking at and what one is thinking of."

The alebrije's shape is developed in the forming process with additional elements like ears, tails or spines added to the basic shape. These handicrafts are created from branches in Oaxaca,

in the southwestern part of the country. The shape of the branch determines the basic gesture of the alebrije.

Alebrijes are sold in the street or craft stores and are representative of the variety of Mexico's magical, naive and dramatic imagery. They talk about the unknown in an animal shape – the magic is also a way to give these animals supernatural powers.

### *Analysis*

*Unity* · In order to assure the logotype is communicating its message, we can ask if the ideas (alebrijes, magic, etc.) are expressed in the logotype. The precise idea of Mexico of the alebrijes could be difficult for foreign audiences that might not know these crafts, but the logotype still conveys the essential idea that the alebrijes deal with magic and a fantastic Mexico.

*Coherence* · This logotype is made of an organized series of legible letters, arranged by association between the most representative images and their appropriate letters. In terms of function, the Mexican public recognizes the logotype because of their familiarity with alebrijes.

*Emphasis* · The logotype has color, vitality and energy. It was designed with animal shapes integrated with the letters, decorated with dots and flowers with bright and energetic colors that contrast in a warm/cool combination – yellow for the background and purple for the letters.

*Concepts* · Given the varied audiences for this logotype, it will shift between abstract and concrete, popular and learned, customized and mass-use language based on their knowledge. The Mexico of the alebrijes is abstract, learned and uses mass language. A foreign audience will understand the general idea of fantastical and magical Mexico. A Mexican audience will view it as a concrete, popular and customized language, since they can immediately identify the craft.

#### *Syntactic rhetorical figures*

*Repetition* · The author repeats flowers, dots or stars on the surface of the Mexico alebrije.

#### *Semantic rhetorical figures*

*Personification* · The fantastic animal possesses the word. This imaginary animal also wishes to transform into a butterfly. Here personification is used rather casually as the word *Mexico* is not taking human characteristics but animal shapes.

*Metaphor* · Mexico is replaced by the animal possessing its name and transforming it into something else. Likewise, the alebrije is transformed as part of a new field: the word. Like a

metaphor, a simile compares two things different in most respects, but alike in respect to which the comparison is made. Here the combination of two elements allows a new, more spiritual interpretation of Mexico. Subtleties of language sometimes can't be drawn out easily from words such as *like*, but the simile may be identified more easily when visible language or imagery is used. Metonymy is also included in the transformation of the letter *X* into a butterfly, suggesting the incorporation of different animal sections into one. Most alebrijes have this fusion of elements.

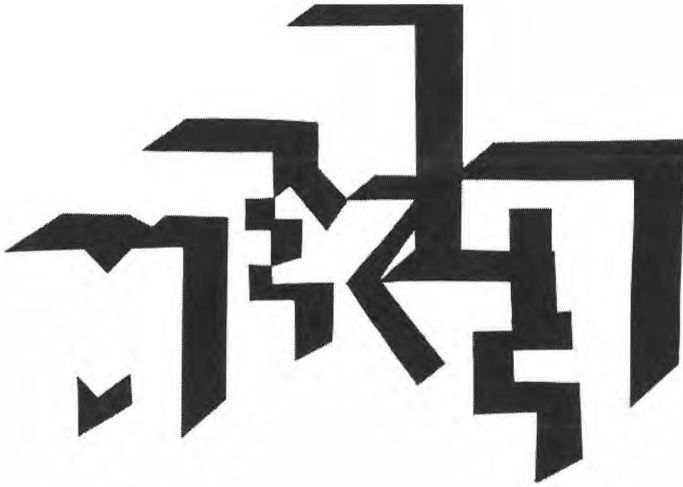
*Denotation and connotation* · These relationships are listed below.

<i>Denoted</i>	<i>Connoted</i>
Decoration	Mexican crafts
Yellow, blue	Mexican colors
Curves / shapes	Mexican baroque
Animal parts	Alebrije
Letter X	Butterfly

Since the whole is much more than the sum of its parts, I would say that the connotation of this logotype as a whole is Mexico as a playful, fantastic and magical country.

