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Images with meaning: a critical study of the Polish Poster Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology Archives and Special Collections

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May 16, 2002  
date
Images with Meaning
A Critical Study of the Polish Poster Collection
at the Rochester Institute of Technology
Archives and Special Collections

A thesis submitted to the faculty
of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
School of Design
Department of Graphic Design

Kristin O’Loughlin
May 2002
Acknowledgments

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Kari Horowicz

Dr. John Mitchell

Professor Bruce Ian Meader

Professor John Solowski

Professor Krzysztof Lenk

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The Wallace Library Archives and Special Collections
Special permission was granted from the Archives and Special Collections, Wallace Library, Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce 43 posters from the Polish Poster Collection for use on the poster matrix as well as within this thesis.
Thesis Project Definition

The Polish Poster Collection at RIT’s Wallace Library Archives and Special Collections represents a unique period of development in the history of design. The era between the late 1950s and the late 1970s has come to be known as the golden age of Polish posters. The collection itself was gathered by former RIT art history professor Joanne Szabla and donated to the RIT Archives in 1988.

My purpose with this thesis was to make a critical study of the collection from a design perspective, and from this work, to create an application that would use examples from the collection to demonstrate methods of constructing meaningful imagery for graphic designers. In the end this application took the form of a book, which I titled, Images with Meaning. My research proceeded concurrently in two directions.

* 

Historical Significance

My first area of research, the history and socio-political context in which the posters were produced, proved to be key in understanding the development of this golden age of Polish posters.

Research into the history of Poland and the context in which the posters were designed revealed that the posters were commissioned by the Communist government imposed by Russia. They were produced to announce events, films and public safety messages. The posters were created by designers, artists and filmmakers who brought to their task many different approaches and ideas. In addition to conveying the intended message of the client, these artists played a game of getting subtextual meanings past censors.

Why were the posters so popular with their contemporary audience? The viewing context of the posters; gray streets in gray post-war cities, was enlivened by these colorfully arresting design artifacts. The posters are excellent examples of the potential power of design destined for a life on the street. They became a forum for sharing ideas between creators and viewers. Few people owned televisions and radio was seen as an arm of the imposed Communist government, while posters which occupied public spaces were a more natural form of communication for Poles.

Meaningful Imagery

Second, I researched the various ways of developing and communicating ideas through imagery. Because the format of these posters is image dominant, they proved to be exemplary models in researching the use of imagery to communicate ideas. My goal was to find a way to demonstrate how effectively different types of imagery can be used to communicate a specific idea.

Hypothesis

In December, I wrote the following hypothesis, “At the outset of my research into the symbolic content of imagery in Polish posters (and possibly others), my hypothesis is that I will discover that the theories of psychology, mythology and symbolic imagery are evident in the posters. By increasing familiarity with these theoretical constructs, the designer can intuitively and rationally create more effective messages.”

I found evidence of these ideas in the Polish posters and continued my study to strengthen my understanding of the poster imagery and to develop a way to document my explorations and conclusions in a useful way.
Precedents

In the quest to study both the background of the Wallace Library's Polish Poster Collection and how graphic images are purposefully created to convey meaning, the following books served as valuable precedents to my research.

An Overview of Polish Poster Design
Editor Krzysztof Dydo's *100th Anniversary of Polish Poster Art* (1993) is an excellent overview of Polish poster design, which features essays from eleven different authors concerning a variety of facets of the history and circumstances surrounding Polish poster design. The book is a large, full-color catalog from an exhibition of the same name, which opened in 1993 and was shown at six different venues in Poland.

Models for Studying Imagery
The following sources each provided my study with valuable and well-organized information. They proved to be some of the most useful examples to look to for guidance in organizing and presenting my research.

Dr. Rudolf Arnheim explores the role of imagery in thinking in *Visual Thinking* (1969). I also used *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), and *Toward a Psychology of Art* (1972). Together they helped me to establish a solid basis for studying and discussing visual art. Arnheim's tone is both accessible and inspiring, and was both enjoyable to read and useful to study.

