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Designing Philosophy

/ David Sless

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Abstract

Drawing on the everyday experience of collaborative design, and using ordinary language, I examine the nature of design practices and rules, how they come about, and how we use them.

I offer some arguments to suggest that our conventional ways of thinking about rules are wrong. I conclude by arguing that the practice of designing and doing philosophy are merging, opening up exciting new possibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

I am writing this essay on designing philosophy for fellow designers, in the belief that it may offer some useful insights into our everyday practice. I am also writing it conscious of a design tradition in which elegance, simplicity, truth to materials, function and above all a deep respect for people and the environment are at the core of what we do as designers.

I take philosophy to be something one does in order to help oneself and others make sense of everyday life. For me it is also an extension of what I do in my daily practice as an information designer: making information accessible and usable to people so that it makes sense to them.

In this essay I am offering what I hope will be accessible and usable design philosophy that will make sense to fellow designers, which will improve our capacity to think about the everyday matters we deal with, and which will be a contribution to a design tradition. In particular, this essay concerns the rules we designers use to guide our practice.

In taking this approach to doing philosophy, I am following the injunction of Ludwig Wittgenstein when he wrote to his friend Norman Malcolm (1984, p.93) saying:

... what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life.

I will also be following Wittgenstein's approach to dealing with philosophical matters through ordinary language and using some of his methods of argument, supplemented with some information design methods of problem solving that emerge out of contemporary information design practice.

AT ODDS WITH THE MAINSTREAM

My approach to doing philosophy puts me at odds with the mainstream 'academic turn' in philosophy, to use Saarinen and Uschanov's apt phrase (1998).

With some notable exceptions like Russell, Wittgenstein and Sartre, the history of philosophy in the twentieth century has exclusively been the history of university philosophy. ... It seems to us that the key turn in philosophy this century has not been the linguistic turn, nor the epistemological turn, nor the logical or formalistic turn, but the academic turn.

It also puts me at odds with the mainstream academic design research community which has recently turned its attention to design philosophy: one whole issue of the *Design Studies* was devoted to the subject in 2002; a new publishing venture *Design Philosophy Papers* was launched on the Internet in 2003 (<http://www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/home.html>); the recent Design Research Society Conference Common Ground had a stream devoted to the topic; and the PhD design list (<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/phd-design.html>) has had a number of discussion threads about design philosophy.

Even though I have participated in some of this activity and read with great interest many of the contributions, like many practicing designers I find much of this corpus disconnected from my everyday practice and difficult to use as a basis for improving my capacity to think about the everyday matters that I deal with. This may, of course, be my fault. No doubt, there will be those who will delight in pointing this out to me.

Nonetheless, from where I view the 'academic turn' in design philosophy, it goes against my designerly sense of elegance, simplicity and respect for the

user: in this case those of us who try to read this writing in search of insight. But rather than offer a critique of its modes and manners, I prefer to engage in something constructive using the ordinary language available to us. I offer some thoughts on what we do as designers and I explore how we might use that language productively in the future to extend our design work.

I think it is premature to join the academic turn's eager embrace of abstractions. At the very least, we need to exhaust the ordinary everyday usages at our disposal before we deem them inadequate and create new usages, new words; time enough to embrace specialist terms and jargon, but only when absolutely necessary and without rushing to embrace academic discourse. If we are to create neologisms and specialist terms, then let us apply the same sensibility to such language as we have applied to the design of books and chairs, instead of following the halting attempts of academics. Moreover, if designing is to be genuinely participatory and involving of both professional and lay people as our designers, then we have some obligation to conduct our conversations in language that is widely shared and even enjoyed.

However, before we can do so, we need to free ourselves of intellectual shackles—ways of thinking and methods that still dominate most of the academic research and lay thinking into the nature of rules.

THE BLOCKED ROAD

Semantics, syntactics and pragmatics

In the last century, three categories—semantics, syntactics and pragmatics—were used extensively as a way of dealing with different aspects of rules, particularly as applied to language.

One of the clearest and most accessible definitions of these three terms is to be found in a slim volume by Charles Morris, published in 1938: *Foundations of*

the Theory of Signs. In this volume, one of the seminal texts in linguistics, Morris articulated the framework through which most of the research and thinking in linguistics, computer science, information design and many other social phenomena involving rules were studied in the 20th century. Each of these key terms—semantics, syntactics and pragmatics—have been used to describe a particular aspect of language. To paraphrase Morris's definitions: semantics is concerned with the relation between words and the things they stand for or represent, what we think of in popular discourse as the meanings of words; syntactics is concerned with the relations between words, what in popular terms we refer to as grammar; and pragmatics is concerned with the relation between words and their users, what in popular terms we would describe as speech or reading.

These three types of relationships—and it is extremely important to see these terms as defining relationships—not objects—are generally accepted as covering the range and scope within which we can study rules, whether linguistic, or, as in my own case of information design, the hybrid yet indivisible combination of language and graphics.

In Morris's formulation and in most other theoretical treatments of the subject, the three types of relationship are treated as having the same status, the same right to existence under the sun. They are treated as three aspects of language, but seen through different approaches and methods. However, in practice semantics and syntactics are treated as more important. The argument, broadly put, is that the way we use language (pragmatics) is determined by what words mean (semantics) and by the grammatical rules we apply to putting the words together (syntactics). That is, pragmatics is secondary to, and dependent on, semantics and syntactics.

The arguments I present here totally upend this view. Pragmatics, I will

argue, is not only more important than the other two, but semantics and syntactics have no existence outside of pragmatics. Indeed, I suggest that any semantic or syntactic analysis is a pragmatic invention. Far from being real and valid subjects in their own right, I argue that semantics and syntactics are generated, constructed through pragmatics. This upending has profound practical implications for design.

WHY PRAGMATICS RULES

The arguments in favor of my thesis must stand up against one powerful proposition of classical linguistics which sustains the superior ontological status of semantics and syntactics: namely that there are fundamental rules underlying usage. Certainly, observations of people and societies point to many areas of consistent usage, whether in language, graphics or other communicative forms. It is argued that this observed consistency must be the product of an underlying rationale or process. The proposition that my arguments have to counter is that semantic and syntactic studies open up for scrutiny this underlying rationale.

I offer three arguments against this central proposition of classical linguistics and three observations.

Three Arguments

1. Neither semantic nor syntactic properties of language are observable in themselves. We only have 'access' to these properties through instances of language use. To use the terminology of theories in this area: we can only study competence through performance; we can only study *langue* through *parole*; we can only study cognition through

behavior; we can only study the unconscious through conversation; and so on. The object of study is never observed, always inferred.

2. Within any theory of semantic or syntactic structuring or rules we also need a theory that explains how these structures or rules determine behavior (or action depending on your theoretical preferences). Such styles of thinking resonate well with dualist philosophical claims about the links between mind and body, spirit and action. And they suffer from the same logical flaws and *reductio ad absurdum*.

3. Any theory that presupposes underlying rules that powerfully determine behavior or action must also account for our daily encounter with aberrant behavior and changes in consistent usage. Why do people break so-called ‘underlying rules,’ rules that are supposed to determine their actions? How do people invent new ways of acting consistently, supposedly changing the underlying rules? Again, these are not new questions and are similar to other earlier challenges to functionalist thinking.

The classic tactic in defense of ‘underlying rules’ is endless elaboration: every exception creates a new rule. But the deployment of this tactic exposes a costly aspect of sustaining a belief in the existence of semantic and syntactic features of language. This belief requires elaborate and costly academic institutional frameworks within which to sustain the endless elaboration. Faith is, as ever,

greatly demanding of individual and collective effort. Yet despite the effort deployed in order to ‘create’ the impression of a body of knowledge there are three repeated observations made by researchers that bedevil attempts to turn these so called ‘fields of study’ into useful bodies of knowledge.

Three observations

1. **None of the theories** that fall into this broad church—from psychoanalysis to transformational grammar and cognitive science—are predictive of peoples’ behavior or actions. In their defense we are given two explanations. First, these are young sciences and we need more research. Second, these are theories of interpretation or hermeneutics, ways of understanding that enrich our world. The first explanation must await the verdict of time, but the second one is disingenuous; it may be true, but such theories derive much of their rhetorical force from the implicit and sometimes explicit claim that they actually explain human conduct. Plausible *post-factum* ‘explanation’ is good story telling, no more nor less. But it is not a useful body of knowledge in any scientific sense.

2. **More damningly**, if one is concerned about rigor, these theories offer no methods of proof that enable us to distinguish between discovery and invention. A typical feature of such theories is that they offer a dense and multi-variable complex explanation of human action, far more dense and complex than the phenomenon they seek to account for. In

simple terms, they always present us with more unknowns than knowns. As most high school students learn: to solve a set of equations containing unknowns, you always need the same number of equations as unknowns. It doesn't matter how many equations you have, how elaborate or complex they are; 100 equations and 100 unknowns can be resolved, 100 equations and 101 unknowns cannot. Behind the wealth of elaboration and scholarship, there is at best an unresolvable uncertainty and at worst, nothing to resolve.

3. **Most compellingly**, however, is a simple fact that many of us have 'discovered' in design when we test our design with people: namely the best predictor of future action is previous action, not an appeal to underlying reasons or causes. It is for this reason that our work in information design always involves testing designs with those who use them (Fisher & Sless, 1990; Sless, 1992).

On the basis of the three arguments I have offered and the three observations I have just made, I want to assert my thesis that pragmatics is at the very least ontologically superior, and probably all we have, all else being invention and good story telling.

We can take a much simpler view of the consistent usage in language than that offered by appeal to the abstractions of semantics and syntactics. Simply, consistent usage occurs because it works. There is a simple and compelling utility in consistency. If we learn the rules, we can take part in the game. One needs no greater depth of explanation.

RULES

Preliminary points

Some important points are in order before my main discussion on rules.

First, I am talking here about human action—things people do. I am not talking about behavior—responses to stimuli. My interest is in what people do in the world, not what causes human behavior.

Second, such simplification or deflation of arguments is not the same as reductionism. I am not reducing something complex to its simpler constituents and thereby losing a holistic view. Rather, I am suggesting that the complexity does not exist in the phenomenon itself. It is an unnecessary human invention—an inflationary form of thinking that results in ever more elaborate and complex schemes to ‘explain’ something that does not need explanation.

Third, I would suggest that the inflationary tendency in design is most apparent in academic design research. This may have something to do with the current political economy of the academic world. One is more likely to get research funding for studying something complex rather than something simple. Reductionism may be out of favor in the academy, but inflationism is in.

My preference is for synthesis and, where possible, radical simplification.

I want to say something general about such rules—what they are and how we might productively apply our current insights about them to the long-term intellectual development of our design practice. To do so I turn to the philosophy of language. Language is the most sophisticated and well developed social practice for which we have articulated rules; and it is also the area of social practice that has been most rigorously and imaginatively explored by philosophers, particularly in the last century.

In Wittgenstein's footsteps

In developing what I have to say about rules, I am drawing heavily on Ludwig Wittgenstein's seminal contribution to the philosophy of language in the 20th century. I cannot point to a single text in which the reader might find the exact point of reference on which I am drawing. Wittgenstein never resolved or finished his work. He constantly revised his thinking. Moreover, Wittgenstein's work is impossible to just dip into and get much sense out of a single quotation or even a collection of such quotations. Only through a careful reading of the progression of his thinking and knowing the background to his thinking—the philosophical ideas or arguments with which he was disagreeing or agreeing—can one make sense of his work. This makes his work difficult to access and probably impossible without the necessary background.

For the general reader, the excellent biography by Ray Monk (1991) may be illuminating. For the more technically-minded reader, with a knowledge of the philosophy of language, José Medina's excellent analysis of the development of Wittgenstein's thoughts on rules would be useful (Medina, 2002).

For me, the most inspiring of Wittgenstein's writing is his later work; in particular I am drawn to the insights in the collection of fragments that made up his final work, *On Certainty* (1969). In particular, I am drawing on Wittgen-

stein's method of arguing. Happily, it is possible to articulate those methods of arguing in ordinary language, without reference to the technicalities of philosophical debate from which they emerged.

Wittgenstein uses two relatively simple methods in his later work.

First, when faced with a question about the meaning of a word or phrase, he exhorts us repeatedly to look at ordinary usage of that word or phrase. Wittgenstein was interested in the words and phrases used by the philosophers of his time; words such as 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'certainty,' 'logic' and so on. He argued, and repeatedly demonstrated, that by looking at ordinary usage, many abstract philosophical ideas, like those mentioned above, just dissolve. Moreover, he argues that such terms only make sense in philosophical arguments when they are taken out of any specific context of use—and this results in an unproductive spiral of abstraction.

Second, when faced with questions about the articulated rules of usage—grammar, logic, syntax, codes of practice—he exhorts us to look at the community of users and their shared practices. Wittgenstein's principle preoccupation was with the articulated rules of logic, mathematics and language. In his earlier work he took the view that underlying all language use was logic. He came to doubt this and later considered it a mistaken view. In his later work he argues that the rules of logic or mathematics, or any other

activity for which one could articulate a set of rules, could be seen as rule-following practices agreed by a community of practitioners. Thus the rule in mathematics that says that $2 + 2 = 4$ is not an expression of some fundamental universal truth, but rather an agreed rule of practice by mathematicians. This makes the rules of mathematics on a par with say, the rules for playing chess—human inventions that are useful in a particular context. They only have their ‘fundamental’ properties within that context. Taken out of context, such rules are empty unproductive spirals of abstraction.

These two simple methods—looking at usage and looking at the context of usage—resonate well with designing. This is, after all, what contemporary designers try to do! Moreover it provides an important *raison d’être* for the practice of designing collaboratively. I believe it also provides a basis on which we can extend the insights that design philosophy can offer our everyday practices.

Where do rules come from?

The fact that one can teach rules and maintain the stability of their usage over a period of time has an unfortunate side effect with which Wittgenstein wrestled in his philosophical arguments. Because the rules can seemingly stand apart from the actual practice they articulate, they seem to have an independent existence. This has led many people to think of rules as not only separate from practice, but in some respect superior to practice. After all, once articulated, rules are followed and this makes it seem that the rules are the

more important of the two.

As I have already suggested, this type of thinking has led many to believe that syntactics and semantics are in some sense more important than pragmatics. But this cannot be the case, as I will demonstrate below. Wittgenstein brings us back to earth. With these thoughts in mind, I shall proceed to look at some of our ordinary usages and the rules they give rise to.

Over millennia of social practices, people have developed many shared ways of doing things, across many aspects of our lives. We invent new practices all the time: some lapse, others persist. As designers, we learn to follow agreed ways of doing a large amount of what we do. Aesthetics, styling, composition, layout and presentation are all designerly concerns that draw on established ways of doing things. At the same time, we create new ways of doing things—new styles or arrangements. Sometimes we create new ways of doing things that extend existing practices. At times we create totally new practices that undermine and negate previously agreed ways of doing things.

These agreed designerly ways of doing things—social practices that persist—are sometimes investigated and then articulated as rules. A rule, as I use the term here, is an agreed social practice that has been articulated. In other words, rules follow practice; practice does not follow rules.