## MEXICO OF POLLUTION AND SATURATION

Daniel Naredo, 1994

*Context*

Mexico City is the largest city in the world in terms of population and size, with over twenty-five million people in the metropolitan area. Mexico City, the capital of the Mexican Republic, was founded by the Spaniards in 1521 after the conquest of the Aztec empire. The city was built on the remains of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital that occupied parts of the lake of Texcoco.

Mexico City is the center of the country in geographical, technological, political and economic terms. It has major problems: pollution, overpopulation, traffic and construction. Large sums are spent every year to improve transportation – the subways transports up to eight million people

every day – and highways are built, sometimes sacrificing green space. Despite all this, Mexico City is a fascinating city that keeps alive centuries of history, tradition and culture.

*Analysis*

*Unity* · This logotype contains the necessary elements that transmit the idea of Mexico City's environmental problems: saturation, grayness, concrete, and contamination.

*Coherence* · In terms of coherence or organization, the logotype is readable, with breaks and movements, but it remains recognizable. These breaks are due to the need to express saturation, since the letters do not have space to

easily fit. It also uses association since certain images and ideas talk about life in Mexico City as experienced by outsiders who may be more sensitive to the lack of space and blue sky.

*Emphasis* · The individual expression of the rhythm of the heavy block letters, the cluttered space, and gray dotted areas that simulate concrete constructions and skyscrapers all provide emphasis.

*Concepts* · The scale of concepts applied is abstract, learned and mass language addressing all audiences. It uses concepts like saturation and pollution, which do not have a concrete, popular or precise representation. However, it is also a customized and specific language when a Mexican viewer, who knows the city, can also relate to other abstract characteristics of Mexico City.

*Syntactic rhetorical figures*

*Anastrophe* · The letters move consciously non-linearly on the space to transmit the idea of saturation and collision of elements.

*Repetition* · In order to give unity to the logotype, the same condition of shading, volume and block letters are repeated in each letter of the word.

*Ellipsis* · Ellipsis is also applied because elements are left out: shadows are just part of the whole representation of the letters and the strokes of the letters do not appear.

*Semantic rhetorical figures*

*Simile* · Here the comparison consists of relating gray, saturated and dusty volumes to the letters for *Mexico*. Metaphorically, they say Mexico City is gray, saturated and dusty.

*Metonymy* · The shadows and letter-forms are closely packed and refer to heavy construction and the dense concentration of buildings.

*Denotation and connotation* · These relationships are listed below.

<i>Denoted</i>	<i>Connoted</i>
Letters	Heaviness, volume
Gray	Dusty, contaminated
Movement	Saturation, disorder

## MEXICO OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Tania Vera, 1995

*Context*

December, 1994, produced two terrible headlines in the news: first, the volcano Popocatepetl erupted and nearby cities were covered with ash; and second the peso, Mexico's monetary unit, was considerably devalued – Mexico was falling into one of the worst economic crises of the century. Since then, the news has been quite depressing about economic and political issues and the future's promise, and this situation has radically influenced the humor, expectation and well-being of the Mexican society.

*Analysis*

*Unity* · Mexico of the economic crisis is a very expressive representation of the feeling of the people. It has precise unity: it uses the letters themselves to transmit the idea. It speaks of conflict, of slimming down, of getting together.

*Coherence* · The logotype's elements are legible, and the alternating use of yellow and red reinforces the organization. As in the other examples, associative concepts are used – the author manipulates the shape of the letters to transmit the idea of struggle.

*Emphasis* · The shape of the letters gives a sense of emphasis. Form conveys content, delivering extra meaning to the word *Mexico*. Emphasis is also given by the contrast between foreground and background.

*Concepts* · The logotype uses abstract, learned and mass language. It is abstract because it takes “signs or symbols for relations, ideas and concepts which are not directly sensible” (Hughes, 201). It is learned because the audience needs more information in order to establish these relations. It could be interpreted in ways like *squeezed* or *tied* without addressing a specific situation or audience.