Professors Charles Wallischlager and Cynthia Busic-Snyder provide instruction on building visual imagery in *Basic Visual Concepts and Principles* (1992). In this book they present introductions to theories pertaining to and exercises in the practice of form generation for art, architecture and design students. Each chapter includes an extensive bibliography with references from current and historically important authors. This book helped me conceive ways to organize theoretical and practical information pertinent to the creation of imagery.

Finally, in *Perception and Imaging* (1997), Dr. Richard Zakia presents a wide range of theories including gestalt psychology and visual perception, which all inform compositional decision making during the process of image making. Though his intended audience is students of photography, the information and examples are valuable to any student of the visual arts.
Research

The Polish Poster Collection

The RIT Wallace Memorial Library's catalog has digital examples of the Polish Poster Collection, and this was my starting point in acquiring an overview of the collection. After viewing each poster at this reduced size, I was able to get a sense of the different kinds of approaches to graphic imagery embodied in the collection. I then developed my own database to sort and document the selected examples.

Next, I made several visits to the archives to view the entire collection in person. This firsthand experience brought to my attention more than a few examples that had not caught my eye when viewed at the reduced size. Since the collection is organized by designers' names, this physical viewing also gave me a better sense of designers' individual approaches.

On my third visit to the Archive, I was accompanied by RIT psychologist Dr. John Mitchell. Together we looked over the works of Polish poster designer Franciszek Starowieyski. I had read in an interview that this designer developed his designs on the basis of dream imagery. I was curious to know how much dream imagery is thought to be universal in nature. Dr. Mitchell and I discussed the value of using dreams as a basis for creating conceptual imagery, and he suggested I consider dreams and meanings in terms of degree of relevance, that is, a basic idea will have many facets. This helped me to accept blurred boundaries between the definitions I was struggling to delineate.

After I had begun familiarizing myself with the contents of the collection and attempting to sort the posters into meaningful groups, Professor Remington advised me to begin building a framework for looking at imagery. In order to discover a way to do this, I continued reading further from Rudolf Arnheim, Richard Zakia and Charles Wallischlager and Cynthia Busc-Snyder. From these authors I learned ways of identifying and developing kinds of imagery, and I began to define pertinent terms and ideas, which I eventually termed "Methods of Meaning."

Context Advisors

In the hope of obtaining input from individuals with firsthand experiences in Poland during the period I studied, I attempted to contact Professor Joanne Szabla (who had personally acquired the posters of the RIT collection in Poland) and Professor John Solowski (formerly of RIT, who studied in Warsaw as a Smith-Mundt grant recipient in the early 1960s). I was unable to make contact with Professor Szabla, but Professor Solowski enthusiastically granted me two interviews.
Methods of Meaning

The most basic concepts to be internalized before I could reach a solid understanding were those of a communication model (based on the Shannon-Weaver model), definitions of picture, symbol and sign (from Rudolf Arnheim), and three basic definitions from the field of semiology of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Definitions of these terms are included in the glossary. I developed graphic representations of Arnheim's definitions as well as an adapted version of the communication model. These interpretations appear as illustrations on pages 20, 21 and 26 in the book prototype.

The following definitions were included on the final poster matrix.

Symbol
A symbol is an image that has a meaning beyond the actual thing it represents. The distinction between symbol and metaphor can be difficult to make, but it seems that the qualities of being a discrete form, self-contained, memorable and reproducible serve to put an image into the category of symbol. Meaning can be conveyed by creating a new symbol, building upon an existing symbol or combining existing symbols so they become integrated to have a new meaning.

Metaphor
Visual metaphors add depth and meaning to communication. The qualities of one thing are presented as characteristics of another. A metaphor is indirect and subjective. It involves the substitution of a different concept, word or image for the intended topic.

