

This special issue of *Visible Language* is part wake-up call to those involved in communication and education and part experiment. Resuscitating rhetoric is the goal of the first article by Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl. This is the wake-up call. She argues, along with various experts in rhetorical history, psychology and education, that scientific fact is not sufficient to solve many of the complex issues facing the human community. In this regard, rhetoric can serve as a means to open issues that will require examination and debate, and which will lead to some form of judgment and action. Considering rhetoric as a visual tool is yet another dimension of this article, along with establishing the role that rhetorical thinking and development can play in not only communication design, but in design in the broadest sense. Here the author examines design as a projection of a future state whose realization requires human agency. The specifically rhetorical presentation is the prototype or the tentative physical model of the future object and/or event. This prototype enlarges discussion among the interested parties and enhances their ability to think through its implications, thereby improving the decision making process.

The experimental section follows in the form of articles analyzing rhetorical use in various Mexican communications. Because rhetoric is an aid to interpretation and meaning it may also serve as an aid to seeing and understanding cultural difference in communication. As products and communications flow more easily between cultures, we run the risk of either homogenizing all culture into some international hybrid or viewing another culture's products as some combination of quaint, mysterious or backward.

Building analytically from Gui Bonsiepe's list of rhetorical figures (see page 224), each author in the next four articles examines particular communications with a view to

identifying rhetorical use. Rhetoric was not used generatively in the creation of these communications. In at least one case, that of the pre-Columbian stamps, the design was created without any contact with ideas of rhetoric. In the other examples, the creators were not naive, but were also not working consciously within a rhetorical frame. In a sense the rhetorical patterns survive despite being denigrated and nevertheless are present as forceful templates for communication. We might ask if some cultures use certain rhetorical figures more prominently than others. We might speculate if these patterns are universal within the human community. We might question if there is a cognitive relationship between modes of thinking and rhetorical use. But these questions go far beyond what is attempted here.

Moving into the specifics of this experimental section, the second article by Alejandro Brizuela analyzes his own artist's book, a retelling of the Nahuatl origin myth. In the basic Mesoamerican myth, gods sacrifice themselves in order to create the world. The mission of humankind is to preserve universal life, including their own, by feeding the gods with a divine substance – blood. Octavio Paz locates the power of this belief for us:

To rob the Mexican gods of their awesome and horrible nature, as our art criticism sometimes tries to do, is tantamount to subjecting them to a double amputation: as creations of religious genius and as works of art. Every divinity is tremendous, every god is a source of horror. And the gods of the ancient Mexicans possess a charge of sacred energy that can be adequately described only as fulminating. That is why they fascinate us.¹

Brizuela's presentation of the Nahuatl origin myth transcends its local culture and time and reminds us of powers not yet conquered, of cycles beyond human memory.

The third article by Claudia Navarro Tapia examines the artistry of pre-Columbian stamps depicting snakes and birds. These enigmatic creatures are distinctly portrayed with economy and high energy, referencing their life cycle, power and transcendent significance.

The fourth article analyzes student work – the design of logotypes. Within this abbreviated visual/typographic

¹ Paz, Octavio. 1987. *Essays on Mexican Art*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 53.

form, Mária González de Cosío gave her students the problem of creating a meaningful identity for Mexico. Each student identified a particular historic or political context in which to locate the work, thus enriching and rendering a particular vision of their country. Writing about Mayan art, Paz examines its metaphorical transformations:

[That] Mayan art amazes me lies in its transformation of literal realism into an object that is a metaphor, a palpable symbol. Image-signs, without ceasing to be signs, become altogether one with the forms that express them and even with the material itself. Nuptials of the real and the symbolic in a single object. The conch shell that I mentioned is a notable example. Its practical function is to be a trumpet, probably used in a self-sacrifice ceremony. But the conch shell trumpet turns into a god, the god into a scream, and the scream into a face. Not only are we offered the crystallization of an idea in a material object, but the fusion of the two is a genuine metaphor, not a verbal but a sensory one. The idea is transformed into matter: a form that, when we touch it, turns into a thought, a thought that we can stroke and make resound.²

A more complex analytical framework is used to describe and reveal the inner workings of the logotypes. The framework includes: unity, coherence and emphasis; what is denoted and what is connoted; a consideration of contextual knowledge on the part of the viewer/reader; and an identification of which rhetorical devices are in play.

Money, that most abstract medium of exchange, is the subject of the final article by Martha Salazar. While the security dimensions of money are fairly universal, with each nation preserving its autonomous wealth through nearly invisible, ever-evolving technological devices, what a nation chooses to reify in their currency is revealing. This article examines the peso and its multicultural celebration of Mexico's history.

Mexico's complex cultural identity reveals itself in many ways in these articles. Returning to rhetoric as both a mode of thought and presentation, this special issue suggests that we cannot escape rhetoric; in fact, we should embrace it for its considerable deliberative possibilities.

² Paz, *Essays on Mexican Art*, 77.