This process of investigation and articulation has been called by Frayling (2002) the ‘Normative Tradition of design research’—a tradition that was the heartland of design research in the 19th century. Frayling also comments that research into these types of rules “in the digital age, is making a comeback” (2002, p. 5).

I’m not so sure it has ever gone away. Those of us involved in information design research still regard it as the heartland, with many important contributions to this type of research in the last century and continuing into this

(Engelhardt, 2002; Horn, 1998; Neurath, 1936; Richards, 1984; Twyman, 1979; Waller, 1987).

In typographic design, as an example, there are many articulated rules: how much space to allow between sentences, how to indicate the start of a new paragraph, when to use bold, italics, caps, small caps and many others. These rules have been articulated in style manuals and they provide prescriptive rules of typographical layout (Walker, 2001).

Once a rule has been articulated, we can use it as a basis for guiding action. In that context we can say that rules precede and guide action. Indeed, we say that people follow rules.

But rules can only be followed once they have been articulated. As an example, the publishers of this journal issue a style guide to authors. This is a set of rules about how we should set out paragraphs, headings, references and so on—a design guide. In writing this paper, I try to follow this design guide. This is much easier than my sending in a manuscript and receiving it back from the editor full of corrections because I have not conformed to the editor's normal way of doing things. Our human capacity to make articulated rules available to each other is very powerful: it enables us to teach others a particular social practice and, of course, enables us to maintain that practice over a period of time.

Rules, therefore, are human inventions that follow practice. Rules are how we 'explain' practice to each other and they arise out of our desire to explain to others what we do. The great power of rules is that they enable people to share common practices by means other than laborious trial and error and copying.

Research by design

These practices and their articulated rules can only be researched and devel-

oped through actually doing design. This type of research emerges out of practice, largely outside the academy. Professional and lay designers, in collaboration with those who use the designs, develop newly shared practices. In the case of information design it occurs in the collaborative struggle to make sense out of emerging communicative opportunities, like email and the World Wide Web.

Such research, which later gets articulated into rules, is one way in which both experts and laypeople make contributions to our collective knowledge. It is collaborative designing at work. It is only when researchers try to articulate it as a set of rules, such as the studies mentioned above, or it takes on a prescriptive form, such as a publisher's style guide, that it finds its way into the academy. By that time, however, the practices have been largely developed and agreed. Of necessity, most of the serious consideration of precedents, trial and error, experimentation and refinement takes place through the everyday practice of trying to make things work in the world. In other words, it is, as Frayling describes it, 'research by design' (Frayling, 1993). For those who assert that (Friedman, 2002) "[s]o far, the category of research by design has proven fruitless," I suggest they take a long and careful look at this ancient and still practiced form of design research.

In information design (my own field) there is a vast, though scattered, body of practice for which rules of usage have been articulated. Some of this body of articulated rules is used in the education of graphic designers, technical illustrators, map makers, statisticians, architects, photographers, editors and writers. Doubtless, practicing designers in other areas can point to a similar corpus, as could many other professionals who have developed regular practices which have been articulated as rules.

FROM LANGUAGE TO DESIGN

I want to suggest that ordinary language activity and its rules on the one hand, and design and its rules on the other hand, are different manifestations of the same thing. I am therefore extending Wittgenstein's insights on language into design.

Wittgenstein's preoccupation was with ordinary language conversation and what makes sense to people engaged in such conversations. Language, like other artifacts, is something we have made collaboratively with others over millennia. Indeed, one could argue that language is the most ancient and sophisticated ongoing collaborative design project that people have ever undertaken. It is constantly being tested, refined and changed to meet user needs; its features get discarded or added depending on user needs. I find the idea of language as prototypically a collaborative design project compelling.

Designing for me as an information designer is about making artifacts collaboratively. We designers not only invent new practices—new usages of the material and symbolic worlds—through the creation of new objects and symbols—but we also codify some of what we invent into rules so that others can take part in the new practices.

If the arguments I have developed above, following Wittgenstein, are sound, then design rules are, like language rules, something which people articulate as a result of actual usage—through design. Design rules, like language rules, are not the result of logic or underlying causes; rather, they are constructed, after the event, from usage; rules are our way of articulating agreed social practices. They do not exist prior to usage, they only come into existence following usage. They are, in fact, inventions rather than discoveries. Designers invent rules in order to give coherence to practice.

LIBERATING RESPONSIBLE DESIGNERS

The cumulative consequences of these arguments are enormously liberating for designers, but with the addition of some important responsibilities. As designers we are relieved of a great burden of explanation. We do not have to provide a logical or causal explanation for the practices we invent, nor the rules we articulate to share those practices with others.

None of this argument should be used to suggest that designers are in some sense free from taking account of the material, psychological, social, economic and environmental conditions in which they work and in which their designs will be used. On the contrary, these are and always have been important and legitimate concerns of anyone who wants to engage in responsible design practice. But I would distinguish between the factors that designers should properly take account of in the scoping stage of a project and the creation of new social practices which is at the heart of the design process, that do not have their basis in either logic or causation.

However, the argument does suggest that as designers we do not have to legitimize the practices we invent in terms of psychological, social, cultural, material causes or in terms of logical coherence. Rather, we can invent practices and see where they take us. This is, of course, liberating, yet with that liberation comes a new responsibility. As there is no basis in either logic or science to the practices we invent, we cannot appeal to those traditions to legitimize our inventions.

If we, as designers, wish to legitimize the inventions we create, we—the designers—have to provide the evidence in their support.

For example, we cannot claim that our designs will work because we have followed a logical process to arrive at a solution. Following a logical process may be valuable to us in organizing our activity and bringing some order into

a complex incoherent problem domain, but in itself it offers no guarantee that the resulting design will work. Formal methods will always have only a limited role in design problem solving, whether those formal methods have their basis in logic or any other already articulated rules. Rules have a special place in human affairs: they can be followed, changed, broken, ignored, even subverted; people can invent new practices or choose to ignore existing ones.

The same applies to the application of scientific knowledge. For example, we could not claim that our design will be usable because we have taken account of human factors research findings. Nor could we claim that our designs will be environmentally appropriate if we take environmental issues into account.

Such formal methods or scientific knowledge may be valuable in narrowing the range of potential problems that a new design might create. Indeed, it can be argued that any responsible professional designer should take account of these and any other factors that might affect the quality of what we create. But, in themselves, neither formal methods nor scientific knowledge offer a guarantee or evidence that a new design will work, will be usable or will be environmentally appropriate. The onus of proof—providing the evidence—rests squarely on designers' shoulders.

Such a conclusion may not be welcomed by those who pin their hopes for the future of design as 'science or technology' in which taking account of other people's knowledge will result in successful design. This I take to be the core of Friedman's recent bold claim (2002, p.10): "Design is of necessity in transition from art and craft practice to a form of technical and social science focused on how to do things to accomplish goals."

Friedman is, of course, not the first to make such a claim. David Jonassen (1982, p.x), for example, made a similar claim twenty years ago in the field of text design: "...a scientific approach to text design...exists as a counterpoint to

the artistic and unsystematic approach to text design and layout that has prevailed since petroglyphs were first inscribed on walls.”

Interestingly, what many of us in text design have been taught, through practice, is that the ‘prescientific’ approach to text design and layout was far from ‘unsystematic’ and that ‘artistic’ contributions to our knowledge and practice are at the heart of what we most value. The fact that little if any of this taught know-how, we internalize through experience, finds its way into the ‘scientific research’ literature, makes it no less real nor less valuable.

Undoubtedly, claims about the superiority of science and technology over art and craft will continue. But we should resist them; they undervalue the importance of rules as discussed here to which the arts and crafts have made, and continue to make, significant contributions. Indeed, if one is playing the futurology game, one could easily argue the contrary case, saying that design is ‘of necessity’ in transition from technical and social science to art and craft practices. I prefer a much more ecumenical approach. Moreover, my concern here is not with the future but rather with what we are doing now and how we should make sense of that to each other.

My conclusion about the need for evidence is also unlikely to be welcomed by those who rely on the normative tradition of ‘established’ rules as a defense of contemporary practice. This is not an argument for ignoring or dismissing established rules, far from it. Such rules are the bedrock of contemporary practice. We learn our craft as designers by learning these rules and we pass on what we learn through them. However, through practice, we continually find new circumstances not covered by existing rules and in some instances we create new practices that we then articulate as rules.

Whether or not the new practice and its articulated rules are actually usable or appropriate, however, is not something that we can determine in advance

of their application. Only evidence of successful application can enable us to assert that a design using a new practice will work.

Neither the application of scientific knowledge nor the observance of established rules allows us to escape the need for designerly evidence to establish a claim about whether a particular design works or not.

This is a very practical matter concerning our everyday practice. Part of what we do every day is to seek ways to legitimize the value of what we do. If we don't provide evidence that shows the value of design know-how, we don't eat. I have suggested that we cannot use either logic or science to legitimize our practices; we therefore have to offer our own types of evidence, based on our practices, systematic methods and, of course, results. Some of us already do this (Fisher & Sless, 1990; Rogers et al., 1995).

For those educators and researchers working to legitimize design in higher education, it might be more useful to look towards those of us who are providing designerly evidence to our clients on a routine basis, rather than trying to legitimize design in higher education by turning it into yet another 'technical and social science'—thereby losing the very thing that makes us distinctive and able to offer a distinctive contribution to the world.

DESIGNING RULES, DESIGNING PHILOSOPHY

With the idea of generating new practices and articulating rules for those practices as something distinctive that we designers do, I want to come full circle returning to philosophy and our everyday concerns.

At a recent conference on designing information for older tourists, I was struck by a discussion we had with one of the speakers, Karin Nijhuis of the Netherlands Board of Tourism. Karin is concerned with the design and development of an 'inclusive internet platform'—www.holland.com. In the discus-

sion, Karin shared with us some of the difficulties in designing a suitable set of categories for grouping information in a way that was useful to a diverse range of tourists. For example, some information is directed specifically to older people, but as many older people do not think of themselves as older, nor do they want to be thought of as associating with older people, they will not respond to a category system based on tourists' ages. In other words, Karin was trying, through practice, to develop a set of useful rules for guiding future practice. Three things can be learned from Karin's problem.

First, the problem of categories is a design problem. It has to do with creating a new structure, albeit a conceptual one.

Second, this type of conceptual problem and many others have become commonplace, everyday issues in a range of design disciplines. It is obvious, of course, in information design where organizing information in new ways is at the heart of what we do. The conceptual problems can also be found in the design of IT products and services, though in IT they extend beyond the problem of categories. Many new products, like mobile phones, radically transform everyday social practices. In my own personal and professional world, as in the worlds of many others, the newly designed IT products have transformed my working and family life and how I define myself and my relations to others. The link between the 'objects' we design—the design domain—and the ways we define who we are—the philosophical domain—have become obvious in our time. This

link brings philosophy and design closer together. After all, the richest source of experience in exploring the nature of concepts, categories and who we are is the history of philosophy. Designers, therefore, can turn to philosophy for help to guide their work.

Third, and most importantly, this example illustrates a significant shift in the nature of design and philosophy in our time. Had we been discussing the nature of categories in any domain at a conference in an earlier age, the challenge would have been to come up with The True Set of Categories. For centuries philosophers and scientists saw their task as revealing the nature of the world as it existed. Their task was discovery and what they aimed to discover was the absolute truth. But in this conference discussion, we were not concerned with absolutes. We were discussing designing an appropriate set of categories for a specific context. We were engaging in work that Wittgenstein would have recognized as philosophical. The implication of treating a design task as a philosophical task suggests not just a link but a merging of activities.

Another way of viewing this merging is to point to the obvious fact that much of the world we live in is of our own making. Our focus is on trying to make sense of what we have done and are doing in creating our world, rather than on trying to make sense of a world seemingly created with us in it. As designers we do not discover, we invent. And as Wittgenstein's insights about language sug-

gest, we invent new practices and articulate rules to share those practices with others. Philosopher becomes designer and designer becomes philosopher.

This merging is for me one of the most exciting challenges of our time, one that has the capacity to reshape how we practice our art and craft and how we might reshape the intellectual and teaching activity in our academies. As the title of this paper highlights, we are in the business of designing philosophy.

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The Homogenized Imagery of Non-profit Organizations on the Internet

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Abstract

This research evaluates websites from 200 'non-deviant' and 200 'deviant' non-profit organizations to better understand the relationship between the type of advocacy group and the visual imagery used for self-representation. Seventeen of 21 variables measured for this study found no difference between non-deviant and deviant non-profit organizations' visual representations on the Internet. These findings potentially complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere. As non-profits face the responsibility of representing themselves to potentially millions of viewers online, it is suggested that self-imposed 'normalizing' restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity may be inevitable. The societal implications of homogenized imagery from non-profit organizations online are discussed.

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Non-profit groups have long charged that media misrepresent their purpose or polarize their issues.¹ Their frustration has stemmed from the deeply held belief that those who control power within society also create the predominant mass ideology of citizen organizations.² However, the arrival of the Internet has allowed for organizations to present their own ideology to a truly mass audience—without any mediation—for the first time in history. Certainly, organizations have long had access to print outlets in the past, but the cost of advertising could be particularly prohibitive to cash-strapped non-profit organizations and the audience reach of the Internet provided exponential promise. The Internet has permitted groups to define their own terms “within which reality is experienced, perceived, and interpreted.”³

In creating their own visual ideology, non-profit organizations now control the implicit boundaries where particular information is included and excluded for potentially millions of people. Yet, it is possible that with the capability to reach the masses, non-profit organizations may have to pay greater attention to the powerful moderate ‘mainstream’—the majority of those exposed to their message. While the inception of the Internet has been heralded as an advancement for diversity, democracy and a heterogeneity of voices, the actuality—in terms of self-representation—could actually be far more homogenous representations. This possibility has deeper implications for groups that deviate further from societal norms.

Therefore, this research explores the generally overlooked intersection between non-profit organizations and visual constructions of organizational identity on the Internet. The Internet has been heralded as a democratizing and heterogeneous communication tool, particularly for non-profit citizen organizations. Yet, a thorough examination of visual content on the Web that substantiates this position has not followed. With remarkably little data

1 SEE BARKER-PLUMMER, *THE DIALOGIC OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS; GITLIN, THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING; AND VAN ZOONEN, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE MEDIA: CONSTRUCTING A PUBLIC IDENTITY.*
2 SEE GROSSBERG ET AL., *MEDIA MAKING: MASS MEDIA IN A POPULAR CULTURE.*
3 GROSSBERG ET AL., *MEDIA MAKING*, 183.

exploring this facet of cyber-communication, this research asks whether non-profit organizations that deviate more from accepted norms in society use equally deviant visual representations to get their message out. This area of overlooked research must be examined if scholars are to better understand the widely assumed heterogeneous forces of the Internet.

