

_design, culture and social responsibility



de/Re/CONSTRUCTING culture

_design, culture and social responsibility

Environmental Reality and Indigenous Society: Historic and Contemporary Perspectives

Fulbright Hays Seminar México and Costa Rica Summer 2003

Maria Rogal

Assistant Professor of Graphic Design
School of Art and Art History
University of Florida
PO Box 115801
Gainesville, FL 32611-5801 USA

e mrogal@ufl.edu
 maria@material-culture.org
w www.material-culture.org
 www.mariarogal.com
t 352 392 0201 x 211 (office)

table of contents

Introduction	1
Summary of Curriculum Project	2
Exercise: A Semiotic Analysis	3
Project 1: Design + Globalization	6
Project 2: The Artifact Project	25
Project 3: A Sense of Place	32
Follow-up Activities	35
Terminology	36
Design Process Information	38
Resources	40
Bibliography	41
Acknowledgements	44

_introduction

The projects included in this documentation are intended to supplement advanced problems in graphic design/visual communication. Each project presented here is grounded in the idea of the designer as the constructor of culture and as an agent for change. Design does not exist in a vacuum and the design student should be fully aware and engaged in an understanding of issues related to social responsibility/ethical communication/cultural sensitivity and globalization. Ultimately, it is the designer who is positioned to construct a certain vision of the world. Therefore it is the intention that these projects aid in exploring the above-mentioned issues in the classroom. Included here are three projects and one exercise which may be interpreted for the specific teaching context.

The projects presented here are intended to provide a framework for the design student to explore the following issues:

- the specific role of language in a culture and how it reflects social, political and ideological values;
- identity, hybrid cultures, colonial influences, literacy, ideology (political and religious), and contemporary mass media;
- visual vocabulary of historic communication vehicles, including architecture, textiles, etc. and how these may, or may not influence contemporary visual communication; and
- consideration of resources and how this impacts design as an activity, thought process as well as its relationship to production.

Specifics related to the Seminar includes:

Exploration of the rich visual, social, cultural, political and economic histories of México, specifically the semiotics of indigenous and popular design as it compares and contrasts to colonial and post colonial visual culture. This may be evident in patterns (textiles, handcrafts, carvings,) architectural motifs, and formal qualities of representation (people, places and things). Regional art is very often political in nature and a rich resource for exploring this subject and decoding meaning. Related topics include investigating the use of form, ornament and color, and multilingual communication (Spanish and Indigenous languages). How, even in exploring a part, it is connected to the whole and reflects or embeds meaning beyond the artifact.

In studying and understanding the Costa Rican context, issues emerge related to tourism and eco-tourism, conservation, commodification and education towards a more thorough understanding of our relationship to nature, how it supports and sustains us and how we can perhaps, subversively, educate the audience in the process of their interaction with a place.

_summary of curriculum projects

LEVEL Post-secondary (3000–6000 level course work)
Advanced Graphic Design, Visual Communication, Communication Design

Exercise: A Semiotic Analysis

A brief exercise designed to deconstruct and decode texts provide. Students will identify the signs within the text and identify the codes that create meaning (point of view, language, typographic syntax, body language, positioning, color usage, rendering of the image, etc.). In turn, this will aid students in constructing messages.

Project 1: Design + Globalization

The intention of this project is provide an opportunity for a student design team to work on “real” projects with international not-for-profit clients. The objective is to open up the US student’s frame of reference with several goals, listed below, in mind. Specifically, this project provides a prototypical framework for working with a client over a distance. This project can also be conducted on-site.

Project 2: The Artifact Project

Context is intrinsic to the study of graphic design and of history. The way that we can more fully understand an artifact, and a culture, is through exploring its function, meaning and significance. The intention of this project is to explore artifacts from México and to discover what they can tell us about “Mexicanness.” This project is intended to employ semiotic theory.

Project 3: A Sense of Place

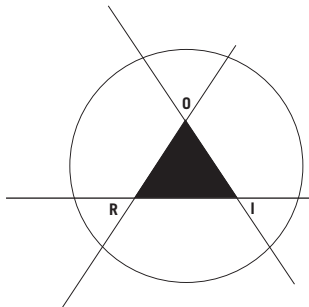
This project will be grounded in visually communicating a “sense of place” to create an experience beyond the obvious, the cliché. The foundations of this project are based on developing an understanding of the rich social, political and cultural contexts (both of an historical and contemporary nature) of México or Costa Rica.

_semiotic analysis [exercise]

INTRODUCTION

A 'text' is a complex sign constructed of other signs. For example, theme parks, tourist sites, city markets, advertisements, billboards, news magazines, are all 'texts' which are, in and of themselves, complex signs.

Your analytical task is to deconstruct and decode the texts provided. Identify the signs within the text and identify the codes that create meaning (point of view, language, typographic syntax, body language, positioning, color usage, rendering of the image, etc.) Break down these codes even further. For example, explain and analyze the typographic syntax used. Define the structural relationships between the signifiers. In doing this, your intention is to ultimately analyze and explain the ideological functions of the signs within the text and the text as a whole as it is presented. Understanding that this is yet part of an even larger whole or socio-cultural construction that still must be considered.



object is the physical thing
[for example, a tree].

representamen is how we refer
to it, a symbol in either written
or visual language.

interpretant is the receiver,
the audience.

sign model developed by
Charles Peirce

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is the reality that this text constructs or presents?

Is it visible or invisible? Does it contain aspects that are both? If so, explain.

How is this manifested?

What assumptions can we make?

Are the codes connotative or denotative?

How do the codes function to create meaning?

MATERIALS

TERMINOLOGY

paradigm: a set of associated signifiers which are all members of some defining category, but in which each signifier is significantly different. In natural language there are grammatical paradigms such as verbs or nouns. In a given context, one member of the paradigm set is structurally replaceable with another. The use of one signifier (e.g. a particular word or a garment) rather than another from the same paradigm set (e.g. adjectives or hats) shapes the preferred meaning of a text.

syntagms: an orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole (sometimes called a 'chain'). In language, a sentence, for instance, is a syntagm of words. Syntagmatic relations are the various ways in which constituent units within the same text may be structurally related to each other. A signifier enters into syntagmatic relations with other signifiers of the same structural level within the same text. Syntagmatic relationships exist both between signifiers and between signifieds. Relationships between signifiers can be either sequential (e.g. in film and television narrative sequences), or spatial (e.g. montage in posters and photographs). Relationships between signifieds are conceptual relationships (such as argument). Syntagms are created by the linking of signifiers from paradigm sets which are chosen on the basis of whether they are conventionally regarded as appropriate or may be required by some syntactic rule system (e.g. grammar).



FIGURES (left to right, top to bottom)
 Store sign, Puebla
 Objects from Saturday market, Puebla
 Day of the Dead sweets, Puebla
 Milagros from church, Puebla
 Tortillera store sign, hand painted on wall, México City
 Subversive T-shirt from México City mall
 Cemento Moctezuma ad, hand painted on wall, México City
 Sol Beer ad, hand painted on wall, México City



FIGURES (left to right, top to bottom)
 Soap Boxes, La Merced Market, México City
 Posada T-shirt featuring La Caterina, Oaxaca City
 Archeological Site, Yucatán
 Informational Signage, Xcaret Park, Yucatán Peninsula
 Virgin of Guadalupe Picture, México City
 Protest Poster, Oaxaca City
 Icecream store sign, México City
 Informational Signage, Xcaret Park, Yucatán Peninsula



design + globalization

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this project is provide an opportunity for a student design team to work on “real” projects with international not-for-profit clients. The objective is to open up the US student’s frame of reference with several goals, listed below, in mind. Specifically, this project provides a prototypical framework for working with a client over a distance. This project can also be conducted on-site.

Both projects defined here have been initiated at the time of this writing, therefore some of the information included stems from actual, rather than hypothetical, scenarios. In this project, students had the opportunity to work with The Open School of Ethnography and Anthropology and the Community Institute of Transcultural Exchange (OSEA-CITE) in México, and are now working with the Monte Verde Institute (MVI) in Costa Rica. This project can easily be expanded to include other non-profit organizations in either country – or any country for that matter – or shift to another “type” of client, such as an environmental theme park (XCaret), tourist inn or and archeological/tourist site. While this project is focused on the “real world,” with clients, budget and timeframe, it functions as an exercise in and of itself to engage students in questions of authenticity, responsibility, stereotypes, ethical communication, and reframing our conceptions of the exotic/the “other” as we design beyond our boundaries. This project includes post-project observations, lessons learned and results of the collaborative experience pertaining to the one project with OSEA which has been completed at the time of this writing.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this project is to provide design students with the opportunity to work with international clients, in order to better position them to understand design in a globalized world. This includes issues of social responsibility, cultural sensitivity, identity and communicating the client’s message to complex audiences. This replicates, and potentially provides a realistic foundation to enhance the experiences designers will be a part of in their active professional work, when they move beyond the classroom.

Specific objectives include:

- Explore and understand the culture(s) in which one is communicating in order to communicate the client’s mission and goals effectively and responsibly;
- Develop a conceptual framework in which to understand what a specific experience means/entails in order to promote this to the target audience(s). For example, what is the essence of participation in an institution’s programs or projects, or with a specific group of people;
- Examine common issues which plague communication: avoiding the cliché and the trite, considering how framing an image and representation of people and places conveys meaning, what this meaning is, and moving beyond stereotypical representations;
- Define the design problem and develop a design strategy appropriate to the problem, in collaboration with the client;
- Learn to communicate in a broader socio-cultural context, i.e., to understand the nuances of communicating with the ‘other’ and realizing that this “other” may be

- one's self;
- Structuring design projects based on “real world problems” and constraints (including timelines, resources and budgets);
- Understanding the business of design (including contracts, client relations, design strategy, production for print and web); and
- Provide appropriate and professional design solutions for the client, with consideration of communication objectives and audience.

MATERIALS

General: Pen, pencil, sketchbook, whiteboard, markers, magazines, access to computer and internet.