A metaphor can make it easier to address a difficult or forbidden subject. An original metaphor is a graceful and sometimes poetic figure of speech or visual image which detaches itself from routine communication by requiring the audience to pause for a second to discover the connection.
ARCHETYPES
To come to an understanding of the meaning of archetypes, I studied Carl G. Jung's *Man and His Symbols*. To understand their application to visual imagery, I read Richard Zakia's *Perception and Imaging*.

The idea of the collective unconscious was introduced by psychologist Carl Jung. He defined the collective unconscious as a part of the psyche that does not owe its existence to personal experience and therefore must be solely inherited. It represents the communal memory of mankind. Jung believed that great art is an expression of the collective unconscious and for this reason speaks to all of us. Jung stated that the content of the collective unconscious is essentially composed of archetypes. The archetypes are definite pre-existing forms in the psyche, and are evident in all cultures. Mythology calls them motifs.

Whether one agrees that an archetype is an inborn concept, or if one believes writers and artists create them by recognizing and distilling certain common human traits, archetypes represent poignant themes with which all people (regardless of era or nationality) can identify. Once an archetype has sparked a connection, its existence can be perpetuated through further works of literature, art and design. Universal themes expressed in Jungian archetypes seem best suited to narrative application.

**A Select List of Archetypes** *(represented in the posters studied)*

**Persona**
is the part of ourselves we consciously show to others.

**Shadow**
is the hidden side of the personality. It is the opposite of the persona.

**Mother**
may be a literal mother figure, or an idea such as a Divine Mother or Mother Earth.

**Orphan**
is a subject that embodies the idea of abandonment.

**Hero**
is represented in myths of every culture. The hero rises from obscurity to perform brave deeds such as slaying dragons or winning battles to save his people in time of need.

**Beauty**
is an ideal of femininity, which might also imply superiority and a goal to be obtained or emulated.

**Trickster (or Fool)**
is a mystical figure who may be only half human and is prone to playing jokes.

**Journey**
is a trip full of experiences that leads to enlightenment.

**Death and Rebirth**
are common themes relating to the fear and questions we have regarding what there is beyond the life we know.
Synthesis

After weeks of research and having amassed a large amount of material, I reached a critical point at which I wondered, "How on earth will I make something meaningful and useful out of all of my findings?" The forms I developed to explain the content became a contextual timeline (showing historical, political and design events in relation to the period studied) and a grid-matrix chart of posters (categorizing them by methods of meaning and graphic techniques or the grammar of graphic design). The book was undertaken as a vehicle to share the discoveries of my research efforts through written text, photographs and examples of posters.

Timeline

I began by selecting and organizing information from my research for inclusion in the timeline. I also needed to include major historical events, and obtain from Professor Remington a timeline of worldwide graphic design developments. To add another level of contextual information, I also wanted to include documentary photos taken in Poland during the time period studied (1950s-1970s) as a way to give myself and viewers a visual idea of the context of the posters. Again, Professor Remington lent me from his own collection, copies of slides taken by Professor John Solowski in Poland. Professor Solowski studied drawing and design at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in the early 1960s. He had been one of Henryk Tomaszewski's students, and in a videotaped interview with Professor Remington and in a telephone interview with me, he shared anecdotes and supplied information that helped me write captions for the photos.

I briefly explored the idea of combining the timeline and the poster matrix into a single information panel. I decided against this option with the conclusion that such a single "meta panel" may cause the two different facets of my study to compete with rather than complement one another. Instead, I opted to create separate, but related (through shared formal elements, color and typography) pieces of information design.

Poster Matrix

The criteria for inclusion were that the posters have a bold, forceful quality, and that they make use of imagery as the total or partial means of conveying an original meaning.