ACTIVISM ON THE NET

Non-profits are defined as “two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion tactics or force”.⁴ Their success depends in large part on their ability to access and to use political allies, media coverage, money and public awareness.⁵ For the most part, non-profit groups are, or begin as, marginal or powerless groups.⁶ Certainly, there are exceptions, such as the lobbying powerhouses of the National Rifle Association or the Sierra Club. However, the overwhelming majority of non-profit organizations remain largely powerless in society⁷ given that they fall outside of mainstream media’s norms of inclusion⁸ and they are faced with tight budgetary constraints that hamper their ability for promotion otherwise. Non-profit organizations and social movements are often shut out of mainstream media as they “challenge a major aspect of society, either its authorities or cultural codes, from outside the political process, often employing unconventional actions.”⁹

However, because of the inherent capabilities of the Internet, new hope has arisen that non-profit organizations will be able to gain credibility and power in their struggle for social change. The technology of the Internet has allowed for horizontal and vertical flow of communications,¹⁰ physical connectivity, data communality and interactivity.¹¹ With no central control point,¹² the Internet has allowed non-profits and citizen groups to produce, receive and distribute

4 SEE GRUNIG, ACTIVISM: HOW IT LIMITS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND HOW EXCELLENT PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS RESPOND.
5 SEE HEATH, STRATEGIC ISSUES MANAGEMENT: ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES.
6 SEE BERRY, THE INTEREST GROUP SOCIETY.
7 SEE GREENWALD, GROUP POWER: LOBBYING AND PUBLIC POLICY.
8 SEE WOLFSFELD, MEDIA AND POLITICAL CONFLICT: NEWS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST.
9 SEE LESTER, LOST IN THE WILDERNESS? CELEBRITY, PROTEST AND THE NEWS.
10 SEE STROMER-GALLEY, ON-LINE INTERACTION AND WHY CANDIDATES AVOID IT.
11 SEE FLANAGIN ET AL, THE TECHNICAL CODE OF THE INTERNET/WORLD WIDE WEB.
12 SEE BERMAN AND WEITZNER, TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY.
13 SEE BERTELSON, MEDIA FORM AND GOVERNMENT: DEMOCRACY AS AN ARCHETYPAL IMAGE IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE; FISHER ET AL, BREAKING GROUND ON THE VIRTUAL FRONTIER:

information almost instantaneously¹³ from both a visual and textual perspective.¹⁴

Many scholars have framed the Internet as space for thriving democracy and plurality¹⁵ where non-profit groups can become more powerful¹⁶ and individuals can become more civically engaged¹⁷ due to their unique, singular voice.¹⁸ These arguments rest on a supposition that as Internet users become increasingly exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives, a Habermasian public sphere will develop. Certainly, previous technologies were seen as equally democratic in promise during their inception.¹⁹ Yet, it has been argued that what differentiates this medium is that the Internet, unlike other communication technologies, is less centralized, accessible to heterogeneous and diverse public intervention and not defined by a one-way or top-down communication model.²⁰ It is important to note that online communities can, and often do, manifest themselves off-line as well. Howard Dean's real world 'Meet-Ups' are just one example of overlapping community spheres. However, the power of the Internet to potentially foster civically-engaged communities, both offline and online, is indisputable.

The sheer abundance of content on the Internet suggests a strong level of diversity. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that there were 104 million Internet users in the United States in 2002, which translated to roughly 56 percent of the population.²¹ In 2006, over one billion people worldwide, or 15 percent of the total population, used the Internet²² and in the United States, 73 percent of all American adults in 2006 were online.²³ As more people go 'wired,' the Internet inevitably becomes more diverse. While college educated, highly paid white men inhabited early cyberspace,²⁴ U.S. women now slightly outnumber men on the Internet.²⁵ Further, minorities and families with modest incomes continue to grow.²⁶ African-Americans, along with middle-

SURVEYING CIVIC LIFE ON THE INTERNET; LUNENFELD, THE DIGITAL DIALECTIC: NEW ESSAYS ON NEW MEDIA.

¹⁴ SEE DYSON, RELEASE 2.0: A DESIGN FOR LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

¹⁵ SEE KELLNER, INTELLECTUALS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES; PAVLIK, NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY: CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL PERSPECTIVES; ROSEN, CHEAP SPEECH.

¹⁶ SEE COOMBS, THE INTERNET AS POTENTIAL EQUALIZER: NEW LEVERAGE FOR CONFRONTING SOCIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY.

¹⁷ SEE BUCY AND GREGSON, MEDIA PARTICIPATION: A LEGITIMIZING MECHANISM OF MASS DEMOCRACY.

¹⁸ SEE WEIGNER, EVERYONE CAN BE A STAR.

¹⁹ SEE DAHLBERG, DEMOCRACY VIA CYBERSPACE: MAPPING THE RHETORICS AND PRACTICES OF THREE PROMINENT CAMPS.

²⁰ SEE KELLNER, INTELLECTUALS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES.

²¹ SEE WEB STATISTICS.

²² SEE INTERNET USAGE STATISTICS—THE BIG PICTURE.

²³ SEE INTERNET EVOLUTION.

income families, are the major group responsible for the sharp rise in home broadband adoption in the United States.²⁷ Given these increases in diversity, the assumption could be made that there has also been a concomitant increase in diverse—and sometimes deviant—visual elements on the Internet.

DESIGN AND DEVIANCE

Deviance has emerged as an important conceptual categorization in differentiating citizen organizations.²⁸ Admittedly, in their effort to change widespread thinking or alter accepted political policies, citizen groups by their very definition, deviate from the norm. Yet, some groups deviate further from accepted societal values than others. Standards of deviance within social organizations have historically been constructed on loose political grounds. Meaning the further away from moderate centrist views, such as similarity to the majority of Americans and the amount of change advocated, the more deviant the group.²⁹ Organizations can deviate from the mainstream along almost any conceivable axis, such as occupation, sexuality, politics, philosophy, economics or violence.

Extremist groups, conceptually similar to the categorization of deviance, are said to demonstrate dogmatic intolerance, expressed in varying form and possess a rigid obedience to an authority that has been shaped by group unity and ideology.³⁰

There is a diverse range of rhetoric found in the non-profit community, moving from the militant to the moderate.³¹ More deviant groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that could often utilize violence³² or subversive design techniques, such as instability and fragmentation. In doing so, these groups have challenged design techniques and popular aesthetic conceptions. A classic image of Huey P. Newton, the Min-

²⁴ SEE GUNKEL AND GUNKEL, VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHIES: THE NEW WORLD OF CYBERSPACE.

²⁵ SEE MORE ONLINE, DOING MORE: 16 MILLION NEWCOMERS GAIN INTERNET ACCESS IN THE LAST HALF OF 2000 AS WOMEN, MINORITIES, AND FAMILIES WITH MODEST INCOMES CONTINUE TO SURGE ONLINE.

²⁶ SEE INTERNET EVOLUTION.

²⁷ SEE REPORTS: TECHNOLOGY & MEDIA USE.

²⁸ SEE GITLIN, THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING: MASS MEDIA IN THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE NEW LEFT.

²⁹ SEE SHOEMAKER, MEDIA TREATMENT OF DEVI-

ANT POLITICAL GROUPS.

³⁰ SEE GARDNER, THE AGE OF EXTREMISM.

³¹ SEE SIMONS, REQUIREMENTS, PROBLEMS, AND STRATEGIES: A THEORY OF PERSUASION FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

³² SEE RAY AND MARSH, RECRUITMENT BY EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THE INTERNET.

ister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, demonstrates such challenges in imagery (*figure 1*). In this iconic poster, Huey Newton stands in the foreground holding a machine gun. In doing so, this image clearly utilizes violence for its message. The poster is designed in complete symmetry except for one crucial element—Huey Newton holding the gun. This destabilizing image is purposefully placed in the foreground to grab the attention of the viewer. Directly behind him, Newton's face is replicated and blown up to envelop almost the entire page. He stares off into the distance as a martyr for his people. Lines of motion pull from all sides directly to him, as the figurehead of the movement. If there was any doubt as to his stature in the party, his photo is replicated seven times across the top of the page. The repeated emphasis of Huey Newton as the symbol for the Black Panther party is meant to challenge the viewer—and society at large—to consider the power of this man and this party.

These challenges stem from the need for those seeking social change to exercise the “symbolic capital”³³ of visual images in the absence of “electoral clout or (in most cases) economic influence.”³⁴ In a modern world dominated by images not words,³⁵ non-profit groups—like all others operating in this modern, visual, communicative sphere—have had to rely upon direct, emotionally charged imagery to invoke participation. Dramatic visuals are often the result of “heightened intensional requirements”³⁶ facing groups who are desperately searching for public participation and awareness. Conklin³⁷ agrees and argues, “images and ideas, not common identity or mutual economic interests, mobilize political cooperation among people separated by wide distances and differences of language, culture and historical experience.” One only need examine the case of Greenpeace to comprehend the true power of dramatic visuals. This environmental organization swiftly gained global power and prominence after “deploying dramatic visuals”³⁸ in

³³ SEE BOURDIEU, *OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF PRACTICE*.

³⁴ SEE CONKLIN, *BODY PAINT, FEATHERS, AND VCRS: AESTHETICS AND AUTHENTICITY IN AMAZONIAN ACTIVISM*.

³⁵ SEE DELUCA AND PEEPLES, *FROM PUBLIC SPHERE TO PUBLIC SCREEN: DEMOCRACY, ACTIVISM AND THE 'VIOLENCE' OF SEATTLE*.

³⁶ SEE SANCHEZ AND STUCKEY, *THE RHETORIC OF AMERICAN INDIAN ACTIVISM IN THE 1960S AND 1970S*.

³⁷ SEE CONKLIN, *BODY PAINT, FEATHERS, AND VCRS*.

³⁸ SEE DELUCA AND PEEPLES, *FROM PUBLIC SPHERE TO PUBLIC SCREEN*.

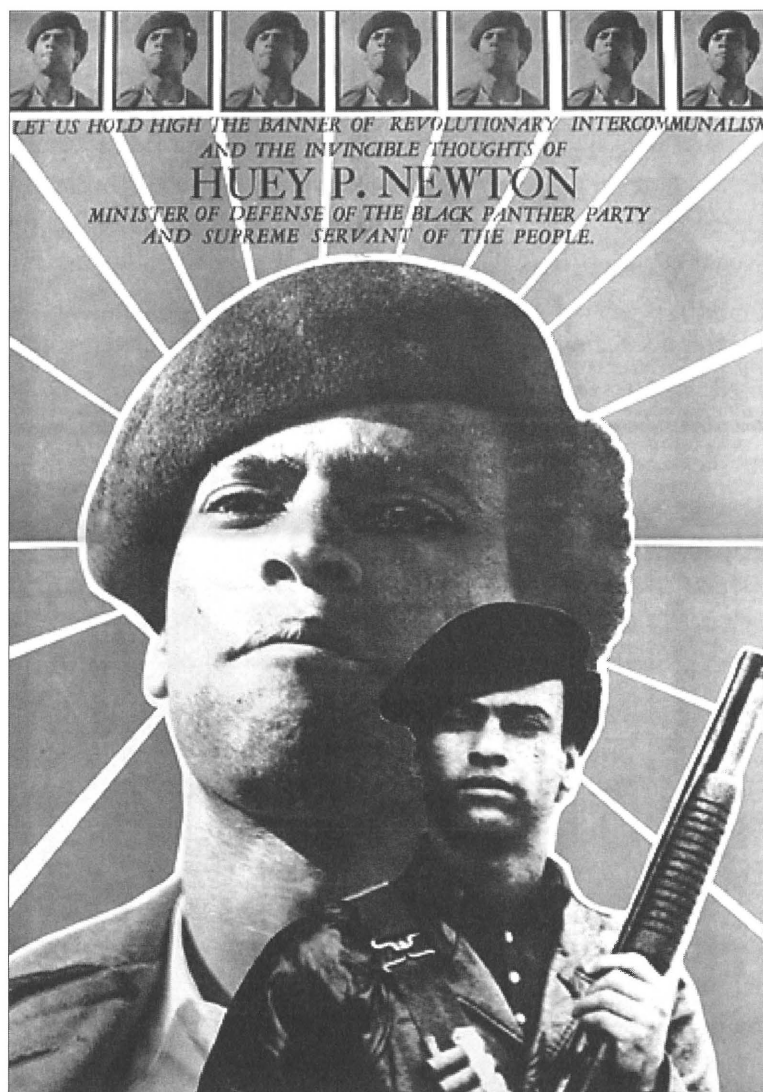


Figure 1 A classic image of Huey P. Newton, the Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, demonstrates such challenges in imagery.





Figure 3 <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/photosvideos/photos/riodejaneiro>
Christ statue: Rio de Janeiro.

equally dramatic locations (*figures 2 and 3*). This is not to say that mainstream organizations never use challenging imagery. Only that one has to wonder if more deviant organizations might rely on more dramatic imagery to better communicate their philosophical distance from the center.

These visuals have so much dramatic impact because they reproduce informational cues, that individuals use to construct their perception of social reality.³⁹ Gattegno⁴⁰ first argued that sight itself is simultaneous, comprehensive and synthetic in its analysis. Indeed, visual images are central to how we represent, make meaning and communicate in the world around us.”⁴¹ Research has shown that different techniques and aesthetic approaches signify different meanings to viewers. For example, the overall design of a web page itself can suggest sophistication, seriousness and professionalism if it follows a structured, aligned construction.⁴² When elements are aligned, there is an invisible line that connects items and indicates their relationship. Without any alignment, a design can appear haphazard and unstructured.

In deconstructing design, experts have generally agreed upon several guides⁴³ that have implications for deviance: unity, balance, rhythm and contrast. These widely accepted design techniques, when skillfully used, create cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness.⁴⁴ When manipulated, these techniques can also translate into disorder, tension, a sense of chaos and division. For example, balanced designs have been found to denote strength⁴⁵ whereas an unbalanced design creates uneasiness. Whereby a symmetric design denotes formality, tradition and conservatism, an asymmetrical design proves to have a dynamic tension.⁴⁶

Williams and Tollett⁴⁷ suggest that type on web pages can appear more sophisticated and professionalized if a few simple rules are followed: type must be readable; not in too many colors, not too large, stable in movement and

³⁹ SEE MESSARIS, VISUAL LITERACY: IMAGE, MIND AND REALITY.

⁴⁰ SEE GATTEGNO, TOWARDS A VISUAL CULTURE: EDUCATING THROUGH TELEVISION.

⁴¹ SEE STURKEN AND CARTWRIGHT, PRACTICES OF LOOKING: AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE.

⁴² SEE WILLIAMS, THE NON-DESIGNER'S DESIGN BOOK.

⁴³ SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.

⁴⁴ SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK.

⁴⁵ SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.

⁴⁶ SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.

⁴⁷ SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK.

unblinking. Typography that breaks these rules often appears either subversive or elementary. Further, these authors have argued that organization, structure, a navigation menu and a simple background in a website appear more professional.⁴⁸

Images themselves are profoundly important in creating meaning for the viewer. Messaris⁴⁹ argues that visual images elicit emotions, serve as photographic proof and establish an implicit link between the image itself and some other emotion or thing. More deviant non-profit groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that utilizes violence or sexualized imagery⁵⁰ to denote the direct-action orientation of the organization. Symbols have also been widely used by organizations because these visual constructions effectively and succinctly communicate the ideology of that organization to the viewer.⁵¹ For example, when symbols such as an American flag are used, the meanings associated with that flag (patriotism, democracy, capitalism, freedom, etc.) are transferred to that organization in the mind of the viewer. However, when well-known symbols are manipulated in some way, the opposite of the symbols' intended meaning is often conferred.