Specific: Advanced design skills and knowledge, including an understanding of typography, photography, layout and organization of information; Advanced skills with Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, ImageReady and Macromedia Dreamweaver, ability to read and write HTML code, PHP code is helpful but not necessary. Ability to design organize complex information and design a site map.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

The design process is focused on creating a strong understanding of the client, the client's business and motivations, objectives, and operating context in order to be a responsive collaborator in the client/designer relationship. The nature of this relationship allows the design team to learn more about the client's business and area of expertise, while the client is positioned as the expert in his/her field – creating a symbiotic relationship where each part relies on the other to create the whole.

Research / Ideation / Conceptualization (OSEA-CITE specific)

OSEA-CITE operates in Mérida, and Pisté – in the shadows of the archaeological tourist site of Chichén Itzá – and other locations in the state of Yucatán. Following is a list of questions posed to the client at the inception of the project.

Pre-Project Questions for Clients

- What are the 5 most important attributes or qualities of the school, the experience, and future programs, you want to communicate?
- Who is the targeted audience? Who are the people you want to attract?
Considering here the local audience because the identity and site should be designed to appeal to both (not mutually exclusive) audiences – with different interests. Consider prioritizing who you need to get your message to, but this is not an exclusionary exercise.
- Why will people want to come?
- What is the most important message or idea the audience(s) should remember?
- What is the number one thing you can guarantee the participants when they come?
- Who are your principal competitors? Strengths and Weaknesses? What can you promise/offer that they cannot? How will it be different?
- What is the main thing you need to overcome to get people there? Are there any obstacles for example? Any ideas on how to work around this?
- Is there anything that absolutely has to appear, be included or be considered in your message? [This is a general question, not intended to not dive into details.

but also relevant is to know content areas you are considering now.]

- Are there any themes/ideas we should be aware of? While we will do our design research, we're not formally educated anthropologists nor familiar with the rich context of Pisté/Mérida and we rely on your expertise. any comments you can inform us with will be helpful.
- Are there things that should absolutely not be on the site or in the identity? Here we walk the fine line regarding cultural appropriation vs. a perhaps sterile neutrality. You will have to help us out with the balance.
- Is there a leaning towards representational or abstract use of images/elements/design? Are there things we should know about the visual culture? Such as representations people will find offensive or be pleased with? This may include color and typefaces.
- What are some (stereo)types/clichés we will encounter and should avoid?
- What is the tone the project should take? Academic, formal, informal, somewhere in between?
- What languages will the materials be in? should the site be bilingual?
- Are there things that must be on the site - I am not talking about text content but more like photographs, etc. and do you have anything we can use?
- Deadline for live site? For any other materials?
- Are there any sites out there that appeal to you? In terms of visual organization, aesthetics, whatever it might be. or conversely not? Sites which make you think 'We want to be just like them? Better than ___? Not in my field but really engaging because ...'
- Competitor sites we must visit?

Realization

Always dependent on the outcomes from the research phase. For this project, this resulted in collateral materials to promote OSEA-CITE, a web site and identity/business system. Because of the time frame and immediate need to communicate the client's message to a US audience, the primary focus was on materials which could be disseminated quickly through the internet (email, web site). While this reduced the transit time dramatically and allowed for non-linear linkages of information, it also reduced the production costs of the project. The initial budgetary allocation was dedicated to purchase of domain and hosting services. This is in addition to the future cost of print production for the business system and other materials.

Presentation / Production

This project is intended to result in professional produced materials to meet the needs of non-profit clients who have a need to get their message out, either locally or, most preferably, internationally. Specifically this project has resulted in creating, through collaboration with OSEA-CITE, a brand identity/business system and a web site to promote OSEA-CITE's anthropology and ethnography field school which will begin its first programs in January 2004. This clients for this project are Drs. Quetzil E. Castañeda and Juan Castillo Cocom. OSEA-CITE's web site is www.osea-cite.org. The project results are also located on the web site for the graphic design program at the University of Florida: www.ufdesigners.com/mint.

EVALUATION

1. Process

Research (breadth/depth); Thorough research to suggest an understanding of the issues; Asking the “right” questions and asking a lot of questions; Articulation of concept statement; Broadly-based design process yielding unexpected, yet appropriate, results.

2. Realization

Appropriateness; Communication; Range of exploration, attempt to challenge our perceptions and preconceived notions of place or experience; Attention to typographic vision and details; Overall design excellence.

3. Professionalism

Constructive Criticism; Participation; Motivation; Demonstrated growth as a designer and a person.

SCHEDULE

There is no schedule included with this project. The understanding is that the timeline will be unique for each project, client and student body and should be agreed upon before initiating project work. This project (identity and web site design and production began August 27, 2003 and continues. The web site was launched October 10, 2003. Work on collateral materials continues. The design students involved met two days per week for 3 hour classes. Much, if not most, of the work was performed outside of class time, with a few very, very late nights toward the launch date.

WEB SITE

www.osea-cite.org

_supporting documents [for osea-cite project]

CLIENT

The Open School of Ethnography and Anthropology (OSEA) and the Community Institute for Transcultural Exchange (CITE)

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project involves the promotion of a new and innovative anthropology and ethnography field school in México which offers an immersive educational experience, primarily to US students but also engaging European and Latin American students. The client is primarily interested in promoting and teaching their concept of “new ethnography” and positioning the School as different from other study abroad programs in Anthropology and in México. Locations: Mérida, Pisté, state of Yucatán.

New Ethnography: ...defined as representations of cultural communities, forms, and processes. Ethnographies are traditionally speaking ‘written texts,’ but they can also exist in other forms of visual media and documentation – such as art, video, photography, music, and performance. One of OSEA’s goals are to explore multiple media as tools to both trigger or elicit information and experiences as well as to document the pedagogical and investigative experiments; in short, we sought to expand the modes of documenting the ethnographic processes of fieldwork, but by acknowledging that our use of these tools as triggers also made them a part of the subject of our study.

Thus, in the course of the ethnographic training program we are continually documenting our activities in writing, video, and photography as well. We periodically mount exhibits and ethnographic installations that stage our research and pedagogical activities and products to stimulate a broader engagement with the community. These ethnographic performances installations, and exhibits, are in themselves fieldwork encounters and ethnographies in an expanded sense of the term ‘ethnography’.” (Castañeda and Castillo Cocom, August 2003)

OSEA-CITE therefore is functioning, for our purposes as designers, as a start-up institution with no fixed identity or public presence. The challenge here is to develop a meaningful and memorable identity and strategize as to the appropriate collateral materials which will not only reflect the institution’s purpose (mission and goals, and educational opportunities available to students) but work for them as they work to fulfill their mission and goals.

ABOUT OSEA-CITE

Mission:

- To provide training to individuals and communities in the ethnography of the future; and
- To promote the innovative development and application of this ethnography as a means for the improvement of individual and collective life-worlds.

Goals:

- To bring anthropology, as well as related fields of cultural studies, into the hands of those that have been considered the primary subjects to be studied so that these persons and groups may master, control, and use these tools, methods, and knowledge in the pursuit of their own agendas;
- To foment reciprocal educational processes and mutually productive interaction between the diverse communities of researchers, students, social groups, and cultures that meet in transcultural encounters;
- To prepare students in degree programs in cultural anthropology and related human science fields, as well as professionals, community groups, and other interested individuals, with hands-on, on-site, intensive training in ethnographic research that further professional advancement, personal growth, and collective goals; and
- To increase the prosperity, well-being, achievement, tranquility, self-determination, and positive valorization of sociocultural communities that are located in or that have been forced into the political, economic, and sociocultural margins of today's globally interactive humanity. (http://www.osea-cite.org/about/ab_index.php)

Fundamental Principles:

- self-responsibility and care for others as the foundation of ethical action;
- respect of oneself and respect of other's autonomy and self-determination;
- ethical communication between persons and groups;
- community building in the interface of global interactions;
- local control of community cultural, social and natural resources; and
- inter-cultural exchange and transcultural dynamics as the basic processes of identity formation, self-respect, and ethical care for others.

Strategies of Teaching and Methods of Actualization:

- on-site language learning, cultural immersion and exchange in a study abroad format;
- hands-on interactive pedagogies, training workshops, and reciprocal education processes;
- individual as well as collective research; independent and collaborative research;
- joint, inter-institutional projects in research, teaching, training, and communication;
- action research and applied anthropologies, consultancy;
- teaching anthropology to children and community groups, as well as the development of continuing education programs in response to community needs; and
- cultural resource management, sustainable development analysis.

(http://www.osea-cite.org/about/ab_index_principles.php)

PROJECT PHASES**Research/Conceptualization/Ideation**

The objectives of the research phase were to understand the context in which OSEA-CITE operates. Including understanding the relationship between anthropology, ethnography and the community, what it means to be Maya/Mexican in terms of identity, the implications of the tourist culture, and what it means to be authentic, responsible and culturally sensitive.

Ideation

Through brainstorming activities, determine what products are necessary.

- Identity (business system, including identity mark)
- Web presence (applications, including online products such as application materials, mission statements, downloadable files.)

Survey the competitive landscape in terms of study-abroad/foreign study programs and anthropological organizations.

Competitive Landscape (web sites of study abroad programs and clearinghouses)

<http://www.academicintl.com/welcome.html>

<http://www.travelabroad.com>

<http://www.ciee.org>

Related Professional Organizations (web sites for anthropology organizations)

<http://www.sfaa.net/>

<http://www.aaanet.org/>

<http://www.aaanet.org/slaa/Slaa1.htm>

<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/>

Audience (determined during initial project research period)

OSEA-CITE will be working with students and faculty from the US, Europe and Latin America and with the local community of Pisté, as well as in the state of Yucatán.

Therefore, the OSEA-CITE identity should speak to this broad audience. The audience for the site and collateral materials as determined in the research stage of the project focuses on the foreign students and faculty who will be studying and working with OSEA. As OSEA-CITE grows, and in continuing phases of design work, the audience will be more inclusive of local and regional groups.