I questioned whether to include film posters because their imagery might have been based on that drawn from the films rather than invented by the artist or designer. Upon further research, I realized that designers took liberties and produced a great deal of arresting original imagery especially in the film posters. For this reason the film posters were included, and are identified as such by the red "frame" around each reproduction on the matrix.
Posters that drew imagery from Polish folk art traditions were included but not highlighted in a separate section because a broad enough range of this style was not becoming evident in the group of examples. Since the primary criteria for inclusion was that the posters have strong imagery with the purpose of conveying original meaning, this group was not entirely a good fit since they brought with them an inherent referent of traditional nationalistic visual forms.

After searching through the posters for tendencies, themes and strengths, I began narrowing down the techniques and methods of imagery development to those that seemed to be best represented by the chosen poster examples. I then made thumbnail printouts of posters from my own poster database (created in my research phase) for inclusion as a visual overview of the collection.

Deciding how to structure a framework of categories and relationships for analyzing the posters was an important decision in the process of developing a useful organization of the content of my study. This process led to the synthesis of what eventually became the cross-referencing Poster Matrix (Appendix 4).

Book

In the first steps to organizing the material for inclusion in the book, I developed a working outline. Topics included are ones that emerged from my research phase and were useful in support of the development of an understanding of the posters. The outline contained: Introduction, Posters, Evolution of Polish Posters, The Designers, Methods of Meaning, Graphic Techniques and Conclusions. This outline also served as my writing schedule, which helped me keep the process moving forward, even though several times I had to leave items unfinished to be revisited later.

Important questions discussed in the text of the book include, "Why do the posters look the way they do—expressive and emotional—in contrast to other contemporary design styles?" and, "How was it that artists and designers working on commissions from an unpopular Communist government were able to incorporate ideas of personal commentary and sometimes even criticism into their work?"
Ideation

This section includes documentation of the generation of conceptual solutions, some of which did not prove suitable for implementation, and consequently are not present in the final application.

Multimedia Application

Early in my thesis process I considered creating a multimedia application to share the results of my research. This application would have been constructed as a primer in visual awareness to foster conceptual agility in image development, using the Polish posters as examples. This idea was let go in favor of the book format.

Research Form

While I was in the process of developing a database of the posters that seemed useful for inclusion, I considered making use of a more systematic approach to my study of the posters individually (diagram 5.1).

After drawing up and evaluating the idea, this method was not used. It seemed that its rigid structure might lead me to a study that favored reduction of imagery into its most easily observable and definable terms. This approach seemed as though it would be in direct opposition to the nature of the imagery I was studying.
Survey
I also considered the option of sending out a Polish Poster Survey (diagram 5.2). It seemed that this would be worthwhile as a way to get meaningful input from firsthand observers and residents of the cities in which the posters appeared.

If I had had more time to assemble a group of survey subjects, this might have been a useful exercise, however, there still would have been the distinct possibility of gathering responses that were too unique to yield a definitive consensus of opinion.

Poster of Posters
This idea was carried through to the poster matrix (Appendix 4). At one point I considered whether it might be useful for future researchers working with the Polish Poster Collection to include all of the posters in this information piece. I finally decided to use only the strongest representatives in order to retain the focus of my study of how meaning is conveyed through imagery.

Timeline
Early on, the timeline started as a research document to assist my own understanding of the topic. It developed through a few stages and was completed as the timeline which was shown in the exhibition (Appendix 3).
Intermediate Evaluation

Exhibition Pieces

Thesis Presentation to Graduate Graphic Design Faculty and Students

A diagram of my proposed gallery installation (sketch appears in diagram 7.2 on p. 17) was presented to the RIT School of Design faculty as well as to the first-year and second-year graduate students on February 13, 2002. The response was that the sequencing was coherent and the information was meaningful. Professor Deborah Beardslee advised me to try to work on getting all of the supporting information for the posters onto a single panel. Initially, I didn't think this would be possible since there were several levels of detail (including title, designer, date, brief analysis and category—film, public service or circus) I wanted to include. However, the suggestion proved to be achievable in the end, partially through the use of narrow color outlines surrounding each poster image, which are coded to denote the category.