#### *Syntactic rhetorical figures*

*Parenthesis* · In this example, the vertical stroke of letter *M* is used to enclose the rest of the letters. It also has a semantic dimension, since this stroke is communicating as a binding element.

*Repetition* · Repetitive figures are also present because of the alternation of colors and the similarity of shapes.

#### *Semantic rhetorical figures*

*Parable* · Although this word can't represent a whole story, we can nevertheless see a complete narrative: the letters are squeezed and tied in the middle – at the waist. They're struggling to keep their space and their shape, but are pressed into each other. The accent and the dot of the letter *i* “are splashing from the squeezing” of the six letters tied together.

*Satire* · This logotype almost makes fun of Mexico's economic struggle by simplifying it to the extreme.

*Denotation and connotation* · These relationships are listed below.

<i>Denoted</i>	<i>Connoted</i>
Black background	Unknown environment; depression
Inter-letter space	Squeezing
Stem of <i>M</i>	Binding elements
Yellow and red	Still alive

This design recalls a newspaper cartoon in which the government asks a peasant to act more vigorously to reduce expenses. The government states, “It's time to tighten the belt.” The peasant answers, “Oops, I've already eaten it!”

## MEXICO OF THE GOURMETS

Mario Vargas, 1996

*Context*

After the conquest in 1521, Spain left an important heritage to Mexico and other Latin American countries through its language, religion, Occidental customs and traditions. Food is one of the areas of mixture between Spaniards and native Mexicans. The Spanish returned to Europe with things like potatoes, coffee and chocolate, while leaving traditions like sweet fresh bread. Bread can be bought every day, salty and sweet, in different shapes and with decorations; adequate for lunch or breaks, to have with hot chocolate, milk, tea or coffee. Family

dinners typically have a tray with an assortment of sweet breads in the middle of the table.

*Analysis*

*Unity* · Unity is given by the same realistic expression of each of the breads that is repeated in the entire composition. The objective of the message is clear: "Mexico has a multitude of good bread." The letters separate from the background table cloth and cup.

*Conherence* · It is stylistically coherent because it subjectively ties food to the word, relating two different concepts.

There is also a logical coherence because of the iconic representation of the bread and the placement of the logotype with the table cloth and cup.

*Emphasis* · Emphasis is given through this particular and personal way to communicate a positive idea about Mexico's culinary culture.

*Concepts* · This represents the customs and food traditions Mexicans keep regardless of the influx of fast food and technology. This logotype could be considered a concrete, vernacular and customized use of language. It represents the concrete or specific bread production one can find in Mexico. It represents popular knowledge since one can find these products in cities and towns and it is part of the context in which Mexicans are raised. Finally, it is also a customized language because it realistically identifies a local tradition for the Mexican audience.

*Syntactic rhetorical figures*

*Atomization* · While each letter is treated independently as a piece of bread, it does not lose the sense of unity needed to create a word.

*Parallelism* · The structure is given by the bread itself. The letters adjust to these forms and depend on them to transmit the idea.

*Semantic rhetorical figures*

*Metaphor* · Two different ideas without previous relationship are brought together. An unexpected combination of joining a Mexican culinary custom with Mexico creates surprise.

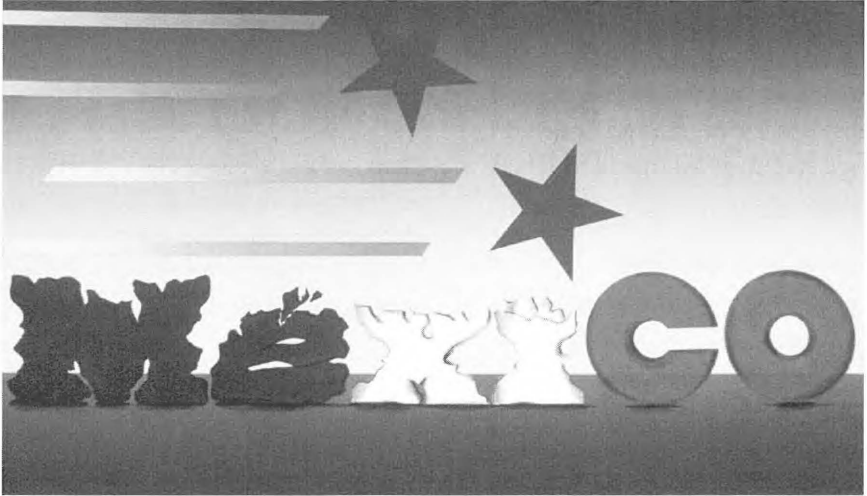
*Denotation and connotation* · These relationships are listed below.