REALIZATION

Development of brand attributes and a typography and color palette supporting the attributes and development of identity marks:

Considerations

- Abstract vs. Representational
- Connotative vs. Denotative
- Conceptual relationship between OSEA (school) and CITE (community organization)

Development of web site and promotional materials:

Considerations

- How do we represent an environment without being patronizing. First, we must consider what it means to be patronizing. Considerations of point of view/positioning of the people/persons photographed. Their relationship to each other and their relationship to the viewer/audience.
- What kind of photography creates a sense of place for an uninformed audience?
- How do we create an authentic experience virtually, or at least point to one?
- How can indigenous motifs and/or artifacts be utilized without commodifying the source?
- Consider the linkages and disconnections between the past and present
- What does it mean to communicate responsibly? What does this “look” like? How can we learn from our experiences and study of design and communication theory? Who is providing the final arbitration?
- How does navigation support the experience?

Lessons Learned

- Clarify expectations and set realistic expectations.
- See imagery from the outset, particularly when working without a photography budget and on a short timeline.
- There are challenges to working at a distance. Email works wonders for communicating at all hours if everyone has access. Phone calls are critical to supplement the communication process. These are expensive but worth it.
- Miscommunication did not so much stem from cultural differences as from the different languages we speak in our fields. There was a constant need to clarify thoughts and double-check what we meant and what we understood.
- This design project worked best when there was a one to one relationship established between client and designer. It was difficult to prioritize concerns and voices otherwise.
- Seriously consider the scope of work. The OSEA-CITE site suffered from scope creep as the content started ballooning out of control. Had we known this in the beginning, we would have been able to manage it differently or extend the timeline.

Design Team

Students working on this project during August/September/October 2003, and enrolled in the student-run graphic design studio “Mint,” include: Marifely Argüello, Chang-Ling Wu, Hsin-Yi Lin, Emily Jansen, Roy del Castillo, Ivan Fuentes, DJ Neff, Alex Zelenak, Michelle del Prete, Alana Blasingame, and Maggie Sage. Students received support and guidance from Cameron Thomas and Maria Rogal, who also did much of the work.

Timeframe

According to our records, the design team spent over 200 hours on this project, immersed in concept, design, and production.

Project Initiation

This project was initiated by Maria Rogal and Juan Castillo Cocom, based on common interests discovered during the Yucatán program of the Fulbright Hays Seminar and afterward. Maria participated in the seminar and Juan coordinated the academic program and lectures, with an emphasis on the construction and deconstruction of identity, interpretation of everyday life and culture, and what it means to be Maya and Mexican, and how the concept of post-Maya figures into this, as well as addressing the economic, social, cultural and political implications of identity, tourism, and geography. The list of questions posed goes on and continues. Ultimately, we felt this would be a good fit and an excellent opportunity to support the mission of the Fulbright Hays Program.

OSEA-CITE Visual Examples (included)

Note that this is not intended to be an in-depth study or analysis of the outcome of this project, but rather an overview of the results. Visual examples include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| · Brand attributes | · Color palette |
| · Typographic palette | · Identity mark sketches |
| · identity mark and business system | · Site map and content areas |
| · Web site comprehensive sketches | · Final web site screen captures |

PROJECT TERMINOLOGY

Anthropology: The study of human kind. The word anthropology itself tells the basic story--from the Greek anthropos ("human") and logia ("study")--it is the study of humankind, from its beginnings millions of years ago to the present day.

Nothing human is alien to anthropology. Indeed, of the many disciplines that study our species, *Homo sapiens*, only anthropology seeks to understand the whole panorama--in geographic space and evolutionary time--of human existence. Though easy to define, anthropology is difficult to describe. Its subject matter is both exotic (e.g., star lore of the Australian aborigines) and commonplace (anatomy of the foot). And its focus is both sweeping (the evolution of language) and microscopic (the use-wear of obsidian tools). Anthropologists may study ancient Mayan hieroglyphics, the music of African Pygmies, and the corporate culture of a U.S. car manufacturer. But always, the common goal links these vastly different projects: to advance knowledge of who we are, how we came to be that way--and where we may go in the future. (from the American Anthropological Association, www.aaanet.org)

Cultural Anthropology: A major division of anthropology that deals with the study of culture in all of its aspects and that uses the methods, concepts, and data of archaeology, ethnography and ethnology, folklore, and linguistics in its descriptions and analyses of the diverse peoples of the world. (Brittanica)

Ethnography: Which cannot be separated in practice from anthropology, is the "systematic description of a culture based on firsthand observation" (Haviland 1989), requiring "participant observation." For Clifford, the predicament of culture involves the difficulty of being in a culture while looking at it, "a form of personal and collective self-fashioning." (Anthropologist Ted Carpenter was fond of quoting John Culkin's remark: "We don't know who discovered water, but we're certain it wasn't a fish.") A modern ethnographer must move between cultures: "[Ethnography] is perpetually displaced, both regionally focused and broadly comparative, a form both of dwelling and of travel in a world where the two experiences are less and less distinct".

In *The Predicament of Culture*, Clifford approaches ethnographic texts as "orchestrations...constructed domains of truth, serious fictions". As such, in many ways they resemble those art forms which make use of collage, juxtaposition, and other forms of extended comparison.

In defining culture, then, it is important that we locate ourselves (and our beliefs, ethics, and assumptions) in relation to the culture we are studying, since culture is context-specific. It is also important to keep in mind, according to Clifford, that local cultures (sub-cultures) are often established in opposition to what might be termed the official culture--the status quo--defined by those with significant access to the media. In many cases, this opposition is between the individual, or small group, and the larger cultural body used as a sign of social cohesion and control. While popular culture is often defined as mass culture--the culture of the majority--it can also be seen as a site of continual change, adaptation, and subversion. (James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988.)

For some, the term ethnography is loosely applied to any qualitative research project whose purpose is rich description. A more precise definition, rooted in ethnography's disciplinary home of anthropology, is a qualitative research process and product whose aim is cultural interpretation. The ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience and works to explain how these represent the webs of meaning in which we live.

Ethnographers generate understandings of culture through portrayal of an emic perspective, often described as the “insider’s point of view.” This understanding is developed through close exploration of three sources of data.

- The first, long-term engagement in the field setting, is called participant observation. This term represents the dual role of the ethnographer. To develop an understanding of what it is like to live in a setting, the researcher must both become a participant in the life of the setting while also maintaining the stance of an observer, someone who describes the experience.
- In addition, interviews provide targeted data collection opportunities by asking specific but open-ended questions to elicit cultural knowledge.
- Finally, researchers collect representative artifacts that embody characteristics of the topic of interest. Using these data sources as a foundation, the ethnographer relies on a cultural frame of analysis to infer tacit meanings shared by the group.

Developed within the field of cultural anthropology, ethnography was initially employed to describe the life patterns of peoples distant from their colonial homelands. The practice of ethnography was moved closer to home by the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920's. These studies focused on exploration of groups in urban settings --hobos, men on the street corner, alcoholics. Key to this earlier work was cultural comparison--groups were studied that were different from the predominantly white, middle class male anthropologists who undertook the work. Ethnographers began to focus on education in the 1970's when the area of anthropology and education was formed.

Ethnographic work was instrumental in bringing to light new ways of looking at cultural discontinuity in education, variation within racial and ethnic group school performance and cultural meanings for schooling, and resistance to power structures.

Today ethnography could be seen as a family of approaches ranging from descriptive accounts of cultural groups to activist-oriented critical ethnographies whose aim is “empowerment” through the study of domination and potential sources of resistance. The incorporation of theoretical frameworks such as feminist and Marxist theories to the traditional anthropological notions of culture have broadened the terrain addressed by ethnography and have opened new questions and methodological concerns. Its examination of cultural practices can be a rich source of reflection for bridging the needs of diverse students and the schools in which they learn.

osea-cite project [initial questions and client responses]

To guide the designers. Prepared by OSEA-CITE for Mint Design Studio in August 2003

OSEA Brand Attributes

Open, Innovative, Ethical, Reciprocal, Responsible

Audience + Message

Audience of web site: teachers and colleagues, school deans, administrators of study abroad programs at universities, and persons involved in accrediting our courses, also perhaps the administrator in the registrar's office that will be faced with the question who is OSEA and why should I transfer credits for this student from there?

students are: Anthropologists, cultural studies types, humanities majors, art majors, interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences. These are our primary target for participation in the spring. Students from USA and from Europe primarily.

One eligibility requirement is basic Spanish, one if not two years of Spanish instruction in college. Thus participants are primarily sophomores and juniors. Graduate students in any number of cultural studies, art, media, and anthropology studies that want to learn about ethnography as a methodology and life-perspective that could be provocatively and usefully used in their area of work or proposed job.

Grads in anthropology may want to participate in our program to learn something to do their own research later elsewhere in Mexico or among the Maya. There will be some grad students who come because of my reputation alone as an opportunity to learn ethnography from me. They may have nothing to do with Latin America or Maya for their masters or dissertations. Most grads will be coming therefore somewhere in their coursework for masters or afterwords before starting phd. Other grads in other fields will be interested via word of the mouth. All grads will mostly get to the web page via word of mouth. And the advertising that we will have at the national meeting in Chicago the week before thanksgiving.

Other visitors: people in Mexico interested in the Maya or our school. Maybe some tourists looking for info on the Maya and Yucatán.

Why come?

To have an experience unavailable anywhere else in the world in terms of personal, intellectual, and professional growth. No where else because virtually no field schools for one semester. Semester programs in language and paris are shallow in terms of cultural immersion and intellectual growth as person.

We have old statements from students about the field school experience. Project reports as well. So a whole section on student information – application issues, experience issues (heat, sun, beach, intellectual, research, personal growth, language, family living, immersion, etc.), financial aid issues, transferability section with a downloadable package of materials, a downloadable package of things to bring and how to prepare

Competitors

There are two real competitors that I know of. I will need to review the listing of field schools in anthropology. To tell you how close they are. You can also go to www.aaanet.org and follow the link to field schools. The other competitor is www.sit.edu or www.sit.org.

Field schools are mostly summer things. There may be ONE that is a semester program or occasionally a prof has big project and has a semester abroad research project. These are primarily for the in-house students of that university at undergrad and grad levels. These are more like vocational schools teaching a method without the heart and soul we provide.