In creating imagery for a specific audience, designers often pay close attention to attracting the interests of their constituency. Designers must presumably balance the needs of their audience against the agenda of the organization, the design interests of the non-profit and the organization's budget. Each one of these important facets in the creation of an aesthetic online presence is, in its own right, central to the output. Kaye and Medoff⁵² point out that "an online site may be perfectly designed from a company's point of view, but if it does not attract users or encourage repeat visits, the site is not worth the time and resources of upkeep."⁵³ Obviously, the same applies to non-profit organizations. For the aesthetic of a site to be successful, the design must reflect

48 SEE WILLIAMS AND TOLLETT, *THE NON-DESIGNER'S WEB BOOK*.

49 SEE MESSARIS, *VISUAL PERSUASION: THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN ADVERTISING*.

50 SEE RAY AND MARSH, *RECRUITMENT BY EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THE INTERNET*.

51 SEE STURKEN AND CARTWRIGHT, *PRACTICES OF LOOKING: AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE*.

52 SEE KAYE AND MEDOFF, *THE WORLD WIDE WEB: A MASS COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE*.

53 SEE KAYE AND MEDOFF, *THE WORLD WIDE WEB*.

the content provided and attract the organization's core audience. Yet, the dilemma is that there is not simply one single public that visits a site. Rather, there are several publics who may navigate through an organization's site that are in no way homogeneous.⁵⁴ Giussani⁵⁵ writes that the biggest challenge to those uploading content on the web is that they must "take into account all of these elements, the wild diversity of the public, the different cultures, the different media tools and to make something coherent."⁵⁶ Some scholars have argued that there is a broad range of layout and design diversification on the web that reflects the heterogeneity of Internet users.⁵⁷

This research examines whether this suggested visual heterogeneity actually applies to all types of non-profit organizations. Are the most deviant groups on the Internet represented through common, non-confrontational imagery and standard design techniques or do their visual constructions equate with their professed ideologies?

HYPOTHESES

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an arena for divergent voices to be seen, the following hypotheses are offered to determine whether deviant organizations use concomitant imagery to represent themselves on the Internet:

H1 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness.

H2 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate

54 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA TELLS DIFFERENT STORIES.

55 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA.

56 SEE GIUSSANI, A NEW MEDIA TELLS DIFFERENT STORIES.

57 SEE CORDONE, A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE VERBAL AND VISUAL ELEMENTS OF THE ENGLISH OF WORLD WIDE WEB PAGES.

a professional design emphasizing organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background.

H3 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type).

H4 / The visuals of a non-deviant non-profit organization will be less likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize subversive symbolism, or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery.

While practice of logo design dates back to ancient Greece, it has been intrinsically tied to business, and therefore, mainstream, normalized interests. Early logos that used to differentiate mason marks, for example, have become crucial visual identities for any type of business in modern society. The presence of a logo, in and of itself, suggests a connection with mainstream, normalized capitalistic ideologies. Therefore:

H5 / Non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a logo into their design.

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an expanding democratic sphere that encompasses a wide range of diversity, it is suggested that all non-profit organizations would be best served by conveying a unified textual and visual representation. Rather than concealing the mission of a deviant orga-

nization behind innocuous graphics, this research suggests that the Internet allows for transparency in visual communication.

H6 / The visual content of non-deviant non-profit organization web pages and deviant non-profit organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages.

METHODOLOGY

Content Selection and Coding

Two hundred mainstream web pages were selected randomly based on inclusion in Guidestar, a database of 850,000 IRS-recognized (U.S. Internal Revenue Service) nonprofit organizations and World Advocacy, publicized as the “world’s premier list of advocacy groups.”⁵⁸ This was done to purposefully gather a spectrum of organizations that are not confined to one political, geographical or ideological location, yet are located in a public index defined by inclusion in the mainstream IRS-recognized database. A further 200 web pages were randomly selected from the American Family Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League and Altervistas. The American Family Foundation⁵⁹ and the Anti-Defamation League,⁶⁰ assemble URL’s of ‘deviant’ web citizen organizations, such as neo-Nazis, religious cults, militias, Satanists and racist groups for educational or informational purposes. Altervistas,⁶¹ on the other hand, is a database of URL’s that are “weird and bizarre.” Only non-profit citizen organization web pages were used from the Altervista database.

A randomized content analysis of the front pages of 400 web pages was then completed. Coders were instructed to code only what ‘pops up’ when the home

⁵⁸ SEE HOMEPAGE.

⁵⁹ SEE CULT RESEARCH
LINKS SUBJECT INDEX.

⁶⁰ SEE POISONING THE
WEB: HATRED ONLINE.

⁶¹ SEE WELCOME TO
ALTERVISTAS.

URL is typed in. If the page automatically goes to a second page without any user intervention, then both pages were coded. Two coders were selected from a graduate program that emphasized visual imagery in mass communication. Coders were instructed about the coding scheme together to help facilitate discussion and questions as a group. The coders worked from a randomly ordered list of all 400 websites that combined (200 'deviant' organizations and 200 'non-deviant' organizations).

Coders were trained in determining design guides such as unity, balance, rhythm and contrast as well as symbolism, apparent violence and sexual content in imagery. Coders were also instructed to classify the design of the web page itself along traditional design classifications of proportion, movement, contrast and unity. Finally, students were given training about different typographical treatments in web page design.

Operationalization of Variables

Given the often-subjective nature of visual communication, the following terms were operationalized for the purposes of this study to ensure a higher level of reliability in coding the variables.

Unity / Determined through proximity, repetition or continuation. These forms of unity can communicate specific ideological, geographical or symbolic cohesiveness to the reader.⁶² This concept is closely related to the Gestalt theory of visual cognition, which states that through various methods of unification there is a resulting perception that the whole is substantively different than the sum of its parts. For the purposes of this research, if an element

⁶² SEE LAUER AND
PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.

⁶³ SEE LAUER AND
PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.

was grouped within a pre-determined space with another element, then these elements were identified as unified by proximity. If more than one element was recurring within a specific space then these elements were unified through repetition. Images that were grouped through a visually continuous line or by their directional unanimity were unified through continuation.

Balance / An element frequently used to demonstrate strength and professionalism or isolation and uneasiness.⁶³ Accordingly, these emotions are found in symmetrical balance and asymmetrical balance. Radial balance and crystallographic balance are often used to denote a sense of overwhelming emotion or chaos. Radial balance was found when all of the elements radiated or circled out from a common central point whereas crystallographic existed when all elements within a web page carry equal emphasis over the whole format. If any obvious usage of balance was found, it was categorized within these four options.

Rhythm / Categorized as either progressive or alternating. Progressive rhythm was detected when elements gradually shifted in shape, color, value or texture within the frame, creating a quiet sense of serenity. Alternating rhythm was present when elements interchanged with one another in a consistent and regulated pattern creating a tenser, dynamic emotion.

Contrast / Occurs when two elements or more are markedly different, with the greater difference providing greater

contrast. Contrast can occur by using differences in size, value, color and type.⁶⁴ More contrast emphasizes difference and divisiveness while less contrast communicates a calmness.

Structure / Arranged elements that mutually connect through parallel or perpendicular alignment.

Organic / Elements that are free form and do not necessarily have perpendicular or parallel alignment with one another.

Navigation menu / A graphical or textual 'map' that guides users through the site and gives users easy access to the pages they want.⁶⁵

Symbols / A widely accepted sign or object that stands for or represents another thing, often an abstract concept.

Logo / A symbol or letter representing a non-profit organization.

Deviance / Differing from the norm or from the accepted social and/or moral standards of society.

Confrontational / Challenging or hostile.

Professional / Demonstrating great skill or experience.

Analysis Technique

The study utilized descriptive statistics to describe the variables of interest. Inter-observer reliability coefficients were utilized to provide an indication of the reliability of the coding scheme used. Chi-square correlations, the Mann-Whitney test when variables are ordinal, expected values, adjusted residual scores, simple percentages and frequencies were utilized to answer the stated hypotheses.

⁶⁴ SEE LAUER AND PENTAK, DESIGN BASICS.
⁶⁵ SEE BARND AND YU, CREATING AN EFFECTIVE WEB SITE.
⁶⁶ SEE DENNING, THE CULTURAL FRONT: THE LABORING OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

PRE-TEST OF DEVIANCE

To ensure a higher level of validity in determining deviance, coders were asked to stop after coding the first 75 web pages. From these, 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations were randomly selected. These thirty web pages were then shown to 100 students in an Introduction to Mass Communication course, who then completed a survey about their conceptions of the organizations' deviance. This was an essential additional step (beyond measuring intercoder reliability for this variable) due to constantly shifting constructions of deviance. Groups that were at one time deemed deviant have become an integral part of the cultural landscape.⁶⁶ Students, in particular, were sampled because their age is generally similar to the average age of participants within many non-profit organizations. Students from the Introduction to Mass Communication course in particular were sampled due to their apparent interest in mass communications (gauged by their enrollment in the course) and their limited amount of knowledge in the subject as evidenced by their enrollment in an introductory course. If an acceptable level of similarity between the coders and outside students were to be found then the study would be continued. If a significant difference were to be found then the results would be evaluated and appropriate changes made.

The results from this initial pre-test of deviance were found to be promising. In comparing the randomly sampled 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations against student conceptualizations of deviance, there was strong uniformity. Out of thirty organizations, 27 had more than 50 percent of the students agreeing with the coders' categorization of deviance. This suggested a high level of reliability in coding this central variable. Therefore, coders were

instructed to continue with the study.

RESULTS

In total, there were 22 variables coded for this study to examine the six hypotheses across all 400 organizations. Through use of the Cohen's kappa measure of agreement, two coders generated a 69.2 percent inter-coder reliability agreement in coding all non-profit organizations' level of deviance. The first four variables examining unity, balance, rhythm and contrast in the web page design generated 67.6 percent inter-coder reliability. The remaining variables (logo, structure, alignment, navigation menu, background, violent imagery, sexual imagery, apparent symbolism, type readability, type size, blinking type, moving type, alignment of type) generated a much higher 86.9 percent inter-coder reliability. The final four variables that gauged the visual elements of the web site front pages as a whole (visuals conveying content, professional design, visuals as confrontational, visuals as deviant) produced a 74.2 percent inter-coder reliability. Inter-coder reliability values greater than 75 percent indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone, while values between 40 and 75 percent indicate fair to good.⁶⁷

Frequencies

Unity through repetition was found to be the overwhelming (65.5 percent) source of unity in design (*example in figure 4*). Only 3.3 percent of the 400 front page web pages were found to have no apparent use of unity, suggesting a strong sense of cohesiveness on web page content. Most of these 400 web pages used asymmetrical balance (46.8 percent) followed by no apparent use of balance (29.3 percent), symmetrical balance (21.8 percent) and radial balance (2.3 percent). In accordance with previous research, the preponderance of

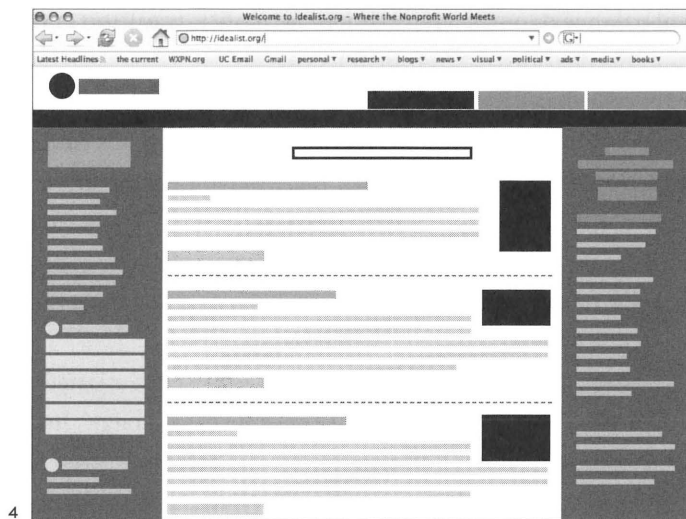
asymmetrical balance denotes a rejection of formality, tradition and conservatism and a communication of dynamic tension.

The majority of web pages had no apparent use of rhythm in the design (73.5 percent). The most common rhythm technique used was alternating rhythm (23.3 percent). Contrast was rarely used. Eighty five percent of all web pages 'did not use contrast' or 'did not use contrast very much.' This suggests there was no striking imagery denoting strong difference in visual web page content. Rather, web pages relied more upon communicating calmness in their opening pages.

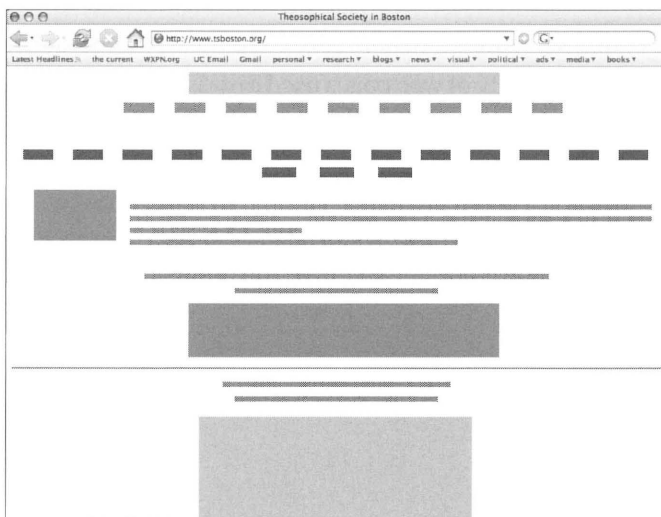
An overwhelming 96.3 percent of web pages were 'very aligned' or 'somewhat aligned.' A very high 82.7 percent of these 400 web pages had a navigation menu and only 19.5 percent of non-profit organizations used a pattern as their background in their website front page. However, when coders were asked directly if the design was professional, results were much more mixed. In total, 35.7 percent of web pages were found to be 'unprofessional' (*example in figure 5*) and 64.3 percent of all 400 web pages were found to be 'professional' (*example in figure 6*).

In further coding of professionalism and sophisticated approaches to design, the overwhelming majority of web pages used a normal type size (89.5 percent), did not use blinking type (84.8 percent) and did not use moving type (90.3). The alignment of type on a web page tended to be mixed (47.3 percent) or was simply left justified (36.0) percent.

When initially examining the web page, coders were asked to ascertain the meanings behind *only* the visual imagery and the design. As much as it is possible, coders were asked to make initial judgments of the page images and design without reading the words first. The majority of web page visual content was found to be 'not confrontational' (*example in figure 7*) (86.5 percent). Fur-



4



5

Figure 4 Abstracted example of unity through repetition website based on a representative action-oriented non-profit site.

Figure 5 Example of a very unprofessional website.

