

Special Section Editorial

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My aim for this broadly-conceived special section in *Image & Text* on visual rhetoric and rhetorics of the visual is to highlight the multiple ways in which rhetorical approaches can offer valuable perspectives on a broad range of visual cultural products and practices. More specifically, one of my main objectives was to solicit studies that consider the rhetorical constitution of visual cultural phenomena via a mixture of visual and verbal argumentation. This means paying attention to how visual artifacts operate as persuasive “arguments”, while recognising the essential role played by verbal argumentation when it comes to the creation, justification, promotion and evaluation of the visual. I am delighted that the articles presented here reflect on these interconnected aspects of visual rhetorical inquiry (the rhetoricity of visual language and the rhetoricity of language about the visual).

The five articles selected for this section offer a variety of rhetorical perspectives on a wide range of visual cultural products and contexts. While some articles look closely at the rhetorical strategies employed in visual communications (Kevill-Davies; Rath) and environments (Gilich), others emphasise the rhetorics of visual communicative research processes or methodologies (Omrani & Rutten) and vocabularies (Brown-Edwards). The articles in this section therefore illustrate the interpretive versatility and flexibility of visual rhetorical criticism, insofar as it can take on a variety of theoretical and methodological forms. While some articles draw directly on established rhetorical theory, others offer more intuitively rhetorical readings. As Dilip Goankar¹ argues, the adoption of a ‘rhetorical lexicon’ is not a requirement for articulating a rhetorical awareness of a situation. Nonetheless, as I hope these articles show, a rhetorically-(self)conscious attitude towards visual interpretation is worth cultivating. As Laurie Gries explains, regardless of the artifact analysed or the method used in the analysis, a visual rhetorical approach differs from other visual methodologies in its emphasis on the artifact as a performative ‘symbolic action’ with ‘constitutive force’, produced and distributed for specific strategic purpose.² All the articles in this section can be said to offer such context-specific perspectives on

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Themed section on Visual rhetoric and rhetorics of the visual

the strategic and performative functions of visual texts and the verbal discourses that surround them.

In the article 'Look and see: Optical technology and disciplinary mechanisms in Topps Trading Cards, 1948-1952', Harriette Kevill-Davies explores rhetorical mechanisms whereby post-war American trading cards reinforced a particular worldview, not only through educational content, but also through a taxonomic 'collectable' system and ideologically-loaded optical gimmicks. Taken together, these mechanisms encourage the 'disciplined' engagement of American children, who could become participants in the hierarchal ordering of world history from a particular western, techno-scientific perspective.

The article by Storm Jade Brown-Edwards, 'Visual Communicative Practices: towards a more inclusive visual rhetoric?', deals directly with issues surrounding the verbal rhetorical vocabularies surrounding the study of visual culture. She proposes the application of an inclusive term, 'visual communicative practices', to circumvent difficulties that arise when attempting a transdisciplinary study of visual practices ambiguously categorised as 'public art', 'street art' or 'graffiti'. She argues that the verbal classifications of these visual expressions circumscribe and delimit how they are interpreted and evaluated. Brown-Edwards, therefore, suggests an opening up of the discourse to enable a more nuanced discussion of the total meaning-making process of particular visual communicative acts in context.

In the article, 'The rhetoric of neutrality. Again. Revisiting Kinross in an era of typographic globalisation', Kyle Rath critiques what he perceives to be a contemporary manifestation of the modernists attempt to produce 'objective' and 'neutral' typographic applications. Rath offers a historical overview of how the notion of typographic 'neutrality' gained popularity, after which it was presumably 'debunked' via an understanding of minimalist typography as thoroughly *rhetorical*. Rath thus critiques the reemergence of a 'rhetoric of neutrality' (as conceptualised by Kinross) by referring to numerous examples of recent corporate rebranding efforts, discussing the movement's problematic logic and worrisome homogenising effects.

Arjang Omrani and Kris Rutten's piece, 'Collaborative audio-visual rhetoric: a self-reflexive review of collaboration in anthropological film projects', explores various ways in which anthropologist-filmmakers may go about collaboratively representing the life experiences of vulnerable subjects such as refugees. They argue for the importance of developing a 'shared anthropology', beyond the mere sharing of a camera, to allow refugees to competently and persuasively tell their stories to specific audiences and for specific purposes. The article reflects on two films that have adopted distinctive approaches to

tackling power imbalances in visual representation, such as dehumanisation, objectification and stereotyping. They highlight how there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution when it comes to collaborative ethnographic filmmaking, but argue that an understanding of these audio-visual products *as rhetorical* may generate more balanced, context-appropriate and persuasive results.

Lastly, Yulia Gilich's article, 'This is not a Pig: Settler Innocence and Visuality of Zoos', explores the visual and verbal rhetorics of two Israeli zoos and how they perpetuate myths of settler innocence, thereby reinforcing spatial entitlement to 'claim, displace, and possess'. She explores how loaded metaphors of exotic animals and their supposedly uninhabited environments are co-opted for reinforcing not only a western-colonial ideology, but also benevolent Zionist rhetorics of 'indigeneity', 'reintroduction' and 'restoration'. In other words, she illustrates how the design of these zoos, along with media coverage of the zoos, are utilized as rhetorical weapons in the ongoing regional conflict.

In summary, the articles featured in this themed section seek to interrogate, to varying degrees, both a) the visual communicative strategies employed in argumentation of various kinds, as well as b) the discursive utterances that persuade us of the propriety, legitimacy or value of those visual articulations. While visual texts can undoubtedly be highly persuasive in their own right, they do not exist or operate in isolation. Both the production and the reception of the visual are highly influenced by discursive communities and practices. To consider rhetorics of the visual then, is to interrogate how the visual is conceptualised and to consider what the purposes and effects of such conceptualisations may be.

Notes

1. Gaonkar, D.P. 1990. Rhetoric and its double: Reflections on the rhetorical turn in the human sciences. *The rhetorical turn: Invention and persuasion in the conduct of inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press:341-366.
2. Gries, L. 2019. Advances in Visual Rhetorical Analysis, in *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, edited by L Pauwels and D Mannay. London: Sage:382.