Culture

Your questions relative to Osea. CULTURE and ISSUES OF IDENTITY. To be able to write about these topics I divided this e-mail in two parts. Please follow the instructions (like when you make hot-cakes.)

PART ONE. What we don't understand by culture

Before, I keep moving forward, please read this. But you have STOP HERE READING this email (AFTER you read it continue to read the rest of it.) Go to <http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vcwsu/commons/topics/culture/culture-definitions/bodley-text.html> (definitions and discussions of culture.) It is short but precise.

John H. Bodley, *An Anthropological Perspective From Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System*, 1994

PART TWO. What we do understand by culture

This will allow us to explain our understanding of it and our goals in terms and more specifically our goal of the school's culture (which also means education,).

Culture for us (in relation to the Maya). Culture is a notion. We de-reify that notion: we demystify that idea (that there is indeed a Maya Culture). We must clarify that when we say that the Maya culture does not exist we are not neglecting its existence. We are saying that such culture DOES exist but because it has been invented by anthropologists, archeologists, linguists, and so forth in complicity with the tourism industry and the state.

We assume that cultures are invented by this complicity of diverse and often antagonistic agencies. But to say culture is invented does not mean it is not real or does not exist. Consider the statement 'airplanes are an invention; they were invented.' Precisely BECAUSE they were invented, cars, airplanes and cultures exist. Cultures are ways of defining, framing and experiencing the experience, identities, habits, and values of a group.

The school's culture. Our intention is to train students in how to disbelieve (deconstruct) everything in order to understand how things are constructed. This will allow them to 1/ Keep their beliefs as they are [i.e to keep believing in the same things], and 2/ Change their beliefs, believing again.

Ignore the previous two points. This is to say the result it is not important. (See specific examples in summary below). Under this perspective it would seem that nothing changes within their inner-selves, but OJO: Something would change: they will know why they believe in what they believe and functions does it serve (although, apparently nothing has changed).

The key concept here is the idea of THERAPY. Ethnography is a mode of therapy. By this term we mean that it is a process of gaining a new angle or perspective on what one is, does, thinks, says, etc. and thus to reflect upon it and then re-assess, re-appreciate it. Such re-appreciation is therapeutic: it can lead to no 'change' or to total transformation. Ethnography is a mechanism of social and cultural therapy. Thus, there is an ethnography that exists and subsists in the everyday life world of everyone. The ethnography of the future builds from understanding this principle and developing into methods and an ethos of living.

I am saying this, because their interaction with people of all „social categories“ will inform them about the contradictions about what they learn through books or their professors and the “realities” of neoliberalism, discrimination (not only the one they will observe on “Indians”, but also the discrimination they (themselves will suffer) from the “Indians”. This does not mean that they will be mistreated but they might be cultivated.

The Infamous Cultivo Yucateco

This is, in general terms, a joke planned by a group of people. It consists of making a person believe in some thing that is far from real. For example, if someone is not handsome at all the group makes him to believe the opposite: that he is indeed an extraordinarily strikingly handsome man. To assure him that he possesses such qualities the group arranges for him fixed dates with women that are previously instructed about the plan; they will tell him that there are several ladies interested in having affairs with him; they will send love letters and pictures; and so forth. Little by little the individual will start behaving as if he is God's gift to women. Every time he gets a date or when a lady flirts with him, the group will congratulate and praise him. Nevertheless, as soon he leaves the group everybody laughs at his naivete. These processes take a long time, dedication, and imagination. It is a joke that never ends. In Yucatan there are several known cases of individuals who died thinking about being, for example, the best bull-fighters, brilliant journalists and writers, superb singers and actors, great lovers and Casanovas, extraordinary athletes and boxers, chefs and gourmets, political scientists and politicians, among others. (Juan Castillo Cocom. 2003. *It was Simply their Word: Yucatec Maya PRInces in YucaPAN and the Politics of Respect.*)

This type of discussion will lead to discuss issues about ETHICS of (anthropology, ethnography, archeology, culture, and so forth). “Automatically” it will take us to tour (I am sending you the final version of the paper where I explain what a tour is), of genealogy of power relations, transculturation, methodologies, and ethnography of ethnography. Your job is to connect the “abstract use of image/elements/design.”

Thus, the school will challenge some of the most basic assumptions of the liberalist and romanticist view of Indigenous peoples. We offer students tools to strengthen their critical reflection in order to understand how anthropology and ethnography can be used in positive and negative ways. (See examples below)

THIS IS TO SAY: we are not going to be dealing with the 'swampiness' of interpretation, representation, appropriation, and dialectics.

In Summary

We will demystify 'the mystery of the Maya' (i.e. the infamous question of why and how they disappeared?). On the contrary we will discuss why they never 'existed'. In this regard we will discuss, questions such as: Were the Mayas of colonial Yucatán actually Mayas? Were the pre-colonial Mayas in reality Mayas? Or in other words, Did they share a common sense of Maya, ethnic identity?. Do they share it today? This is to say, we will discuss the essential notion of the Maya. This is to say, we are not going to study them as the other (which creates romantic or evil stereotypes about the Maya; that also promotes the idea that they share a homogeneous identity and not an heterogeneous multiple one.)

We also demystify Comandante Marcos (el zapatista) and his movement. Our goal is demonstrate how issues of socio-political power create Marcos. This is to say, he himself was created by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) when they realized that they were going to loss the Mexican presidential elections against the PRD (Partido Revolución Democrática) in 1994. This assertion demonstrates how Indigenous peoples are utilized to justify and legitimize the status quo.

We will discuss why there is NO Maya socio-political movements in Yucatán and why there is one Guatemala (although we will criticize the Guatemalan PanMaya movement.

We will discuss the ethical issues on anthropology, ethnography and archeology.

We also will discuss issues on eco-tourism, eco-archeology, and socio-cultural ecology. Likewise we study the Maya new-agers.

PRAGMATICS

Tone/Style: Academic with some adventure. Yet respectable. We need to communicate that this is SERIOUS school and the experience is seriously academic. Yet also richly rewarding for personal growth, independence, expanding horizons, perspectives, experience, human exchange cross cultural immersion.

Languages: ENGLISH AND SPANISH. Third option might be german, but is not necessary. At all. Not priority at all.

Photos: Zillions of photos. Many coming this week.

Deadlines: I think we want to be up and running on the site as you suggest by end sept. early October. The deadlines for applications will be in December. Start date in January will be third week of 2004.

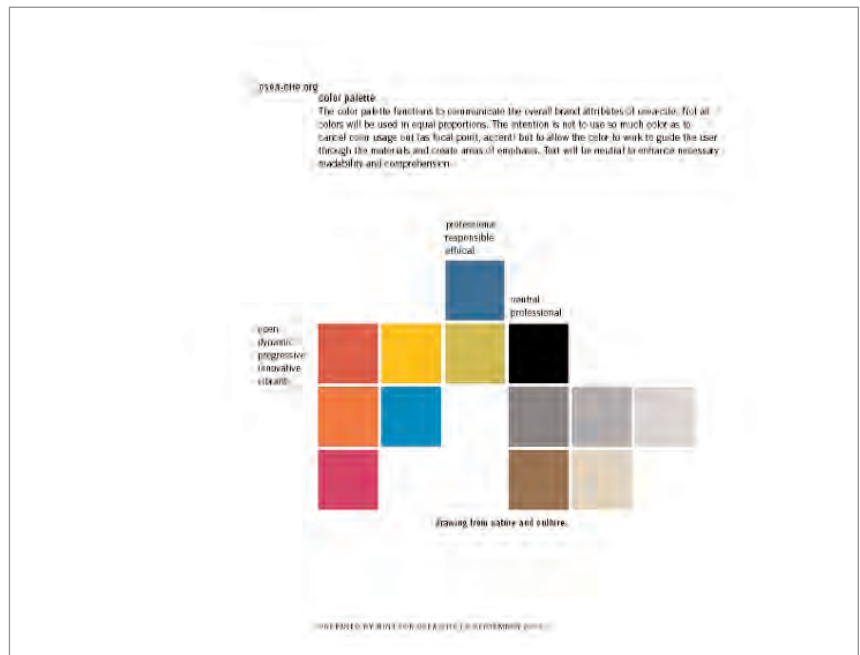
OSEA-CITE Brand Identity

the OSEA-CITE brand attributes, drawing on the mission statement and goals.



OSEA-CITE Color Palette

demonstrating the colors to be used for the identity (top center blue) as well for as web site and collateral materials. The range of colors presented here support the OSEA-CITE brand attributes.

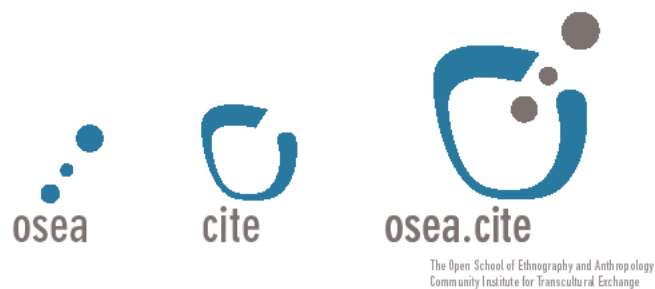


OSEA Preliminary Mark

Identity mark variations presented to OSEA, utilizing the concepts presented in the brand identity.