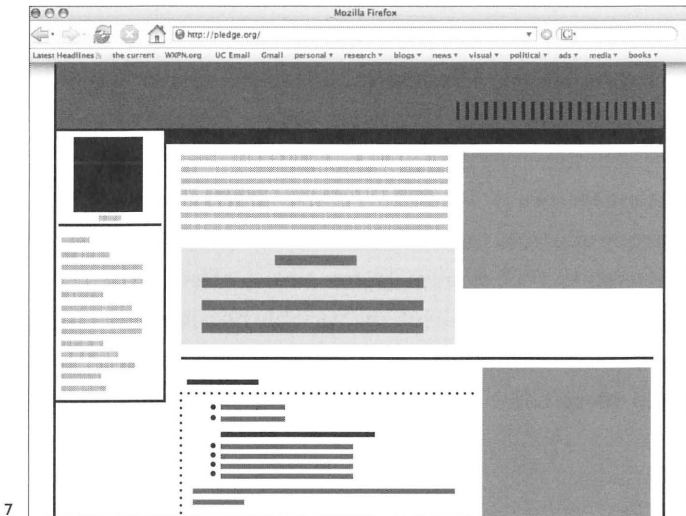
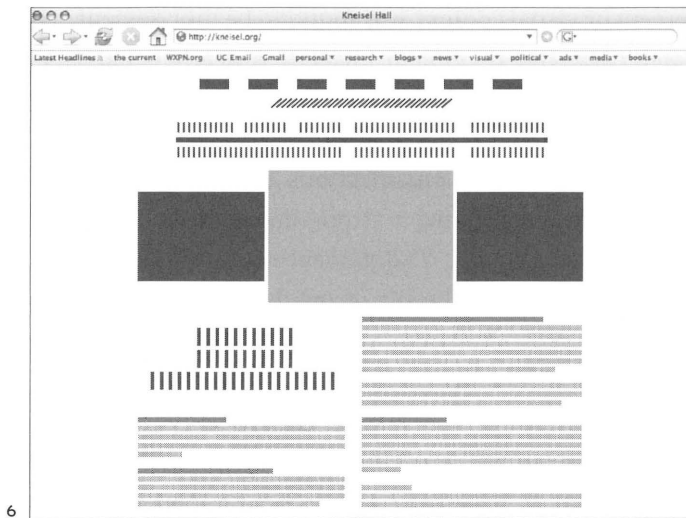


Figure 6 Abstracted example of a very professional website for a non-profit cultural event.

Figure 7 Abstracted example of a non-confrontational website directed to student action.

ther 78.5 percent of visual content was found to be ‘not deviant.’ Ninety seven percent of web pages had no violent imagery. A nearly equal 97.5 percent of web pages had no sexual imagery either. Sixty one percent of web pages used no apparent symbolism.

The majority of non-profit organizations (63.0 percent) used a logo on their front web pages, suggesting a strong linkage to mainstream, corporate approaches to identity. Finally, 77.8 percent of all visuals did not appear to convey the textual content of the site (*example in figure 7*). These preliminary results suggest that visuals may have been used (inadvertently or purposefully) to conceal the meaning and mission of the organization.

These findings, when taken in total, suggest a preponderance of ‘normalized,’ ‘mainstream’ visual content on non-profit organizations’ web pages. However, further statistical measures were completed to discover any linkages between the measured level of organizational deviance and visual content.

Associations Between Deviance and Visual Content

An association was operationalized as a statistically significant relationship between measured levels of deviance and variables used to gauge visual content. This test was necessary to determine if more deviant organizations were more likely to use certain visual constructions on the Internet.

Significance was measured through four statistical measures: chi square p values; the Mann-Whitney Test when variables were ordinal; large expected values; and strong adjusted residual scores, or the difference between expected and observed counts that demonstrates actual effects of this relationship. Strong effects of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if not more than 20% of the cells had expected values less than 5. Within these cells, adjusted residual scores that departed markedly

from the model of independence (well above +2 or below -2) demonstrated added strength in relationships.

Hypothesis 1 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness. Three of the four variables (unity, balance and rhythm) tested had a statistically significant relationship between deviance level and the variable in question (*table 1*). Regarding unity, organizations that were seen to be 'not deviant at all' were much more likely to use unity through repetition (3.8). 'Somewhat deviant organizations' used unity through continuation (3.3) more than expected and organizations that were seen as 'not deviant at all' relied on unity through continuation (-4.1) far less than chance allowed. 'Very deviant organizations' were more likely to utilize symmetrical balance (3.0) and organizations that were seen to be 'not deviant at all' relied on alternating rhythm (3.4) in their web design more than one would expect.

However, two of the four variables (balance and rhythm) also produced more than 20% of the cells with expected values less than 5. Therefore, only unity was determined to demonstrate a significant and strong relationship. When adjusted residuals were examined for specific relationships between unity and deviance, the findings were further mitigated. Of the sixteen relationships between deviance ('not deviant at all,' 'somewhat not deviant,' 'somewhat deviant' and 'very deviant') and unity ('none apparent,' 'unity through proximity,' 'unity through repetition' and 'unity through continuation'), six showed strong difference from the model of independence and the remaining ten relationships were found to be weak. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a professional

	ASSOCIATIONS (DEVIANCE X ...)	NON DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	P VALUE	PERCENT EXPECTED < 5	MANN- WHITNEY VALUE
HYPOTHESIS 1	<u>Unity in Design</u>	-	-	.000	18.8	-
	None Apparent	2.5	4.0	-	-	-
	Through Proximity	15.5	18.0	-	-	-
	Through Repetition	76.0	55.0	-	-	-
	Through Continuation	6.0	23.0	-	-	-
	<u>Balance in Design</u>	-	-	.001	25	-
	None Apparent	28.5	30.0	-	-	-
	Radial Balance	2.0	2.5	-	-	-
	Symmetrical Balance	14.0	29.5	-	-	-
	Asymmetric Balance	55.5	38.0	-	-	-
	<u>Rhythm in Design</u>	-	-	.046	25	-
	None Apparent	67.0	80.0	-	-	-
	Alternating Rhythm	29.0	17.5	-	-	-
	Progressive Rhythm	4.0	2.5	-	-	-
	<u>Contrast in Design</u>	-	-	.202	0	-
	Does not use contrast	87.3	82.6	-	-	-
	Uses Contrast	12.7	17.4	-	-	-
HYPOTHESIS 2	<u>Organization of Page</u>	-	-	.022	33	-
	Unorganized	2.6	4.5	-	-	-
	Neutral	1.9	6.8	-	-	-
	Organized	95.5	88.6	-	-	-
	<u>Alignment of Elements</u>	-	-	.005	25	-
	Aligned	98.1	92.4	-	-	-
	Unaligned	1.9	7.6	-	-	-
	<u>Navigation Menu</u>	-	-	.023	28.6	-
	Not applicable	10.5	24.0	-	-	-
	Menu on Left Side	32.5	24.0	-	-	-
	Menu on Top	16.0	12.0	-	-	-
	Menu on Bottom	2.5	6.5	-	-	-
	Multiple Menus	32.0	25.0	-	-	-
	Menu in Middle	4.5	7.5	-	-	-
	Menu on Right Side	2.0	1.0	-	-	-
	<u>Background</u>	-	-	.000	29.2	-
	White	1.5	.5	-	-	-
	Light Color	14.5	16.5	-	-	-
	Black	3.0	19.0	-	-	-
	Dark Color	4.5	5.5	-	-	-
	Pattern	19.0	20.0	-	-	-
	Default Gray	57.5	38.5	-	-	-
	<u>Professional Design</u>	-	-	.000	0	-
	Unprofessional	25.7	56.1	-	-	-
	Professional	74.3	43.9	-	-	-

Table 1 Associations Between “Deviance” and Coded Variables for 400 Non-profit Websites

	ASSOCIATIONS (DEVIANCE X ...)	NON DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	DEVIANT ORGANIZATION [PERCENTAGE]	P VALUE	PERCENT EXPECTED < 5	MANN- WHITNEY VALUE
HYPOTHESIS 3	Readable Type	-	-	-	62.5	.001
	Very Difficult to Read	0	2.0	-	-	-
	Somewhat Difficult to Read	1.0	2.5	-	-	-
	Somewhat Easy to Read	2.5	10.0	-	-	-
	Very Easy to Read	96.5	85.5	-	-	-
	Type Size	-	-	-	33.3	.056
	Very Small Type Size	1.0	6.0	-	-	-
	Normal Type Size	92.0	87.0	-	-	-
	Very Big Type Size	7.0	7.0	-	-	-
	Blinking Type	-	-	.390	0	-
	No Blinking Type Present	87.5	82.0	-	-	-
	Blinking Type Present	12.5	18.0	-	-	-
	Moving Type	-	-	.426	12.5	-
	No Moving Type Present	91.0	89.5	-	-	-
	Moving Type Present	9.0	10.5	-	-	-
	Alignment of Type	-	-	.000	30	-
	Not Applicable	5.5	10.0	-	-	-
	Left Justified	39.0	33.0	-	-	-
	Fully Justified	0	.5	-	-	-
	Mixed Uses	50.5	44.0	-	-	-
	Centered	5.0	12.5	-	-	-
HYPOTHESIS 4	Confrontational Page	-	-	.001	0	-
	Not Confrontational	90.7	78.0	-	-	-
	Confrontational	9.3	22.0	-	-	-
	Deviant Page	-	-	.000	0	-
	No Deviant	95.9	43.2	-	-	-
	Deviant	4.1	56.8	-	-	-
	Violent Imagery	-	-	-	66.7	.449
	No Violent Imagery	98.0	97.5	-	-	-
	Somewhat Violent Imagery	1.5	1.0	-	-	-
	Violent Imagery	.5	1.5	-	-	-
	Sexual Imagery	-	-	-	66.7	.000
	No Sexual Imagery	99.5	95.5	-	-	-
	Somewhat Sexual Imagery	.5	1.5	-	-	-
	Sexual Imagery	0	3.0	-	-	-
	Apparent Symbolism	-	-	.000	0	-
	No Apparent Symbolism	72.5	50.0	-	-	-
	Apparent Symbolism	27.5	50.0	-	-	-
5	Logo	-	-	.311	0	-
	Presence of Logo	63.0	63.0	-	-	-
	No Presence of Logo	37.0	37.0	-	-	-
6	Visuals Convey Content	-	-	.237	0	-
	Do not Convey Content	79.5	74.2	-	-	-
	Do convey Content	20.5	25.8	-	-	-

design emphasizing organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background. When alignment values were collapsed (aligned and unaligned), the variable was found to have a significant relationship with deviance (.005). The organization of a webpage, navigation menu and background variables were found to be significant (.022, .023 and .000 respectively). All variables had over 28% of cells with small expected values, suggesting that these small expected values made large contributions to the size of the chi-square statistic. The professional variable was the only variable that had a significant value (.000) and an acceptable level of expected values (0). When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship, it was found that the most extreme residual (5.9) was for a professional design used by organizations that were perceived to be not deviant. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer professionally designed web pages from non-deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that very deviant organizations produced fewer professional designs than would be expected if all variables were independent. Therefore Hypothesis 2 was partially accepted for overall professionalism in design from non-deviant organizations, but rejected when examining specific variables of organization, alignment, a navigation menu and a simple background.

Hypothesis 3 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more likely than deviant non-profit organizations to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type). In this case, all relationships with significant p values (readable type and alignment of type) produced more than 25% of the cells with expected values less than 5 (*table 1*). Thus, the contribution of a few sparse cells unduly inflated the chi-square statistic, therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Hypothesis 4 stated that the visuals of non-deviant non-profit organizations' will be less likely than deviant non-profit organizations to utilize subversive symbolism or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery. Use of violent imagery was found not significantly related to deviance. Sexual imagery had a significant p value but produced 66.7 percent of cells with expected values less than 5. The remaining three variables (apparent symbolism, deviant visual imagery and confrontational imagery) were found to be statistically significant with acceptable expected counts in all cells.

When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship between symbolism and deviance, it was found that the most extreme residual (5.8) was for use of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer uses of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that organizations identified as not deviant at all used less symbolism (4.5) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Organizations identified as deviant produced more deviant imagery (12.1) than would be expected while organizations identified as not deviant produced less deviant imagery (12.1) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Similarly, organizations identified as more deviant produced more confrontational imagery (11.2) than would be expected if variables were independent and organizations that were deemed not deviant produced much less confrontational imagery (-11.2) than would be expected. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was partially accepted for increased use of symbolism, deviant imagery and confrontational imagery by deviant organizations (and less reliance on these variables by non-deviant organizations). Hypothesis 4 was partially rejected due to a lack of relationship between violent or sexualized imagery and the level of organizational deviance.

Hypothesis 5 stated that non-deviant non-profit organizations will be more

likely than deviant non-profit organizations to incorporate a logo into their design. This relationship had a p value of .311 and was rejected. Hypothesis 6 stated that the visual content of non-deviant non-profit organization web pages and deviant non-profit organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages. Again, this relationship was found to be insignificant ($p = .223$) and Hypothesis 6 was rejected (*table 1*).

DISCUSSION

Since 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee first proposed a global hypertext project, later to be known as the World Wide Web, design on the Internet has become progressively more refined. Early information on the web was purely academic without any aesthetic sophistication.⁶⁸ As the medium gained notoriety and attention through the nineties, design increasingly attempted to make elements more ‘user-friendly’ and idiosyncratic by directly reflecting a user’s unique, individual experience.⁶⁹ Images and visual representations were introduced and shared from a diverse range of perspectives around the globe. Yet, the findings of this research potentially complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere—at least in terms of visual identity constructions for non-profit organizations.

There has been limited research into how the Internet has pragmatically changed communication⁷⁰ but no research was found concerning the representation of non-profit organizations—an essential component within the ‘democratized’ World Wide Web. The general finding of this research is that there is not a meaningful difference between how deviant and non-deviant organizations sampled in this study represent themselves visually on the Internet. Of the six hypotheses searching for difference between non-deviant and

68 SEE VEEN, *THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WEB DESIGN*.
69 SEE CORDONE, *A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE VERBAL AND VISUAL ELEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH OF WORLD WIDE WEB PAGES*.
70 SEE GROSSMAN, *THE ELECTRONIC REPUBLIC: RESHAPING DEMOCRACY IN THE INFORMATION AGE*.

deviant organizations in visual representation, four were rejected outright and two were partially rejected. The study also found that more 'normalized' non-profit organizations do present themselves more professionally on the Internet, using little to no symbolism, deviant imagery or confrontational visuals.

Yet, there was no significant difference between non-deviant and deviant organizations in visual constructions of identity on the Internet for most variables. This could suggest that the organizations in this sample were choosing to represent themselves in a homogeneous manner, regardless of societal deviance—a possibility that runs counter to the perception that the Internet is a diverse, heterogeneous arena of communication. If visual content is indeed compressed among these organizations, alternative voices may be creating self-imposed restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity. This may be inevitable given the pressure to appeal to millions of 'moderate' mainstream viewers on the Internet who may stumble upon a non-profit site through a myriad of different paths.

These findings lead one to wonder what the implications might be for those who are offering a radical message. Further study that interviewed non-profit organizations would help to clarify what these implications might be, but these findings suggest a certain level of concealment, whether it is subconscious or overt. Certainly, representations over time have an inevitable impact on how an organization then considers its operations and purpose. Thus, a mainstreamed image may suggest a much more mainstreamed approach in the process of social change. This has obvious implications for democracy and political participation, particularly for those who continue to view themselves as 'outliers' in society. Those with particularly radical messages may very well be negotiating an increasing sense of defeatism when faced with such a homogenized block of non-profit and non-profit imagery.