<i>Denoted</i>	<i>Connoted</i>
Bread	Mexican variety/ plenty/hospitality
Jug	Mexican pottery, hot chocolate
Tablecloth	Care and delicacy

All the elements working together suggest an invitation to have some delicious Mexican bread with a hot drink in a warm setting. The highly iconic representation, along with the use of a color-pencil drawing supports this rather antique setting.

## MEXICO OF THE NAFTA AGREEMENT

María Luisa Ramírez, 1996

*Context*

In 1993 Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the former president of Mexico, signed the NAFTA agreement with the United States and Canada. This measure was criticized by some and celebrated by others. One of the most acute criticisms dealt with the idea that Mexico was not prepared for such a commercial relationship: many small enterprises were destroyed by the competition, and many others did not have the time to modernize and prepare for such competition. On the other hand, it was well received by productive sectors that were interested in exporting products and services.

*Analysis*

*Unity* · Unity is attained by letters that keep the same style. The work fulfills the function of legibility and it presents its message by referring to the impact of the United States on Mexico.

*Coherence* · Coherence is shown with the association of subjective ideas and images: stars and stripes in motion and burnt or broken letters affected by the passing of the previous elements. Another type of coherence is exemplified relating to chronological order. It could be said that the stars in motion are in a certain stage that continues to the end of the message which in its entirety is located in an environment.

*Emphasis* · Emphasis is given in the form of the letters and the additional elements of stars and stripes.

*Concepts* · The concepts applied here are abstract, learned and mass language for the varied audiences. The abstract concepts are the ideas related to NAFTA – they need to be learned and understood. The logotype uses a mass language because of its broad meaning.

#### *Syntactic rhetorical figures*

*Parenthesis* · The stripes and lines are the active elements that explain the project. They function both syntactically and semantically as the ground in a figure/ground relationship and semantically referring to the U.S. flag.

*Ellipsis* · Two stars and three stripes are sufficient to suggest the U.S. flag, the rest is completed by the audience.

#### *Semantic rhetorical figures*

*Gradation* · Gradation means organizing in an ascending order. Here we see a form of gradation because the stars seem to move with accelerating speed.

*Hyperbole* · The stars and stripes, following a definite movement from left to right, leave broken letters as they pass. From this we can deduce that

American strength has destroyed part of Mexico.

*Metaphor* · In this project two ideas are represented: the word *Mexico* and the United States flag. The result of this combination is the image of Mexico suffering from the dynamism of the United States.

*Satire* · The exaggeration of the elements and their meaning is directed to blame the government for its economic decisions taken in favor of the NAFTA agreement.

*Synecdoche* · The stripes and stars represent the United States.

*Denotation and connotation* · These relationships are listed below.

<i>Denoted</i>	<i>Connoted</i>
Burnt letters	Devastated Mexico
Round letters	Still-healthy Mexico
Stripes and stars	Movement and energy of the U.S.
Colors	Related to each country

The connotation of the whole logotype is that Mexico is losing its stability and is being weakened by the impetus, energy, dynamism of its neighbor to the north.

## CONCLUSIONS

The importance of the social role of graphic design can be seen in these logotypes. The understanding of the message, translation of the information into graphic form, Mexican background and the designers' individual interpretations of the design problem are combined into a whole that gives a perspective of the country.

It should be mentioned that visual language has difficulty with the subtleties that can be identified in writing. Gombrich said, "We shall see that the visual image is supreme in its capacity for arousal, that its use for expressive purposes is problematic, and that unaided it altogether lacks the possibility of matching the statement function of language" (Gombrich, 2).

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