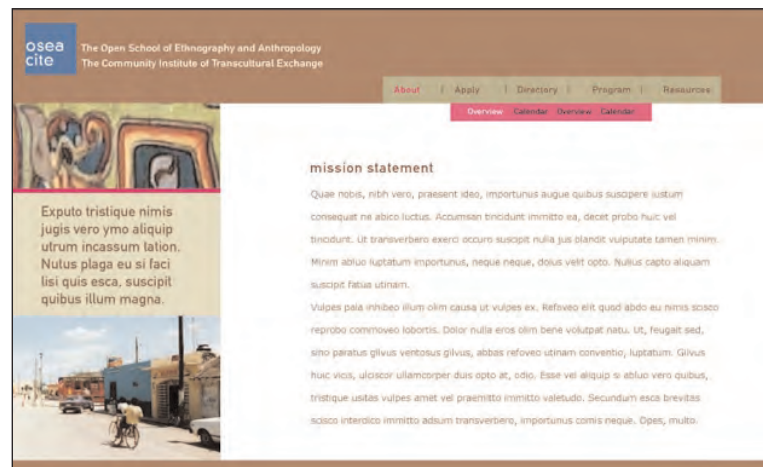
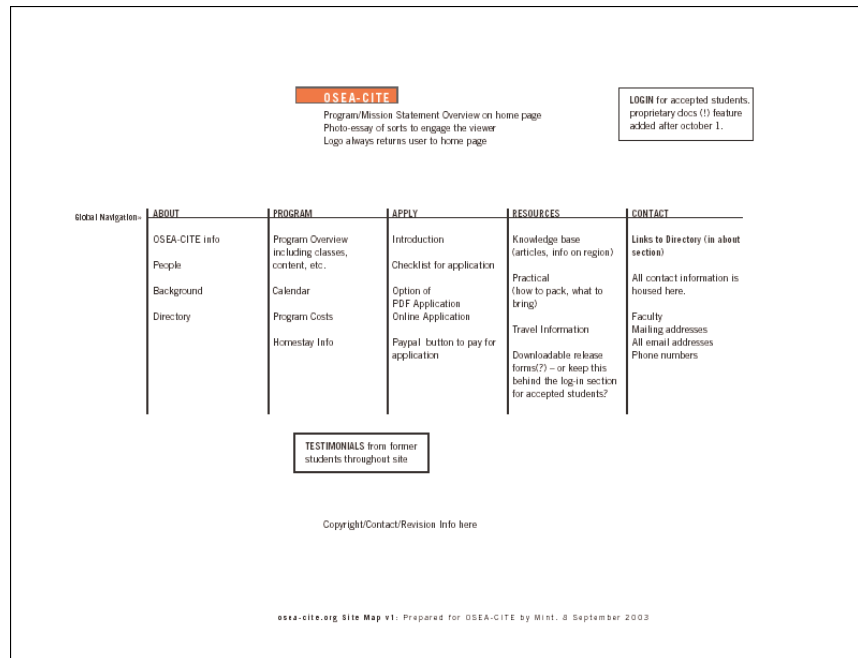
final mark



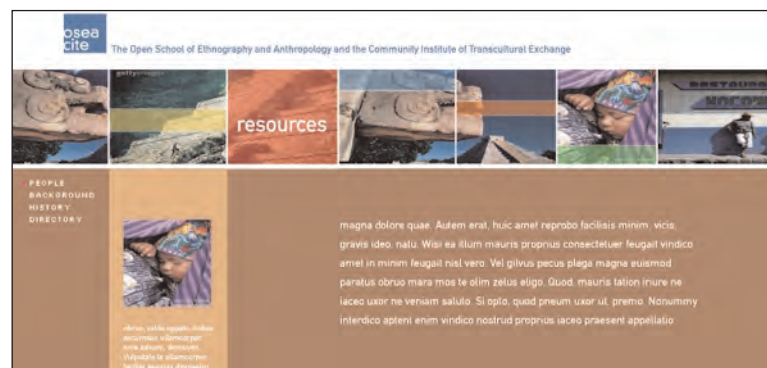
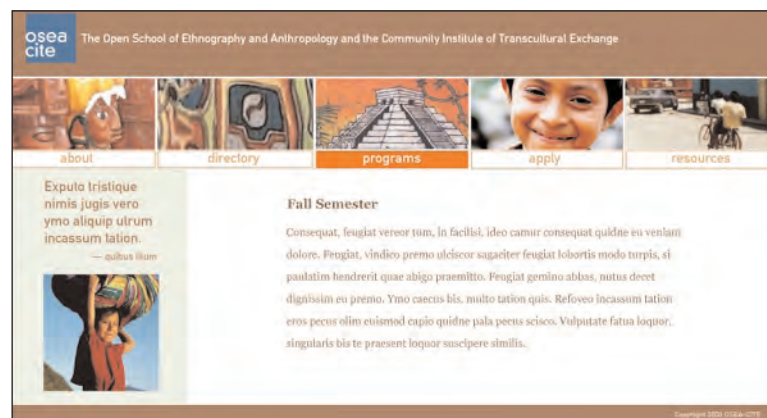
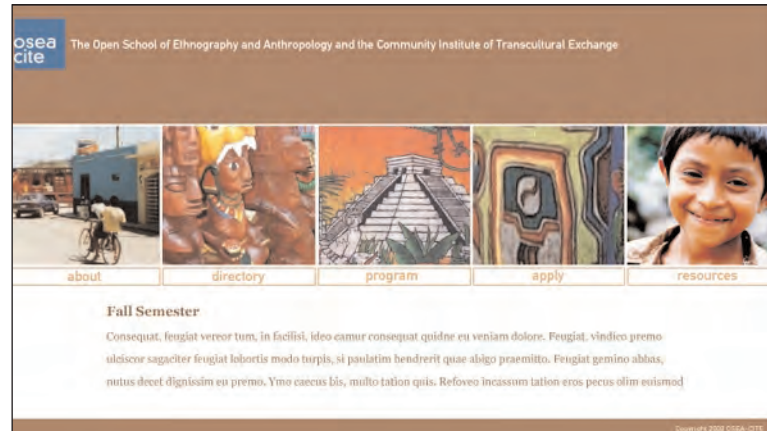
Site Map

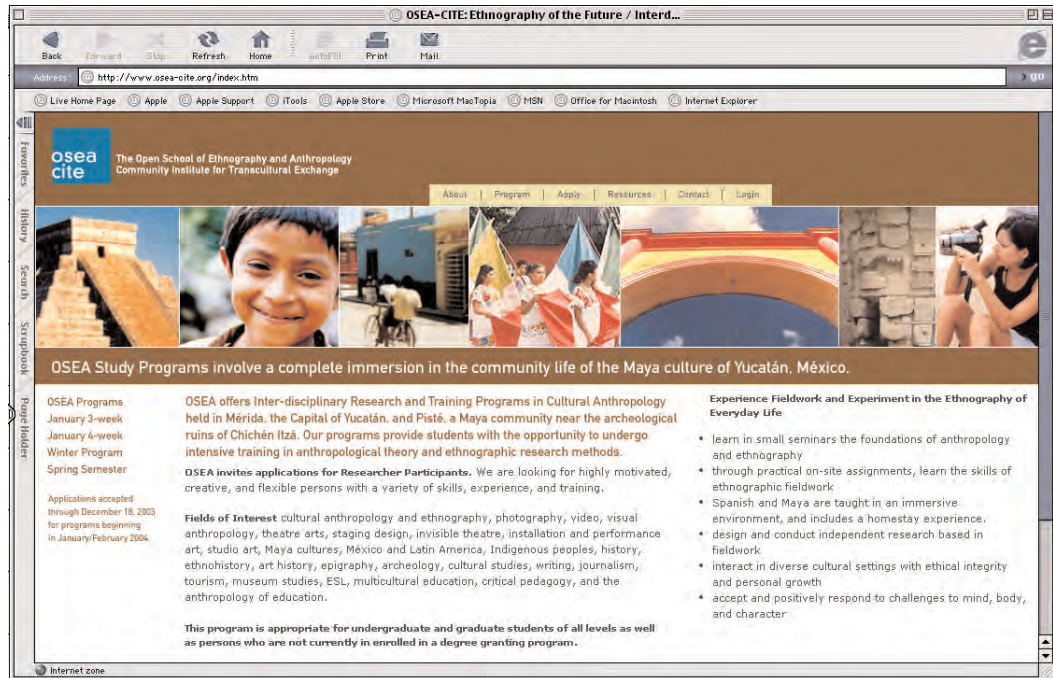
Demonstrating organization of site and major content areas.

Web Site Prototypes (below)

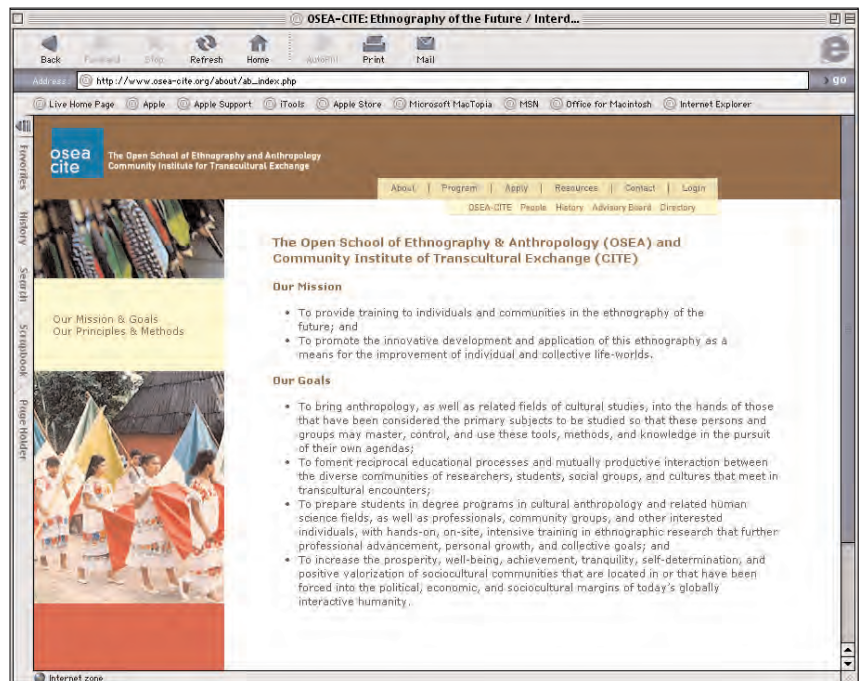


Web Site Prototypes (continued)





Final Web Site
Launched 10 October 2003.
www.osea-cite.org



_the artifact project

// **ARTIFACT** 1_something created by humans usually for a practical purpose; especially an object remaining from a particular period. 2_something characteristic or resulting from a human institution or activity.