Conversely, these findings lead one to question how these homogenized visual messages are received by viewers who are likely bombarded with challenging visual imagery in other arenas, such as advertising,⁷¹ but find non-confrontational images within social change web pages. One has to wonder if such disconnect between imagery and message is seen as a point of invitation or disconcertion to the viewer. In a media sphere of shock, sex and violence, these homogenized, bland, visual messages may be inviting to a viewer—and possible participant—seeking to make a positive difference. Yet, these images may also be seen as cynical and misanthropic to an audience accustomed to challenging images found in other media. Further study, which examined audience response to the websites examined here, would be necessary to better understand this process.

The business of social change is, by definition, on the periphery of society and yet, the visual imagery used by those engaged in social change was found to be homogenous and unchallenging. A considerable issue then is whether social change organizations could be forfeiting the ‘symbolic capital,’ so necessary for smaller organizations, in their zeal to attract mainstream participants. This may, or may not be, the case. The findings here could also suggest that the very notion of what creates symbolic capital in social change organizations has changed. It is hard to imagine the possibility of a ‘deviant’ and challenging image, such as the poster of Huey Newton, gaining prominence when contrasted against the findings revealed in this study. Indeed, such an image may now not be seen as empowering, but as debilitating to a more deviant organization.

As already discussed, further study that examines more “deviant” organizations and their images, as well as audience response, is fundamental to better understand how these images are processed and if there is any impact on

71 SEE DAHLE ET AL, DOES IT PAY TO SHOCK? REACTIONS TO SHOCKING AND NONSHOCKING ADVERTISING CONTENT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS; LESTER, VISUAL COMMUNICATION: IMAGES WITH MESSAGES; VAGNONI, "SOMETHING ABOUT" THIS ADVERTISING..

perceptions of social change and activism. These findings suggest that in our modern, polished, media landscape, only modern, polished, images hold social capital within the non-profit community and, therefore, the promise of social change.

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Relating the Visual and the Headline in Chinese Print Advertisements

/ Lawrence Chun-wai Yu

University of Canterbury / Visible Language 41.2 / Kenix, 163-189

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Abstract

The most important components in modern print advertisements are the visual and the headline. The interplay between these two components is poorly understood, and is typically judged by experience, feelings or common sense. Based on classical rhetoric, Gui Bonsiepe's visual/verbal figures and other literature sources including Chinese ones, this paper examines the relationship between the visual and the headline in 1,562 Chinese print advertisements collected from Longyin Review—the only Chinese creative advertising reference periodical. The study develops a typology for analyzing these relationships from two aspects: Physical and Conceptual. The physical aspect looks at the visual ordering of the visual and the headline, and the conceptual aspect concerns the ways in which these two components jointly form and present creative ideas.

The typology provides a new tool for Chinese advertising practitioners to review their own or other people's work and it supplements what Bonsiepe has done. The findings compare the data in different ways and draw preliminary conclusions on the linkages between the various physical and conceptual relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Visual and headline in print advertisements interact in different ways and are likely to result in different presentations of the creative message. Most practitioners emphasize the manipulation of these interactions but seldom produce concise definitions. 'Work together' and 'complementary' (Cotzias, 1999) are the most widely used definitions, but these can only give a very broad and general idea. Jim Aitchison, the former creative director of Singapore's Batey Ads suggests that there are two modes in the relationships of visual and headline—"a bent headline with a straight picture" and "a straight headline with a bent picture" (Aitchison, 1999). 'Bent' means containing a twist or a shock and 'straight' means straightforward. But his conclusions are not totally clear.

Some scholars give us a better answer. They have broken fresh ground in analyzing modern print advertisements during the past two decades by using the discipline of classical rhetoric. However, most of their studies aim to explore the use of rhetoric either in the headline or in the visual; employing rhetorical figures to evaluate consumer comprehension and liking (e.g. Beltramini & Blasko, 1986; Hitchon, 1991; Howard & Barry, 1988; Mcquarrie & Mick, 1992 & 1993; Philips, 2000; Scott, 1994; Tom & Eves, 1999; Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991). Only a few of them have touched lightly on the relationships between visual and headline (Houston, Childers & Heckler, 1987; Ward & Gaidis, 1990).

In fact, the problem had been explored as early as in 1965 by Gui Bonsiepe. He was among the first to suggest "the need for a modern system of rhetoric, updated by semiotic theory, as a tool for describing and analyzing the phenomena of advertising" (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 167). He first presented his paper on visual

Table 1 Two Lists of Visual/Verbal Figures by Gui Bonsiepe

1965	1999
1. Analogy	1. Analogy
2. Associate Mediation	2. Associate Transfer(link /Mediation
3. Chain	3. Comparison
4. Comparison	4. Exaggeration
5. Parallelism	5. Exemplification
6. Metronymy	6. Fusion
7. Negation	7. Metaphoric
8. Verbal Specification	8. Metronymy
9. Synecdoche	9. Negation
-	10. Parallelism
-	11. Specification
-	12. Synecdoche
-	13. Typogram
-	14. Understatement

and verbal rhetoric to Arbeitsgruppe für Grafik Wirtschaft (The Working Group for Graphic Design and Industry) in Stuttgart in March 1965. Bonsiepe selected useful figures from the daunting system of classical rhetoric and brought them up to date with semiotics which originally studies every language sign in two aspects: syntactic and semantic. This helped Bonsiepe to draft his first list of visual/verbal figures (*see table 1*), based on the analysis of a series of advertisements with the focus on defining “the possible interactions” (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 168) between the visuals and the headlines. He claimed, “the [visual and headline] signs no longer simply add up, but rather operate in cumulative reciprocal relations” and “in this first approach, the visual/verbal figures were simply noted. The work of classifying and systematizing them still remains to be done” (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 171). However, his call didn’t arouse much interest in mainstream advertising countries like present day America, until the 1990s, when Bonsiepe’s work was eventually rediscovered and expanded beyond advertising to cover graphic communication (de Cosio et al, 1998).

Being inspired by Bonsiepe’s work, I did a pilot study in 2001 (Yu, 2001). I examined 180 Chinese award-winning advertisements, collected from The Association of Accredited Advertising Agents of Hong Kong (HK4As) Creative Awards between 1991 and 1999. By using Bonsiepe’s list of figures and referring to other literature on rhetoric, I explored eight types of figure which best describe the relationships of visual and headline, plus two cases which occur when either visual or headline exists alone (*see table 2*). The result paved the way for a deeper investigation that I will describe as follows. The first and most important aim of this deeper study is to formulate a typology of visual-head-

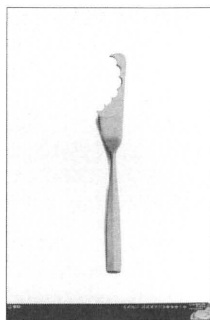
Table 2 The Relationships of Visual and Headline of Award-winning Chinese Advertisements (2001)

CATEGORY	NO.OF ADS	PERCENTAGE
Analogy	10	6
Anchorage	35	19
Blend	28	16
Chain	24	8
Contradiction	8	4
Metonymy	8	4
Parallelism	31	17
Syllepsis	22	12
No Visual	15	8
No Word	9	5
Total	180	100

Table 3 The Physical, Conceptual Relationships and Extreme Cases

PHYSICAL	CONCEPTUAL	EXTREME
<u>Blend</u>	<u>Analogy</u>	<u>No Visual</u>
Typographic Design	Simile	Ellipsis
Headline-in-Visual	Metaphor	Rhyme
Visual-in-Headline	Substitution	Syllepsis
<u>Headline-led</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Pure Visual</u>
<u>Visual-led</u>	<u>Chain</u>	-
-	<u>Contrast</u>	-
-	<u>Exaggeration</u>	-
-	<u>Exemplification</u>	-
-	<u>Metonymy</u>	-
-	By Feature	-
-	By Characteristic	-
-	By Association	-
-	<u>Parallelism</u>	-
-	<u>Specification</u>	-
-	<u>Syllepsis</u>	-
-	Enhancing	-
-	<u>Misinterpretation</u>	-
-	Releasing Tension	-

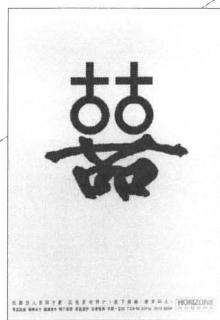
Remarks : Blend is classified as both a physical and conceptual relationship.



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line relationships of Chinese advertisements by examining their two aspects—Physical and Conceptual. The physical aspect of the relationship is the visual order between visual and headline which stems from an old question: “which is read first—headline or visual?” (Cotzias, 1999, 369). The conceptual aspect of the relationship is the way that a visual and a headline together form a creative message. The second aim of this study is to demonstrate the validity of the typology by applying it in the analysis of a large sample of Chinese advertisements. In view of how little Chinese advertising is empirically studied, it is hoped that this typology will become a prototype for the study of Chinese advertising art and provide a useful reference for students and practitioners. Table 3 summarizes the complete typology.

THE PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The physical relationships of visual and headline are about the visual order of these two components. Either the visual or the headline captures the advertising audience so that they will begin reading the advertisement. Thus, the different degrees of prominence of the visual and the headline form different

Figure1 Snow Brand Margarine. Agency: DY&R, Hong Kong.

Figure2 Lim Automobile Air-Con Service. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore.

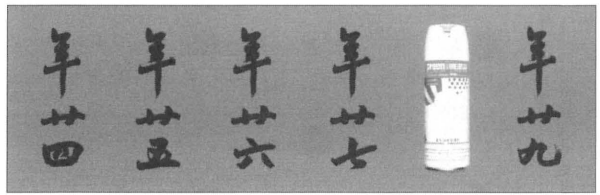
Figure3 Horizons Gay Hotline. Agency: DMB&B, Hong Kong. A congratulatory Chinese character meaning ‘Double Happiness’ that can be seen in almost every Chinese wedding, is used here as the main visual. The top part of the character has been replaced by two male symbols to bring out the message of supporting homosexuality.

Figure4 Sing Kwong Jewellery & Gold. Agency: TBWA Lee Davis, Hong Kong. Several handwritten words added to the subway station sign to form the headline: “Who says there is no diamond on Diamond Hill!”

Figure5 Preen Stain Remover. Agency: Bozell Worldwide, Hong Kong. The product shot replaced the date of the 28th (3 days before the Chinese New Year) in the headline: “24th, 25th, 26th, 27th & 29th of January.” A visual wit connects the product to the Chinese traditional “Clean Out Day” on the 28th. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.)

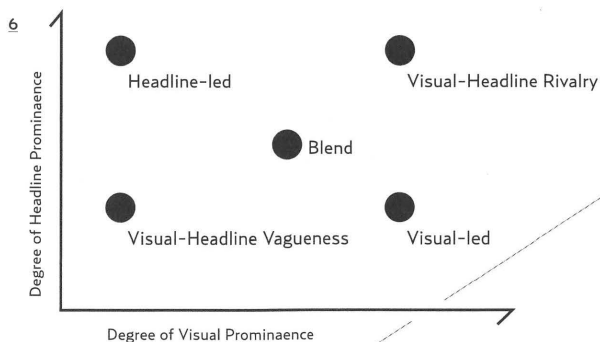


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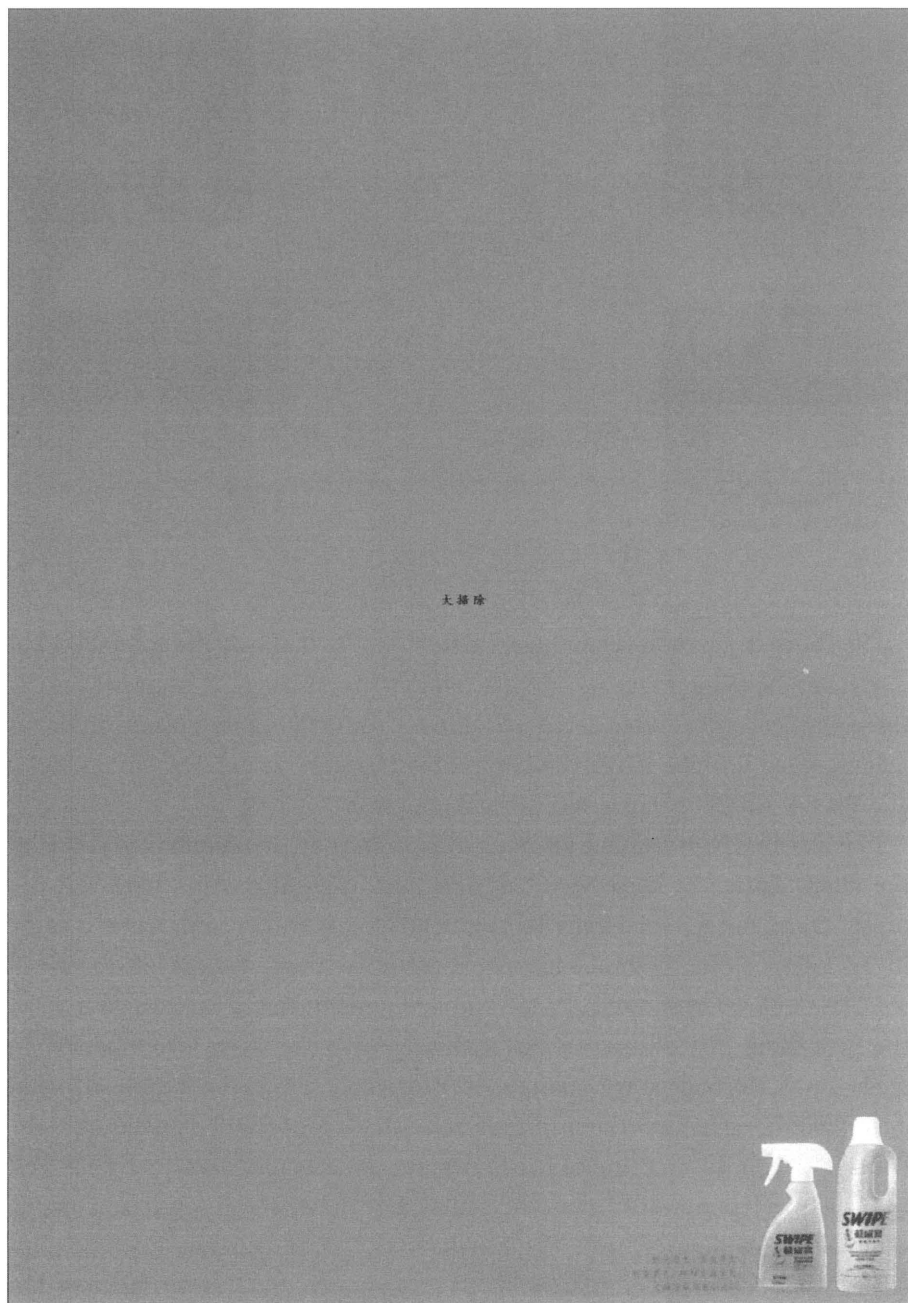
orders. These orders are: Visual-led (Aitchison, 1999, 167-208), Headline-led and Blend. Visual-led means the visual is the most prominent component in an advertisement (*see figure 1*). The visual first draws the attention of the advertising audience while the headline comes next. The more prominent the visual is, in comparison with the headline, the more visual-led the advertisement is. On the other hand, the more prominent the headline is, the more headline-led the advertisement (*see figure 2*). In some cases, the visual is blended into the headline to form an entity. That means the visual and the headline are permanently linked so that the advertising audience sees them at once. The blend relationship presents a physical combination of visual and headline but this combination also creates a new layer of meaning. Thus, the blend relationship is also a conceptual relationship, discussed later. The physical side of the blend relationship has three different forms: Typographic Design, Headline-in-Visual and Visual-in-Headline. Typographic design means adding visual elements to a word or some of the words in a headline to create a new visual entity thus having an extra layer of meaning (*see figure 3*). Headline-in-Visual normally happens in visual-led advertisements. It means the visual has captured a part of or an entire headline (*see figure 4*). If a visual is incorporated into the headline in a headline-led advertisement, that becomes Visual-in-Headline (*see figure 5*). Manipulating an appropriate order of visual and headline aims to avoid undesirable outcomes: Visual-Headline Rivalry and Visual-Headline Vagueness. When a visual and a headline each have a high degree of prominence at the same time, they will compete with each other. This leads to a rapid, back and forth movement of the eyes of the audience, because both the visual and



the headline are strong visual fixation points. Confusion may eventually result. Vagueness of visual and headline does not necessarily mean that they are too small but rather, that they are competing because of too many other visual elements spread all over the advertisements to undermine the visibility of either component.

