



01 Visible Language in Transition

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ABSTRACT

: *Visible Language* evolves into its third generation
: with a new editor (Mike Zender) and a new institutional
: support (University of Cincinnati). Transitions across the
: two completed generations and plans and expectations
: for the third are explored. Forty-six years of continuous
: publication are celebrated.

> It is singularly appropriate for a design journal to experience transition. Donald Schön (1983) defined design as a profession that stimulates transition: from existing to preferred states. How could a journal supporting design transformation not itself change as it seeks to facilitate the growth of knowledge in a change-oriented profession?

Visible Language has been published continuously for forty-six years—this is a small miracle in scholarly publishing, particularly when the scholarship deals with design of communications. The first editor and founder, Merald Wrolstad, provided twenty years of guidance, bringing the journal through a name change, from *Journal of Typographic Research* to *Visible Language*, with a focus on reading and writing, the processing of visible language (reading) and its construction (written language, calligraphy, type design, typography, diagrams, etc.).

The second editor provided twenty-six years of guidance and brought the journal into the digital age; broadening its mission to include digital communications with their more fluid, relational presentations, structural concerns regarding interface and interaction, an interest in communication in terms of contemporary issues like bilingualism, cultural difference, globalization, teaching and learning design, and research in all its formal and informal modes.

During this time, the Rhode Island School of Design provided a physical home for the journal, while the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology provided early and continuous web access for the journal and its participants on their servers. The support of both these institutions was deeply valued. The Advisory Board, who reviewed articles, offered advice and occasionally guest edited issues, were the substantial backbone of the journal. Many people as authors, designers, consultants, reviewers and critics supported the idea that design could and should support dissemination of information that went beyond what a trade magazine supplied. In terms of the second editor, this was about building a discipline through research and various forms of scholarship; it sought to bridge the gap between science and art. It was inclusive regarding international participants, recognizing that research in design is a vital part of many cultures. A cursory count over the past ten years of authors' national identities demonstrated that American and foreign authors were almost evenly divided.

Some of the special issues that show the range of journal interest and gave the second editor special pleasure were:

36.2 AN ANNOTATED DESIGN RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY: BY AND FOR THE DESIGN COMMUNITY

This was a resource in which many designers and educators contributed books with a brief commentary on their importance. That the issue sold out is a testament to its contribution and the design community's interest. Five PhD students were the guest editors.

36.3 & 37.1 RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN

Doctoral investigations often languish without reaching either education or practitioner cultures. In these two issues, research accomplishments were featured.

37.3 INSTRUCTION AND PROVOCATION, OR RELEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS.

Guest edited by Michael Golec and Aron Vinegar, the famous Venturi book *Learning from Las Vegas* received another look demonstrating that it still resonates within the design community.

38.1 CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN

This issue paired the most dissimilar articles, the Mixtec screenfolds from the distant past and from the present a visual analysis of user interface using Gert Hofstede's cultural model on international web advertising for major international corporations.

41.3 VISUAL METAPHORS IN USER SUPPORT

Guest edited by Karel van der Waarde and Piet Westendorp, the role of metaphors in communication, particularly as they guide user performance through abstraction or similarity was the focus. Some of the topics were, for example, the passage of time, a healthful diet or textual movement.

43.2/3 & 44.1 COMMUNICATION DESIGN FAILURES

Guest edited by Sharon Poggenpohl and Dietmar R. Winkler, various kinds of failure were featured in the belief that a critical examination of design performance and aesthetics is necessary to the advancement of the profession and should be part of critical learning. The failures under examination were diverse: the control room at Three Mile Island, temporary signage and prescription medicine information.

of teaching and practicing design, brings a strong interest in advancing design through research. He has written papers on his collaborative research that focuses on making medical information more accessible for medical researchers and practitioners. Two of these papers were presented in this journal (Zender, 2006, 2007). The first article came at the start of what has become a years-long research program in symbol design. Describing a research study funded by Procter and Gamble to communicate product attributes without words, it quickly became apparent that the study of icons, pictograms and symbols had importance well beyond any commercial function and was strategic for understanding visible language. Mike's subsequent articles have explored various aspects of symbol design and issues of design research. A new paper is included in this volume.

The University of Cincinnati, with its long history of cooperative education that joins academic learning to professional exposure and experience in the world, provides a platform in which research may transfer into practice and application; weaving together what have typically remained separate endeavors. Experiential learning in general, and co-op in particular, harnesses the idea that we form important kinds of disciplinary knowledge through the dynamic interaction of research, theory and practice. In medicine this has been called from bench to bed, referring to the flow of ideas from the laboratory bench to the hospital room and indeed into the patient's bedroom, then back into the lab. In design education a co-op system follows a similar path: from research and theoretical exploration in the academy, students go out to put theory into practice in design firms and organizations, then return to school with knowledge from the field. This cooperative educational model parallels the design process itself where concepts (theories for how to solve a problem) are prototyped (put into practice), tested (evaluative research) and deployed (put into practice). Coexistent with the co-op system, the University of Cincinnati is a large research one institution with over \$400 million in annual research funding and is also a complete academic enterprise with an academic medical center. This thriving home of research and practice now houses *Visible Language*.

As the journal changes editor and location it transitions to sharper focus on research in visual communication. True to its name, *Visible Language* will continue to explore all things typographic and literate, while also true to its name



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl has taught in notable design programs: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, and the Rhode Island School of Design. Her focus over a long career has been post-graduate design education, both master and Ph.D., as well as design research. Taking a human-centered position with regard to design, she teaches to help students humanize technology, to learn to work creatively and collaboratively with each other, and to prepare them to contribute to building a body of design knowledge. For twenty-six years, she edited and published the international scholarly journal Visible Language. She co-edited with Keiichi Sato Design Integrations, Research and Collaboration (Intellect Books, 2009). Currently, she is working on a book tentatively titled Design Theory-to-go, while teaching occasionally in Hong Kong.