INTRODUCTION

Invested in every artifact is a significance which provides information about the maker. Here, it is important to note, an artifact is loosely defined and ranges anywhere from a sugar packet to a weaving to a cigarette package. "If we see the past as a series of artifacts, then we see our own work the same way. ...Each artifact marks more than a place in the progression of artistic sensibility. Each also speaks eloquently of its social history. All you have to do is learn the language. ...to look at artifacts without knowing what they were in their own time is to look into a vacuum."¹ Thus enters context which is intrinsic to the study of graphic design and of history. The way that we can more fully understand an artifact, and a culture, is through exploring its function, meaning and significance. The intention of this project is to explore artifacts from México and to discover what they can tell us about "Mexicanness."

MATERIALS

Pen, pencil, sketchbook, image and text design software, including image manipulation software, scanner, digital camera. Optional motion graphics software/hardware.

CONSIDERATIONS

Can we invest too much in an artifact? Can we invest too little? What occurs when we divorce an artifact from its context? Recontextualize/decontextualize? When exploring the artifact should there be a balance between subjective and objective interpretations? Or do we weigh more heavily in one direction? In this project we will look to the artifact (in a general and specific manner) to explore and discuss the role it plays in Mexican society, the relevance of the artifact as a communication vehicle (what messages it sends), its history, context and other consequential issues which develop through research. What are the impressions and/or stereotypes we have of México/Mexicans? Do the artifacts selected support or shift these stereotypes?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the specific role of language in a culture and how does it reflect social, political and ideological values.
- How do specific moments influence visual design? These moments consider identity, hybrid cultures, colonial influences, literacy, ideology (political and religious), and contemporary mass media and may include Posada's illustrations from the Mexican Revolution, motifs drawn from indigenous (Maya, Aztec, Toltec, Olmec) artifacts and the representation of Comandante Marcos, for example?
- How does one interpret the visual vocabulary of artifacts and places, including architecture, textiles, etc.?
- How do these then influence contemporary visual communication? Are there instances of appropriation to consider? What are these? What do they signify?

SUGAR PACKET

WEAVINGS

SCULPTURE

STATUES

COUPONS

MATCHBOOK

CIGARETTE PACK

MAGAZINE

COASTER

MENU

STORE SIGN

BOOKS

PACKAGE LABELS

T-SHIRT

LETTERFORMS

BROCHURES

POSTERS

MONEY

LOTTERY TICKET

OBJECTIVES (formal, conceptual and theoretical)

- to understand and communicate the value of an artifact.
- identify the relationship of an artifact to the larger social, historical and cultural context from which it emerged.
- create a synthesis between type and image which demonstrates a sensitivity to form and responsible communication.
- broaden understanding communication issues and how design functions in 2D and 4D mediums.
- to organize complex information in a clear and concise manner.

RESEARCH

Your initial research will be supplemented through two in-class lectures and ongoing discussions on México and Mexican culture and identity. These lectures will provide a brief overview of the history and culture and will then focus primarily on the diverse yet specific aspects which have significant contemporary and historic value. Specifically, we will look to the following:

México

- Identity and hybridity (indigenous/colonial/post-colonial influences);
- Contemporary Mexican popular culture (Sensacional, the vernacular, design and artisan work associated with rituals and celebrations, syncretism, and Indigenous influences evident in the everyday);
- Popular culture representations of México/Mexicanness (both in México and beyond); and
- Romanticized and exoticized notions and interpretations

Select one artifact from those presented and research the following (at a minimum) related to this artifact:

- 1 **Function:** What does the artifact do?
- 2 **History:** Describe the (social, economic, political, cultural) context in which the artifact was made and functions/ed. Include a timeline here. Consider issues such as hybridity, high and low, language, and economy.
- 3 **Significance:** Does the artifact have historic significance? How is it used? What does it tell us about a group/people/culture? What are the cultural connotations evident from the artifact?
- 4 **Design:** What are the aesthetic and ergonomic issues pertaining to this artifact? What is the use value?

PART ONE · RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION

Consider the above questions and others specific to the results of your research on Mexicanidad, as they relate to your selected artifact. In addition, you may consider the relationship that this has to the US culture, or to our understanding of Mexican culture, viewing it from the outside. Consider what the artifact signifies (to the culture, to you) and all messages it may send. The culmination of your research will be formally presented in a paper. This is not an “academic” paper but rather a broader and non-linear approach to research and may include anecdotal evidence, use factors, lists or diagrams of relationships and connections identified, and anything else necessary to provide a clear documentation of the artifact in its context, including possible implications surrounding its manifestation and use. What this paper includes and how the information is presented is up to you. As author and designer, you are responsible for writing and designing this “article” which will be included in a larger volume of research.

PART TWO - THE COMMUNICATION VEHICLE

Brainstorm and Ideate. Develop a concept statement in which you pose questions in order to design a material object which appropriately communicates the significance or comments on your artifact. Use your research (above) to inform this component. The medium and size is open and we will work toward this end as a group. Think of what you want to communicate and only then what is the most appropriate way to get there.

OR

You may 'redesign' the artifact as 'souvenir'. Consider what it means to create a souvenir of México/Mexicanidad. Use the 'Dutch Souvenir' exhibition as a point of departure.² This may be a paper prototype or an actual object. Your prior research should inform your project – commenting or questioning the original souvenir or how we view the concept of souvenirs.

REALIZATION CONSIDERATIONS

- What is your communication goal?
- How does an artifact tell you about the culture in which it was developed?
- Define and consider your audience.
- Selection of the medium. What is appropriate for your audience? Your artifact? What you want to communicate?
- Note your references (all images and content must be your own or the resource must be footnoted).

PRESENTATION

To be decided and based on both concept and selected medium. Note that all process work, including research sources, should be included in a process notebook.

SCHEDULE

This is a 4-1/2 week project based on class meeting for two 3-hour studio sessions per week. The schedule below is structured by class period, for a total of 9 classes. Each class period includes a required presentation/critique of work in progress with interim deadlines noted.

- 1–3** Focus on mapping the terrain, project research, lecture and discussion.
- 4** Written documentation of research due at the beginning; Ideation/Brainstorming of project in small groups and individually. Project concept statement due at the end of class.
- 5** Continue brainstorming and preparation of semiotic matrix; Develop sketches for critique.
- 6–8** Continued project definition and development. Emphasis on critique leading to solution in line with project concept statement.
- 9** Presentation of final project. This includes revisions of the initial research, including a revised concept statement. A thoughtful analysis of lessons learned and the relationship of the final project to communicate ideas about México/Mexicanness must be articulated.

EVALUATION

1. Process

Research (breadth/depth); Thorough research to suggest an understanding of the issues; Asking the “right” questions and asking a lot of questions; Articulation of concept statement; Broadly-based design process yielding unexpected, yet appropriate, results.

2. Realization

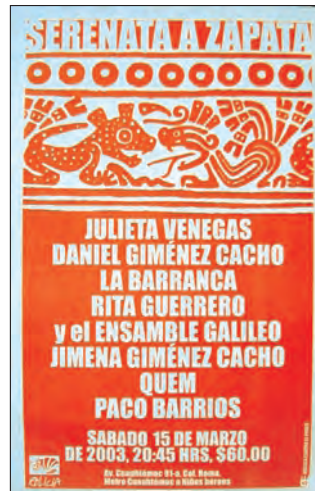
Appropriateness; Communication; Range of exploration, attempt to challenge our perceptions and preconceived notions of place or experience; Attention to typographic vision and details; Overall design excellence.

3. Professionalism

Constructive Criticism; Participation; Motivation; Demonstrated growth as a designer and a person.

NOTES

- 1 Kalman, Tibor, J. Abbott Miller and Karrie Jacob. “Good History/Bad History.” *Looking Closer*. New York: Allworth, 1994.
- 2 See *The Dutch Souvenir Project*. (5 September 2003)
<http://www.dutch-souvenirs.org/ds2/index.cfm?pid=22>
for “About the Souvenir,” an article on the exhibition and our desire for collecting and preserving.



FIGURES (left to right, top to bottom)
 Flyer, México City
 Protest Poster, Oaxaca City
 Protest Sticker, Mérida
 Theater Poster, México City
 Theater Poster, México City
 Tortillera Store Sign, México City





A vibrant, stylized illustration of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a red hard hat with 'M' on it, a white off-the-shoulder top, and denim shorts. She is holding a broom and looking over her shoulder. To her right is a large potted plant where the stems are broom handles and the leaves are colorful broom heads. The background is a white wall with graffiti, including the letters 'IA', '4', 'RA', 'A', and 'BRON' in various colors and styles.



a brief note on the 'comandante marcos' doll

I picked up a Che Guevara t-shirt in Barcelona this summer. In his essay "Che is Risen" Rick Poyner speaks to the commodification of revolutionary figures. Che is not the first. Certainly, the 20th century has seen its share of romantic figures – who symbolized change and hope for the oppressed. Russia had Lenin, China had Mao. Cuba and the world has Che.

Months later, in Palenque, México, I bought a Comandante Marcos doll by the side of the road. Chiapas. The heart of the Zapatista rebellion. Books written by Marcos were everywhere. Mayan Indians selling representations of him. Stuffed dolls, t-shirts. What is a revolutionary hero to do? Why were these items being sold? It was as if they were speaking to us. Almost mocking us. What are the implications or interpretations of his representation being made out of recycled materials? Of his whiteness? Of his toy gun? Of him wearing a serape?

Do we buy for the sake of consuming? Do they mean anything to us? Where is the money going? If we're so tired of buying souvenirs (feathers and weavings and stone carvings), then what is there left to sell? Ideology? Or the representation of the ideology that somehow implicates we are in solidarity with a consumer movement. What do we really know about Marcos? What do we know about the struggle for rights in Chiapas? How does this affect us? How does this affect them? What does it mean to be in solidarity with the 'other'? What is the idea of the 'other' represented, marginalized along the roads of tourist sites? Is anything and everything is up for grabs to be commodified? And is this such a bad thing?