David Ogilvy (1985, 87) strongly believes that the right order of the elementary components—visual, headline and body copy—has brought him perfect layouts that communicate best with the audience. He used his ‘perfect layouts’ in all his magazine advertisements. These layouts follow one simple, clear order: visual (illustration) first, then headline; and finally the body copy from top to the bottom. He thinks that these layouts work perfectly with people’s “normal order of scanning” (Ogilvy, 1985, 89). Undoubtedly, Ogilvy introduced the classic print advertising layouts that are still influential today.

In fact, simplicity is a recurrent theme propagated by those advertising masters who want to stop advertising from suffering ‘art-directoritis’ (Ogilvy, 1982, 121)—craft for craft’s sake. Ogilvy (1985, 88) always reminded his art directors who tended toward over-craftsmanship: “KISS – an acronym for Keep It Simple, Stupid.” Advertising is ultimately a tool for selling brands, services or products. It is all about effective and efficient communication with the target audience. Thus, simplicity is a must. The first and foremost task is to create a simple look, otherwise, people will just skip the advertisement. This is because, in general, nobody will spend time to figure out how to read an advertisement with scattered bits and pieces (today’s advertising for the youth market is another story). A clear and easy-to-follow order of elementary com-



7

Figure6 Interaction between the Orders of Visual and Headline.

Figure7 Environmental Protection. Agency: Gong Kai, Shanghai. Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.



8



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ponents must be used.

The above discussion is summarized in Figure 6. It shows the interaction of visual and headline in terms of their relative prominence. It is clear that the three physical orders: Visual-led, Headline-led and Blend are a useful guide for making good layouts, while the two problem styles: Visual-Headline Rivalry and Visual-Headline Vagueness are less effective.

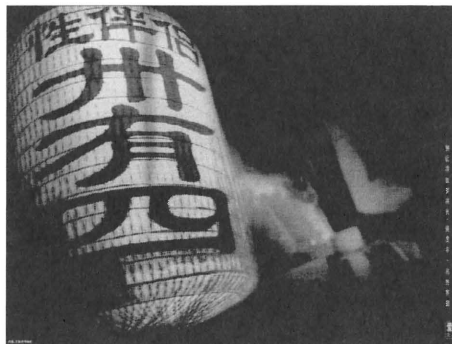
To make an advertisement visual-led, headline-led or a blend is to consider the manipulation of basic visual design rules. The discussion here will not repeat them, but will highlight some crucial factors which contribute to helping us follow either method and make it effective. These factors are described as: The Center, Layer, Open Space and Excitement. Being big in size may be the first thing that one associates instantly with the word ‘prominence.’ In many cases, the biggest is also the most prominent. However, Rudolf Arnheim described the center as “the principal locus of attraction and repulsion, established through the crossing of the four main structural lines. Other points on the lines are less powerful than the center, but the effect of attraction can be established for them as well” (Arnheim, 1974, 13). In general, a component, either visual or headline, placed in the central area of an advertisement has stronger visual power than elsewhere (*see figure 7*). This also challenges the top-

Figure8 Youth Outreach. Agency: Euro RSCG Partnership, Hong Kong. Although the red headline somehow competes with the duotone photograph, the layering helps to enhance its prominence thus it is read first.

Figure9 Swipe Miracle Cleaner. Agency: Euro RSCG Partnership, Hong Kong.

The tiny Chinese words at the centre are hardly missed.

Figure10 Action for Aids. Agency: Lowe & Partners/Monsoon, Singapore. The provocative words: “Thirty-Four Sex Partners” immediately grabs people’s attention. Placing them on the surface of a white lantern (meaning someone died) creates a visual impact. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.)



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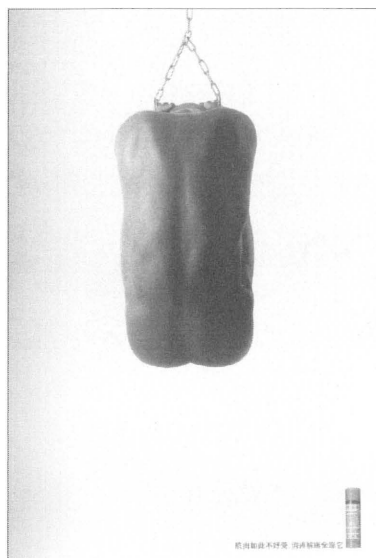
down order which Ogilvy supports. Layers, the second factor, creates visual depth in a two-dimensional space. It can establish priorities. The component on the top layer will be read first (*see figure 8*). Our eyes tend to spot the contrast. Thus a little red flower in a large green field is as prominent as a speck of dirt on a white shirt. Placing a visual or a headline, even though it is small, in a plain, 'open space' is hard to miss (*see figure 9*). The fourth factor is excitement. 'Oddvertising' is short for 'Odd Advertising' which Warren Berger defined as always presenting "extreme scenarios, offbeat characters and at time baffling messages" (Berger, 2001, 185). Most creative people use either well-known or strange scenarios, people or things in their advertisements in order to stand out from today's visual crowd and draw people's attention (*see figure 10*).

Although the above factors have been singled out for individual discussion, they are often mixed in different ways to establish the prominence of visuals or headlines in most of the advertisements we see every day.

THE CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The discussion of the conceptual relationships of visual and headline mainly concerns the ways they form and present the creative messages. By examining a large sample of Chinese advertisements one by one, ten types of relationships were found and described by rhetorical terms. Their key definitions follow.

Analogy / Martin Gray defined an analogy as "a word, thing, idea or story, chosen for the purpose of comparison, which can help to explain whatever it is similar to" (Gray, 1992, 22). Analogy as a conceptual relationship simply means that an



11

Figure11 Deep Heat Sport Pain Relief Spray. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore. A human body punching bag connects very well to the headline: "If your muscles are painful like that, use this."

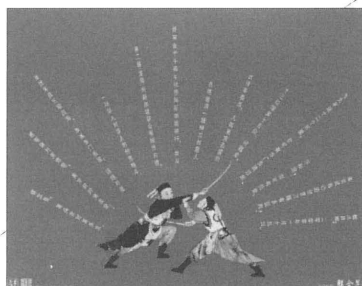
Figure12 Bronx Fitness Centre. Agency: Grey, Shanghai. A muscular lady is holding a pair of weights that imply she has big and firm breasts. The headline says, "This is a one hundred percent natural push-up bra."

Figure13 Long Xi Creative Award Call for Entry. Agency: Singapore Press Holdings – Chinese Creative Unit, Singapore. A combat between the two Chinese warriors substitutes for the competition between Chinese admen.

Figure14 Action for Aids. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore. A combination of the Chinese character meaning 'life' and the graphical illustration of a penis that wears a condom.

Figure15 33rd Anniversary of Singapore, Agency: Leo Burnett, Singapore. The story starts at the visual of "33" formed by two McDonald's logos and ends with the headline that sends congratulation from McDonald's to the Republic of Singapore.

(Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)

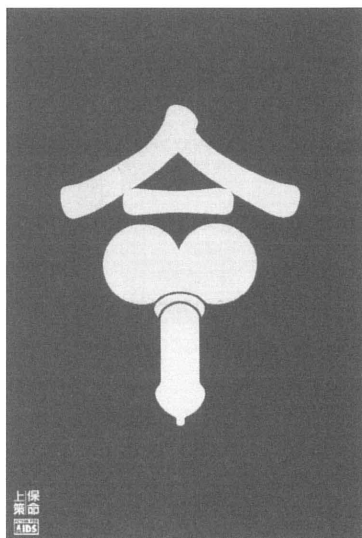


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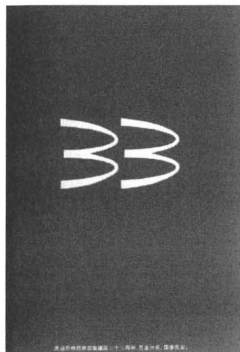
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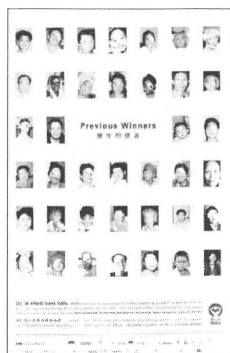


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element of the visual links with an element of the headline. It always gives a very good excuse for creating visual wit. Through careful examination, three basic forms of analogy in modern Chinese rhetoric can be found from Chinese print advertisements. 1) Simile—the visual and the headline are compared to suggest a similarity, usually with words ‘like’ or ‘as’ (see figure 11) 2) Metaphor—the visual and the headline are compared to suggest that they refer to the same meaning (see figure 12) 3) Substitution—this is the most subtle form of analogy. Either the visual or the headline is totally omitted for the basis of the comparison (see figure 13).

Blend / A combination or unity of visual and headline. The physical blend relationship always brings about a more concise visual idea to convey a new message, by combining a visual and a headline in a simple and clever way (see figure 14).

Chain / Roland Barthes (1977, 38-41) described the written or verbal text as having a ‘relay-function’ for the visual in advertising. This means the story starts from the visual and continues in the headline. Meanwhile Bonsiepe (1999b, 171) said that “a topic begun in words and continued and completed visually” is a chain relationship. Apparently, they are talking about the same relationship of visual and headline but in the opposite order (see figure 15).



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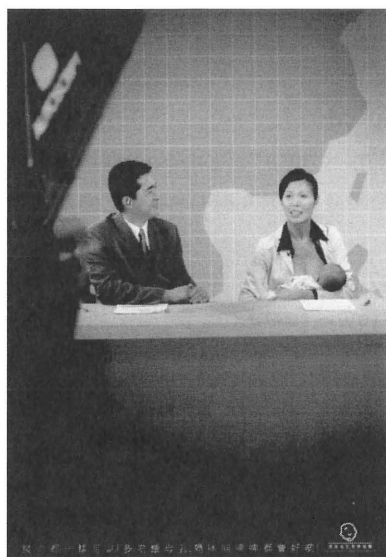
Figure16 Project Orbis Eye Hospital. Agency: DMB&B, Hong Kong. The headline: “Previous Winners” contradicts the reader’s perception that all those people who have eye problems are unlucky. The reader will then find out that these winners have regained their sight because of the donations to the hospital.

Figure17 Caltex Superon Unleaded Gas. Agency: Bates, Hong Kong. A motorcycle driver is lying on the road in an amusing gesture. The humor is revealed by the headline: “Watch out for the ignition power of Caltex Superon unleaded gas”.

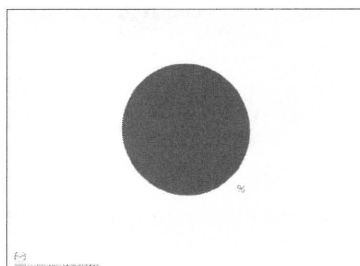
Figure18 Hong Kong Breastfeeding Mothers’ Association. Agency: FCB, Hong Kong. The female news reporter is breast-feeding her baby during the news program. This supports the headline, “No matter how busy you are, you can do it! The more you breast-feed your baby, the more the both of you are healthy.”

Figure19 Mazda 626 Capella. Agency: J. Walter Thompson, Taiwan. The ad looks like the national flag of Japan and the red circle replaces the “zero” of the percentage. It echoes the headline: “Mazda 626 Capella is 100% imported from Japan. Now you can enjoy a 0% installment rate.”

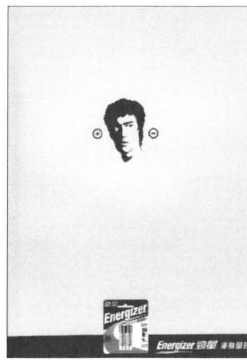
Figure20 Energizer Batteries. Agency: Bates, China. The unbeaten character of the dead martial art movie super-star—Bruce Lee is used to symbolize the long lasting power of batteries. It perfectly matches the tagline: “Full of Energy.” (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)



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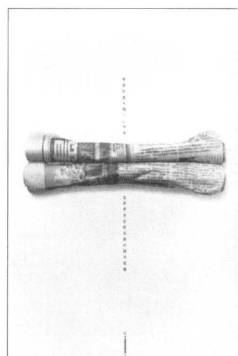
20

Contrast / Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) defined Visual-Verbal Negation as “the meaning of a sequence of words is illustrated by a visual opposite.” I propose the phrase Contrast to describe the incompatibility of visual and headline in which visual-verbal negation is the most extreme condition (*see figure 16*).

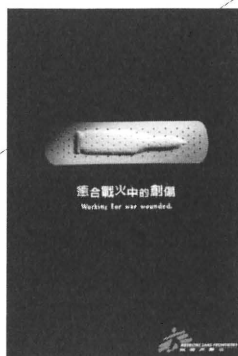
Exaggeration / The visual amplifies something in the headline or vice versa. This something can be the key attribute of a brand or product or the end benefit for the consumers (*see figure 17*).

Exemplification / In most cases, the visuals serve as illustration of examples that support the meaning of headlines (*see figure 18*).

Metonymy / It was originally a figure of speech referring to “the substitution of the name of a thing by the name of an attribute of it, or something closely associated with it” (Gray, 1992, 176). This type of conceptual relationship is reflected in several ways. 1) By Feature—forms, shapes, colors, properties or qualities of things can always be used to substitute for the whole so as to leave room for imagination (*see figure 19*). 2) By Characteristics—specific appearance, gesture, behavior and personality can be used as a substitute for people or animals (*see figure 20*). 3) By Association—customs, traditions and idioms are major elements for creating



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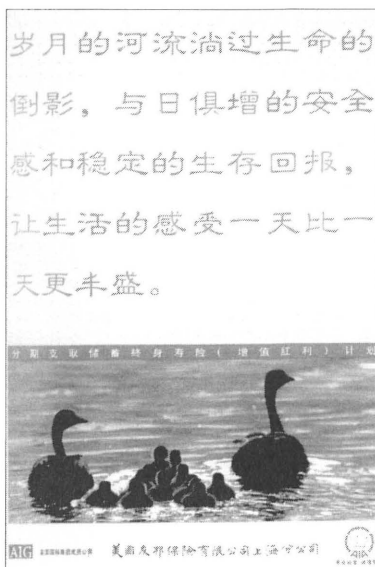
Figure21 Sing Tao Daily News. Agency: A Partnership, New York. The visual of a “twisted cruller” (Chinese deep fried pastry, a typical food for breakfast) shaped newspaper echoes the headline: “Thanks to Sing Tao Daily for providing fresh and genuine nourishment for minds in every morning for the past 12 years.”

Figure22 Medecins sans Frontieres. Agency Unknown, Hong Kong. The bullet-shaped Band-Aid reinforces the headline: “Working for war wounded.”

Figure23 AIA Life Insurance. Agency: DDB Needham, Shanghai. With the anchorage-function of the headline—which tenderly talks about how insurance rewards the insured person with an abundant life—the visual implies a warm family life.

Figure24 Shanghai Advertising Association. Agency: Bridge/J. Walter Thompson, Shanghai. The visual superficially illustrates the headline: “I want to be full of ink.” However, “full of ink” means someone is knowledgeable and intelligent in an old Chinese saying. Thus, the visual is actually ironic for those who seek shortcuts for acquiring knowledge.

Figure25 Barry Forth – The Porsche Expert. Agency: BBDO, Hong Kong. The headline says, “This foreign guy is having an affair with your wife but you still laugh.” The visual shows a guy fixing a Porsche to reveal the other meaning of “wife” for “dream car” in a colloquial saying. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)



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a metonymy relationship, especially in advertising that is derived from local cultures (*see figure 21*).

Parallelism / The visual and the headline reinforce a key point through repetition. As Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) said, parallelism provides “visual and verbal signs related to the same meaning” (*see figure 22*).

Specification / Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) defined specification as: “a visual sign is accompanied by a minimum of text in order to make it clear and narrow it down semantically.” This is quite close to what Barthes (1977, 38–41) called the Anchorage-Function of Text, helping the advertising audience choose from a confusing number of possible meanings of the visual (*see figure 23*).

Syllepsis / Originally a type of pun (Leigh, 1994, 19), it uses a word understood differently in relation to two or more words it modifies, an extra layer of meaning can be created. Syllepsis is making comparisons between visual and headline in dynamic forms: 1) Enhancing Misinterpretation—in order to create paradoxical effects, some advertisements provide wrong cues intentionally (*see figure 24*). 2) Releasing Tension—if the word-pun in the headline is strong enough to capture the advertising audience in the first place, the job of the visual is mainly to release this tension (*see figure 25*).



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Figure26 Red Cross of China/Blood Donation. Agency: D’Arcy, Beijing. The Chinese word “Blood” is omitted to make the incomplete headline: “Integrity, Bravery & Hot (Blood),” which praises people who have the heart to give and implies that there is an urge for blood donation.

Figure27 HSBC Bank. Agency: Bates, Hong Kong. The bilingual headline: “Sing & Dance Festival” phonetically sounds like Christmas in Cantonese.

Figure28 SmarTone Mobile Phone Service. Agency: Leo Burnett, Hong Kong. The headline literally means: “Do you want to come up on stage?” but “come up on stage” also colloquially means “subscribe to a mobile phone service.”

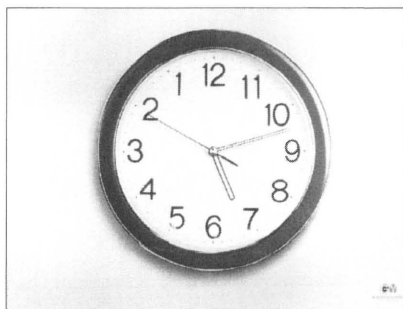
Figure29 Guilin Guiyi Cosmetics Specialized Store. Agency: Huadun Advertising Guilin, China. The backward going clock closely links to the psyche of rejuvenation for cosmetics consumers. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)

NO VISUAL AND PURE VISUAL

Not all print advertisements have a visual-headline interaction. Sometimes, either the headline or the visual can do the job on its own. These represent the two extreme cases. A ‘no visual’ advertisement does not necessarily have a long copy. It can also be an advertisement that has a precise and witty headline with the support of a bit more copy or a brand name. A ‘pure visual’ advertisement is usually a visual riddle which has no hint in words. The headlines in no visual advertisements are self-sufficient and convey the whole creative message. However, this does not say that there should be no visual element at all. Rather, most of the time visual elements like colors, graphics, typeface, page layout are necessary for giving a so-called ‘visual voice’ to an advertisement. A visual voice represents a specific tone and manner which is similar to the mood of a movie. Thus, the headlines in no visual advertisements always carry figures of speech. Here are some of the figures which were used frequently in the sample of Chinese advertisements: 1) Ellipsis—Leigh (1994, 21) defined ellipsis as a “deliberate omission of a word or words that are readily implied by the context” (see figure 26). 2) Rhyme—the play with the sounds of the words (see figure 27).



28



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3) Syllepsis—using double meaning of some words, probably the most frequently used figure in Chinese advertisements (*see figure 28*). One may notice that the existence of a brand or product name in a no visual advertisement creates an anchorage-function (discussed above) that helps the audiences by narrowing down the interpretation of the headlines by recognizing who the advertisers are.

Pure visual advertisements are named by Lazar Dzamic (2001) as ‘No-copy ads.’ The cleanliness and boldness of pure visual advertisements help them to stand out from the ‘visual pollution’ in today’s media. They have a strong power to catch the eyeballs of people because they don’t always look like advertisements, but resemble the visual arts. If the cleverness of the visual is relevant to what is being sold and successfully aims at the psyche of the consumers, the pure visual advertisement is engaging and sophisticated (*see figure 29*). However, they are a real challenge for both the reader to decipher the visual puzzles and the creative people to design “the right amount of suspense” (Dzamic, 2001, 12). Readers must after all ‘click into’ the visual messages before they find their efforts are futile and give up trying. As Jack Fund, the creative director of Los Angeles’ Jack agency, warned, “If you leave it too open-ended, often a consumer won’t get it, or worse. They will fill in the blank with the wrong answer” (Dzamic, 2001, 13). Neil French also commented on some badly executed pure visual advertisements. He complained, “Too often the code is known only to admen” (Dzamic, 2001, 13).

RESEARCH METHOD AND RESULTS

To test the reliability and prevalence of the methods discussed, I have carefully

examined a large sample of Chinese advertisements from different countries and regions.

Collection of Chinese Print Advertisements

The sample of Chinese advertisements for this test was selected to fulfill the following criteria:

- 1) It should be large enough for reliable classification.
- 2) It should comprise Chinese advertisements of a high creative standard.
- 3) It should not be collected exclusively from creative award—winners in the big award shows, that are likely to have more visual-led and ‘pure visual’ advertisements than normal.
- 4) It should comprise Chinese advertisements from different regions.

Longyin Review was selected as the source for collecting the sample. It was first published in early 1995 by several advertising gurus in Hong Kong. It soon became the most important creative reference used in different Chinese communities and is still the only source of its kind in the world. Through this periodical, these luminaries aimed to display outstanding Chinese creative advertisements from different places and catapult Chinese creativity into the world arena. Every advertisement submitted to the *Longyin Review* is carefully screened and short-listed by a panel of well-experienced practitioners, with a professional focus on creativity in the setting of Chinese culture. Most of the published advertisements were from major advertising agencies in different

regions: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, United States and Canada. 1,562 advertisements were collected from the issues number 10 to 28 (1997 to 2001).

Coding the Advertisements

The coding process was in two parts. The first part coded the advertisements according to the two visual orders: visual-led and headline-led. The second part coded the advertisements according to the ten conceptual relationships of visual and headline and the two extreme cases. In this process, a second well-experienced coder was also employed. Disagreements between coders were resolved by discussion. The process of classifying the advertisements was consistent and reliable. To ensure the findings are not biased in the tabulation, only one of the advertisements in any specific campaign has been counted. The rest of the advertisements in the campaign have been put into another category called 'Campaign' (*see table 5*).

Findings and Implications

The findings in Table 4 and Table 5 support the reliability of the methods discussed. Moreover, the data have been compared in different ways in order to make further inferences possible.

1) Visual-led and Headline-led

In Table 4, a total 892 advertisements were coded and counted because Blend (33 ads), No Visual (21 ads) and Pure

Table 4 Visual-led and headline-led Advertisements in terms of Conceptual Relationships

	VISUAL -LED	HEADLINE -LED	RATIO	TOTAL
Analogy	135	3	45:1	138
Chain	189	50	4:1	239
Contrast	28	9	3:1	37
Exaggeration	15	3	5:1	18
Exemplification	55	3	19:1	58
Metonymy	68	1	68:1	69
Specification	86	17	5:1	103
Syllepsis	60	12	5:1	72
	140	18	8:1	158
Grand Total	776	116	7:1	892

Table 5 Distribution of the Conceptual Relationships and the Extreme Cases of the Studied Sample (1,562 Chinese Advertisements)

	CA	CH	HK	MA	SP	TW	US	US	St	Cam	TOTAL
Conceptual Relationship											
Analogy	0	35	76	1	10	14	2	2	138	84	222
Blend	0	5	21	1	5	1	0	0	33	7	40
Chain	1	35	130	3	19	50	1	1	239	189	428
Contrast	0	4	24	1	2	6	0	0	37	31	68
Exaggeration	0	5	8	0	2	3	0	0	18	17	35
Exemplification	0	9	40	1	3	5	0	0	58	41	99
Metonymy	0	22	36	0	7	3	1	1	69	39	108
Parallelism	1	30	53	0	8	10	1	1	103	59	162
Specification	1	19	31	1	10	10	0	0	72	49	121
Syllepsis	0	29	95	2	9	22	1	1	158	58	216
Extreme Cases											
No Visual	0	6	12	0	2	1	0	0	21	7	28
Pure Visual	0	6	12	0	3	1	0	0	25	10	35
Grand Total	3	205	541	10	80	126	6	6	971	591	1562

CA=Canada, CH=China, HK=Hong Kong, MA=Malaysia, SP=Singapore, TW=Taiwan, US=USA, St=Sub-total, Cam = Campaign (only one of the advertisements in a campaign with the same type of the conceptual relationships and the extreme cases has been selected and counted. These are the numbers of the remaining advertisements).

Visual (25 ads) are irrelevant and thus excluded. The result shows a total 776 advertisements that are visual-led and 116 advertisements that are headline-led; they represent 87% and 13% respectively. Not surprisingly, these findings demonstrate that Chinese advertising professionals use visuals to lead the creative ideas in most cases. However, when we looked at the ratios between visual-led and headline-led advertisements according to the conceptual relationships, something else was found. The ratios of visual-led advertisements to headline-led advertisements in Parallelism (68:1), Analogy (45:1) and Exemplification (19:1) are very high. This suggests that these three conceptual relationships allow more room for creating visual ideas than the others.

2) The Extreme Cases

In Table 5, both the numbers of the no visual and pure visual advertisements are very small: only 21 and 25, which represent 2% and 3% of the total of 971 advertisements. The no visual advertisements are scarce because people are used to seeing more and reading less. The high proportion of the visual-led advertisements (*table 4*) gives evidence of this. Pure visual advertisements are also rare in Chinese advertising and this implies that Chinese admen are not 'lazy' or 'illiterate' as Neil French and Trevor Beattle, the creative

director of London's TBWA, say when they criticize the increasing number of pure visual advertisement (Dzamic, 2001, 11).

3) Comparison of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan

The total number of the advertisements from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan is 872 which represent almost 90% of the 971 advertisements studied. It is worth making a comparison of these regions. Table 6 shows that the four most popular conceptual relationships are the same in all these regions. They are Analogy, Chain, Metonymy and Syllepsis. This suggests a common characteristic of Chinese admen. This is noteworthy, because people in today's Hong Kong and Taiwan, though their ancestors came from mainland China, have been influenced by very different cultures. As Tse, Belk and Zhou (1989) have noted, these regions have societal differences in the levels of economic development, political ideology, attitudes towards consumption and business training and philosophy.

CONCLUSION

The typology developed in this study provides Chinese advertising practitioners with a better understanding of the range of relationships possible between the visual and the headline. The study confirms the utility of the typology in describing existing advertisements and providing a basis for composing effec-

Table 6 Distribution of the Conceptual Relationships in HongKong, Mainland China and Taiwan

HONG KONG		CHINA		TAIWAN	
Chain	24%	Analogy	17%	Chain	40%
Syllepsis	18%	Chain	17%	Syllepsis	18%
Analogy	14%	Metonymy	15%	Analogy	11%
Metonymy	10%	Syllepsis	14%	Metonymy	8%
Exemplification	7%	Parallelism	11%	Specification	8%
Parallelism	7%	Specification	9%	Contrast	5%
Blend	6%	Blend	4%	Exemplification	4%
Contrast	4%	Contrast	2%	Exaggeration	2%
Specification	4%	Exemplification	2%	Parallelism	2%
Exaggeration	2%	Exaggeration	2%	Blend	1%

tive relationships between the visual and the headline.

The rhetorical approach to analysis has certain potential pitfalls, illustrated in the previous work of Bonsiepe, that this study has sought to address.

- 1) **The definitions of relationships** are not clear: perhaps due to translations; most of the definitions presented by Bonsiepe appear distorted and confused. This study has sought to revise and clarify the definitions.
- 2) **The definitions of relationships** are not distinct, when we talk about the interplay of the visual and the headline we cannot avoid making a comparison between the two. The Visual-Verbal Comparison relationship is always present. In addition, definitions of Metonymy and Synecdoche overlap. The blurred boundaries between definitions undermine the utility of the typology and makes classification more subjective. This study has sought to identify and address such overlaps.
- 3) **The definitions of relationships** are not effectively tested; confidence in the typology comes from its application to a large data set. Previous studies have been limited in this regard. This study has tested the typology against a large sample size.

However, further limitations remain. Critical in this regard is the need for multiple coders to determine equivalent results. This study has utilized two coders,

but there is still a question about the objectivity of the process. There is also a limitation to the typology because it has been grounded very much on a Western tradition of rhetoric and tested against advertisements that are likely to have been strongly influenced by Western advertising practice. Further studies of non-Western examples and basic studies of non-Western rhetoric may challenge the current typology.

The general utility of a rhetorical approach to the analytical study of visuals and headlines in advertising has been demonstrated. This rhetorical approach to the study of print advertising could be extended to the study of advertising in other fields, such as Public Service Advertising, Medical and Health Advertising and Political Advertising. The approach can also be applied to other types of media than print, such as radio, television and the Internet. Sound (voice, music and special effects) and image (static and moving) can all be evaluated using this approach. Opportunities certainly exist to extend this study and to further enrich our understanding of how visual and text components interact.

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