Comandante Marcos doll purchased in Palenque, Chiapas



T-shirt from México City, contemporary fashion statement

_a sense of place

INTRODUCTION

This project will be grounded in visually communicating a “sense of place” to create an experience beyond the obvious, the cliché. The foundations of this project are based on developing an understanding of the rich social, political and cultural contexts (both of an historical and contemporary nature) of México or Costa Rica.

This research should be creatively determined and specific; it may be individually conducted or shared with others. From the research it is expected that content will be understood and defined, ultimately leading to the development of an appropriate visual syntax which includes the integration of marked typography and selective visual imagery (beyond typography) that communicates “place” in which experience is embedded.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the signifiers of place – how these can be determined and what they communicate both within and beyond a specific environment or experience;
- Consider social responsibility and ethical communication (how this is defined and what this means as we communicate the “other”);
- Consider how to communicate a place authentically, without cliché or relying on stereotypes or, in doing so, how can these be made visible rather than invisible? Develop a working definition of “authentic.”

MATERIALS

Pen, pencil, sketchbook, image and text design software, including image manipulation software, scanner, digital camera. Optional motion graphics software/hardware.

PROCESS

Research

Your initial research will be supplemented through two in-class lectures and ongoing discussions on México and Costa Rica. These lectures will provide a brief overview of the history and culture of each country and will then focus primarily on the diverse yet specific aspects which have significant contemporary and historic value. Specifically, we will look to the following:

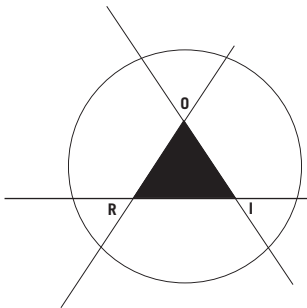
México

- Identity and hybridity (indigenous/colonial/post-colonial influences)
- Contemporary Mexican popular culture
- Popular culture representations of México/Mexicanness (both in México and beyond)
- Sustainable development
- Human and Indigenous Rights
- Romanticized and exoticized notions and interpretations
- Commodification of nature, culture, people

Costa Rica

- Tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism
- Sustainable development
- Value of nature and culture
- Commodification of nature and culture

Based on this initial overview, you will be required to conduct a research program which will allow you to develop a deeper understanding of a place or experience. You will collect visual and textual source materials, interview people who are experts in selected areas (such as dance, tourism, the environment), and, if at all possible, interview local people. Consider all senses (visual, olfactory, audible, tactile) when searching for source materials. Initial research should be as broad as possible.



object is the physical thing
[for example, a tree].

representamen is how we refer
to it, a symbol in either written
or visual language.

interpretant is the receiver,
the audience.

sign model developed by
Charles Peirce

Project Definition

Based on your initial research, define a place or an experience to communicate to a US audience (specifics to be determined). This place/experience can be loosely defined to include watching the evening news, a market visit, a walk or drive, a visit to a tourist site, celebrating/participating in a ritual, etc., but it must be one that you can support through your research.

Essential Questions

- What creates an experience or defines a place (i.e., what is its essence)?
- What is the nature of authenticity and what makes something authentic?
- How do we perceive Mexican-ness? Costa Rican-ness
- What does it mean to be an outsider looking in?
- What is the role of language in a culture? How does it reflect social, political and ideological values?
- How is identity manifested through contemporary and historic forms, including those which are representative of cultural hybridity?
- Specifically, how is the historic or vernacular visual vocabulary, including motifs evident on architecture, textiles, other utilitarian and decorative artifacts, utilized in communicating a culture, place, or experience?
- How have these places been represented in the past?
- Are there comparisons/contrasts which are enlightening?

REALIZATION

As you create/represent this place or experience, it is critical that you identify signs and phenomena that you will visually record by means of notations. These notations are simple translations of the sensory phenomenon you have experienced. What does the smell of the ocean or swamp look like? What does the sound of the night look like? This will require abstract thinking and interpretation. It is not enough to simply draw representations of objects encountered. In fact, this is not the purpose at all. You must interpret signs into visual forms.

Consider the context and how it functions as a filter (as in Peirce's definition of a sign consisting of "representamen–object–interpretant"). You may define the context for your experience. As you make your notations, work on choosing them carefully – a concern for craft is important. Other, non-visual signs that can be collected for each experience include verbal signs such as poetry, quotes, personal thoughts and notes, and descriptive terms. These can also be processed into the form of visual notations and eventually used in the compositions.

From what you learn from your research and from your notations, you can create a list of visual (syntactic) qualities and attributes that are inherent in your observations. This will aid you in making typographic translations of the notations. It will also be the

vocabulary you use to create compositions. You are looking for specific qualities to create a rich experience. For this aspect, it may be necessary to consider focusing on only one aspect of the experience. Record your notations in your process book.

Typographic Translation

Impose specific typographic qualities upon visual notations. What qualities are inherently typographic? Simplicity, economy, clarity of shape, interaction of positive and negative spatial forces, edges and joinery. Beyond these, other specific qualities are derived from your morphology. It is possible to make several translations for each visual notation. For this process you can use a computer, saving the documents as elements to be used in the compositions.

Typographic Compositions

Three compositions final are required or the equivalent for a 3D/4D resolution. Several composition studies should be made for each. Your goal is to poetically communicate the essence of your experience.

Realization

The form that this project takes is open and highly dependent on your experience and what you intend to communicate.

EVALUATION

1. Process

Research (breadth/depth); Thorough research to suggest an understanding of the issues; Asking the 'right' questions/asking a lot of questions; Articulation of concept statement; Broadly-based design process yielding unexpected results

2. Realization

Appropriateness; Communication; Range of exploration, attempt to challenge our perceptions and preconceived notions of place or experience; Attention to typographic vision and details; Overall design

3. Professionalism

Constructive Criticism; Participation; Motivation

SCHEDULE

This is a 4 week project based on class meeting for two 3-hour studio sessions per week. The rough schedule below is structured by class period, for a total of 8 classes. Each class period includes a required presentation/critique of work in progress with interim deadlines noted.

- 1–2** Focus on project research, lecture and discussion.
- 3** Ideation/Brainstorming of project in small groups and individually.
Project concept statement due at the end of class.
- 4** Continue brainstorming and preparation of semiotic matrix;
Develop sketches for critique.
- 5–7** Continued project definition and development. Emphasis on critique leading to solution in line with project concept statement.
- 8** Presentation of final project. This includes revisions of the initial research, including a revised concept statement. A thoughtful analysis of lessons learned and the relationship of the final project to communicate ideas about México/Mexicanidad must be articulated.

_follow-up activities

Proposed Exhibition of vernacular design and popular culture in México. To understand and interpret this work in context, and inform our audience;

Continued project work with OSEA-CITE (www.osea-cite.org) in areas of collateral design and communication;

Continued project work with Monte Verde Institute (www.mvinstitute.org) in Monte Verde, Costa Rica;

_terminology

context the environment, cultural or physical, in which a message or form is perceived and by which it is conditioned.

defamiliarization the term (along with “making strange”) often used to translate the Russian term *ostranenie*, the word used by Russian formalists to identify the principal function of artworks. The principal function of poetry and presumably other artworks is to challenge our habitual modes of perception. It can only do so by a process of defamiliarization.

anthropology 1) the science of human beings; especially the study of human beings in relation to distribution, origin, classification and relationship of races, physical character, environmental and social relations, and culture. 2) theology dealing with the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings.

sociology the science of society, social institutions and social relationships; specifically the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction and collective behavior of organized groups of human beings.

connotation and denotation a sign denotes that to which it explicitly refers. the denotation of the word is its literal meaning, what is found in the dictionary. these are objective. the connotations of the sign are the totality of the meanings evoked by the sign. these are subjective and derive meaning from culture. although the meaning may differ from individual to individual, we are able to gauge the response of the sign based on universal cultural implications.

sign most directly it is something that stands for somethings else. it is an umbrella term under which icon index and symbol, among others fall. French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure uses the terms signifier and signified to define a sign and the arbitrary relationships created. An example of a sign is the word “tree”, “arbol” and “arbre” which arbitrarily stands for the object, what we see and feel as a tree. In this example, the word “tree” is the signifier referring to the object, the signified.

icon a representation based on resemblance or similarity. A map is an example of an icon, since it represents a region or terrain. A portrait of Thomas Jefferson is an icon of him because it depicts a representation that is clearly discernable to the viewer.

index a representation of an indirect nature, causally influenced by the object they point to or are the physical mark left by the object (smoke = fire, fingerprint, a bullet hole). Indexes are the most interesting signs because they require more conceptual participation in the process of interpreting.

symbol an arbitrary representation based on agreement or convention. Examples: red for danger, a cross for Christianity, a flag for a country. Some are easy to accept while others require extensive learning and use.

metaphor a literary device where one thing is explained by comparing it to something else. “his eyes were as blue as the ocean” “her hair was as red as the sun”

synecdoche describes the whole through a part. “glad to lend a helping hand” doesn’t mean only a hand will be lent—it is the whole person who will be doing the work.

metonymy literally means changed name. used as a substitute for the original. a hard hat would refer to a construction worker, a flatfoot would refer to a police officer walking a beat.

simile a metaphor using the words “like” or “as.” this is a simple comparison and is useful in idea generation. “__ is like __.” or “__ as__.” as big as a house.

_ideation

The following are exercises to aid in the ideation and conceptualization processes. These are standardized exercises now employed in graphic design classrooms throughout the US and elsewhere. The key to their success is an open mind and not saying “NO” or thinking anything is a “dumb idea.” Ultimately, it allows one to arrive at ideas through relationships that are not connected in a linear fashion.

Verbal Brainstorming Exploration

Brainstorming is a simple and straightforward verbal exploration system that can produce dramatic results. It consists of the written recording or verbalized ideas generated through free association by a group gathered to consider a particular subject or problem. The most important advantage of brainstorming is the generation of ideas from multiple sources as a result of group participation. Because of this multiple involvement, there is a chance to hear ideas from different points of view. A situation is created where each new idea flows directly from one previously verbalized.

Mind Mapping

For any creative thought system to be effective, it helps if it is as spontaneous as possible, with a minimum of restrictions. The system suggested is that of an accessible diagrammatic approach (by accessible I mean an open system, as opposed to a closed system that does not allow a free flow of thought.) Since organization in a linear language context can slow down and limit the possibilities of verbally exploring concepts, a diagrammatic approach that is not linear can help accelerate and expand verbal concept exploration. That is, if the elements of the diagram at no time form a completed circle, we are always free to insert data when and where it occurs in relation to appropriate areas in the diagram.

The primary difference between this method and a vertical, linear method is that instead of starting from the top and working down, it starts with a key concept (word or phrase) and branches out as other ideas related to the concept occur. The advantages of working this way are numerous; they all help the brain to function more naturally and fully. This method may appear messy and cluttered in comparison to the vertical, linear method. As a result of its spontaneous nature, it is; but this is necessary because spontaneity is one of the reasons it works so well.

Alphabetical Listing

This is a very direct way of suddenly having twenty-six or more ideas; some novel, some mundane -that pertain to your subject. Start by listing all the letters of the alphabet. Then, for each letter, list a word or phrase that begins with that letter and somehow seems to pertain to the problem you are attempting to solve.

Connective Thinking

Creative individuals weave their way through the creative process in individual ways. The common ground to their personalities is also based on individuality. The same will hold true when we talk about how creative individuals find their creative ideas. Yet, despite these similarities of individuality and difference, there is that one important concept which unifies the diverse aspects of what it means to be creative. The concept is

connections. Perhaps above all else, creative individuals are able to form connections that are new and relevant. Often this is what most distinguishes their ideas and work from the ideas and work of others.

Visual Search

Gather visual information that relates to your company, product or service. Allow yourself to be influenced by the verbal listing, mind map, alphabetical listing, and connective thinking. Organize and gather the information according to the categories listed below, and include more categories and questions if necessary:

People/Cultural

In what ways is your product related to people?

What kinds of people? How many people?

Is any one individual person more important than others?

What physical actions may be required or evoked by your product?

What types of moods or emotions may be associated with your product?

Environmental

Is your product related to the built or natural environment?

What particular aspects of the environment?

Perceptual

Does your product appeal to some senses more than others?

What colors, textures, surfaces may be associated with your product?

_resources

General Resources

a! Diseño

Arqueología Mexicana. México City, México. Bi-monthly journal. www.arqueomex.com

Rostros de México Antiguo (Special Issue)

Puebla-Tlaxcala. Volume III, Number 13.

Indumentaria Prehispánica. Volume III, Number 17.

Códices Prehispánicos. Volume IV, Number 23.

Códices Coloniales. Volume VII, Number 38.

Plantas Medicinales Prehispánicas. Volume VII, Number 39.

Iconografía del México Antiguo. Volume X, Number 55.

Artes de México. México City, México. Bi-monthly journal.

Number 13: El Arte de la Suerte.

Number 42: Arte Popular. Museo Ruth D. Lechuga.

Number 44: Hojalata

Communication Arts. Menlo Park, CA. www.commarts.com

March/April 2001. Diseño en México.

Matiz. The graphic design magazine from México.

México Desconocido (Hidden México). www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx.

Issues include:

Arte Popular Mexicano (Mexican Popular Art)

Museos (Museums)

Qué Curan las Plantas (Curative Plants)

Virgen del Guadalupe (The Virgin of Guadalupe)

_bibliography

- Almeida, Luis. "Made in México: Today's Graphic Design." *Print*, v. 51 (January/February 1997), p. 106–15.
- Aquino Casas, Arnulfo. "Graphic Design in México: a Critical History." *Print*, v. 51 (January/February 1997), p. 98–104.
- Basave del Valle, Agustín. "On 'Mexicanness'." *Print*, v. 51 (January/February 1997), p. 92–61.
- Bermúdez, Xavier, Eduardo Téllez and Patricia Hordóñez. *Diseñadores Mexicanos 2000/Mexican Graphic Designers 2000*. México City: Trama Visual, 2000.
- Castañeda, Quetzil E. *In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- _____. *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá* (video recording). Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1997.
- Castillo Cocom, Juan. "It was Simply their Word: Yucatec Maya PRInces in YucaPAN and the Politics of Respect." Unpublished. 2003.
- Chavarín, Eduardo and Robby Vi. "Gráfica Reactiva." Miami: *Loft*, July 2003. p 76–80.
- Coe, Michael D. *The Art of the Maya Scribe*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.
- ____ and Rex Koontz. *México from the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. London: Thames and Hudson. 2002.
- Coombe, Rosemary J. "Is There Legal Protection for Cultural Imagery." *Looking Closer 2*. New York: Allworth Press, 1997. p 145–147.
- During, Simon (editor). *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Dutch Souvenir Project*. (5 September 2003) <http://www.dutch-souvenirs.org/ds2/index.cfm?pid=22>
for "About the Souvenir," an article on the exhibition and our desire for collecting and preserving.
- Florida Museum of Natural History. *Images of the Maya: a Travelling Exhibit of Textiles and Photographs*. Gainesville, FL: Florida Museum of Natural History, 1997. Virtual exhibit: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/maya/maya.htm>
- Frank, Patrick. *Posada's Broadsheets. Mexican Popular Imagery, 1890–1910*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998.

Fuente, Beatriz de la. "Beneath the sign of 'Otherness'." *Res*, no. 42 (Autumn 2002), p 251-8.

Garcia Canclini, Nestor. *Hybrid cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. translated by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. Lopez. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

González de Cosío, María. "Of arches and Talachas: Design as a Mirror of México." *Print*, v. 51 (January/February 1997) p. 82-91.

Gravier, Marina Garone. "Nineteenth-Century Mexican Graphic Design: The Case of Ignacio Cumplido." *Design Issues*, v. 18 no. 4 (Autumn 2002), p. 54-63.

Hanks, William F. and Don S. Rice, editors. *Word and Image in Maya Culture: Explorations in Language, Writing, and Representation*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989.

Heimann, Jim (Editor). *Mexicana: Vintage Mexican Graphics*. Köln: Taschen, 2002.

Hodge, Robert and Gunther Kress. *Social Semiotics*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988. Chapter 1: Social Semiotics. pp 1-12; Chapter 4: Style as Ideology. p 79-120; Key Concepts in a Theory of Social Semiotics. p 261-268.

Holtz, Deborah and Juan Carlos Mena. *Sensacional de Diseño Mexicano*. Mexico City: Trilce Ediciones, 2001.

Kaplan, Michael. "The Graphis Interview: Roger Black." *Graphis*, v. 58 (July/August 2002), p. 112-19.

Kowalski, Jeff Karl. *Mesoamerican architecture as a cultural symbol*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Kress, Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge, 1996. Chapter 2: Narrative Representations: Designing Social Action. pp 43-78.

Lechuga, Ruth D. "Day of the Dead Rituals." *Artes de México*, no. 62 (2002), p. 16-25, 70-73.

Looper, Matthew George. *Gifts of the Moon: Huipil Designs of the Ancient Maya*. San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 2000.

McCoy, Katherine. "Countering the Tradition of the APolitical Designer." *Looking Closer* 2. New York: Allworth Press, 1997. p 212-218.

Miller, Mary Ellen. *Maya Art and Architecture*. London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999.

Montalvo, Germán. *Popo-Pop*. Puebla, México: Gobierno del Estado del Puebla/Secretaría de Cultura, 2002.

- Navarro Tapia, Claudia. "Pre-Columbian Stamps: Pintaderas." *Visible Language*, v. 32 no. 3 (1998), p. 256-63.
- Orellana, Margarita de. "New Questions about the Day of the Dead." *Artes de México*, no. 62 (2002), p. 6-9, 64-5.
- Paz, Octavio. *Essays on Mexican Art*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1993.
- Pearce, Kenneth. *A Traveller's History of México*. New York: Interlink Books, 2002.
- Poniatowska, Elena. *Mexican Color*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1998.
- Popson, Colleen P. "Gods of Yucatan." *Archaeology*, v. 56 no1 (January/February 2003), p. 64-8.
- Poynor, Rick. *Obey the Giant : Life in the Image World*. London Birkhauser, 2001.
- Prieto, Miguel. *Diseño Gráfico*. México City, México: Ediciones Era, 2002.
- Ruy Sánchez, Alberto. "Traditional Arts and Artes de México." *Print*, v. 51 (January/February 1997), p. 116-21.
- Salazar, Martha. "National Currency as Rhetoric: The Peso." *Visible Language*, v. 32 no. 3 (1998), p. 280-93.
- Katie Salen and Steven Skaggs, editors. *Zed 4, Semiotics: Pedagogy and Practice*. Richmond, Virginia: VCU Center for Design Studies, 1997
- Severin, Wener J. and James W. Tankard, Jr. *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media*. White Plains, NY: Longman, 1992. "The Role of Perception in Communication." pp 57-71; "Problems in Encoding." p 72-89; "Analysis of Propaganda: First Theories of Decoding and Effects." p 90-108; "Theories of Persuasion." p 147-180.
- Takahashi, Masako. *Mexican Tiles: Color, Style, Design*. San Francisco : Chronicle Books, 2000.
- Tedlock, Dennis. "How to Drink Chocolate from a Skull at a Wedding Banquet." *Res*, no. 42 (Autumn 2002), p. 166-79.

_acknowledgements

Fulbright Hays Program, US Department of Education, Washington, DC.
Gale Holdren and Michelle Guilfoil

US-México Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange
COMEXUS, Fulbright-García Robles
www.comexus.org.mx

Special thanks to Teresa Saavedra, Jacques Paire, Jorge Brozon, Margaret Hug, Arturo Borja from the COMEXUS Office.

University of Florida, College of Fine Arts Scholarship Enhancement Fund.
Funding for this project was provided by the University of Florida Office of Research and Graduate Programs through the Fine Arts Scholarship Enhancement Award Fund.

Monica Salazar for her insight into Mexican culture.

Juan Castillo Cocom and Quetzil Castañeda for the OSEA-CITE experience.