Professor R. Roger Remington

Professor Remington questioned my reasoning behind my sequencing, wondering if I had considered placing the actual poster from the archive adjacent to the poster matrix in order to properly represent the real size, color and dynamic imagery that was being discussed. Although I agreed with him about the value that such an arrangement would have for the display, I eventually kept the Hubert Hilscher Cyrk poster as the first item in the sequence. This was for two reasons. First I thought it was an arresting image that would draw the viewer into the story I wanted to tell, and second, because of the configuration of the gallery space (shown in Appendix 6 on p. 42) I wanted to have a strong image visible to the left of the small wall that, upon entering the gallery, blocked most of my display from view.

Book (prototype version one)

Professor John Solowski

Professor Solowski, a former RIT School of Art & Design Faculty member, is currently Professor Emeritus at Ryerson University in Toronto. He served as a primary authority on the subject of the Polish posters. He studied with Henryk Tomaszewski in Warsaw as a Smith-Mundt grant scholar in 1961, and personally knew some of the designers whose works are included in the poster matrix. He reviewed the book prototype with enthusiasm and suggested it be sent to the Polish Cultural Institute.

Archivist Kari Horowicz

Kari Horowicz is the Art and Photography Librarian/Archivist at the RIT's Wallace Library. She agreed to read over the entire first version of the book prototype. On May 8, 2002 Kari returned her feedback to me. She found several instances where a quoted section of text would benefit from a descriptive lead-in sentence, a few places where a word needed to be italicized, and she noted that in the designers' section, the dates of birth and death needed to be handled in a consistent manner. In conclusion Kari wrote, "this is a wonderful document— I've learned a lot!"
Professor Bruce Ian Meader
Professor Bruce Meader was kind enough to join my committee for the last four weeks of the project after Dr. John Mitchell found it necessary to retire from his position at the RIT Student Counseling Center. Professor Meader teaches typography and shared with me his expert insights for my book application. His valuable typographic advice helped me to put the finishing touches on the book. In a review of the prototype on April 15, 2002, he made the following suggestions:

JACKET
Remove the red “Thesis Application in Progress” line of text. Its color seems to vibrate due to the similarity in value to the background image.

CONTENTS PAGE
Use a right alignment for numerals. It is best to keep them lined up relative to decimal placement.

ILLUSTRATION CAPTIONS
Enlarge captions. Even though they are physically legible, they might be perceived as too small. Check all captions for standard distance from illustrations.

TIMELINE
Adjust elements so that none will be affected by the gutter. Explore other options for black rules connecting events to dates (might they work in white?).

PULL-QUOTES
The author’s name can do without the em-dash. There are enough typographic differences to signify that this is the author.

GRAY RECTANGLES BEHIND ILLUSTRATIONS
Determine a second narrower width for use with smaller images.
Implementation

Exhibition Pieces
After showing intermediate stage printouts of the poster matrix and timeline at the February thesis presentation to the graduate Graphic Design Department, the pieces were further refined in preparation for the MFA thesis show, which opened April 5, 2002.

Final versions of the poster matrix, timeline and an additional introductory statement were output as large exhibit panels and flush-mounted on foam core. The panels were designed in QuarkXpress and pieced together many times along the way from tiled printouts. I first had the files printed out by RIT’s Hub printing service. I wasn’t satisfied with the color balance from these prints, possibly due to the fact that the files were converted several times at the Hub before final printout.

I adjusted the color balance of my files to adapt to the Hub’s output, and meanwhile took the unadjusted original files to Kinko’s for output. After comparing the output from both service bureaus, I chose the Kinko’s set and flush-mounted it onto foam core and installed them at the Bevier Gallery on March 30, 2002.
**Exhibition**

Below are some of the process notations from the development of the exhibit diagram. A key element in this process was that Archivist Kari Horowicz allowed me to include an original example from the RIT Polish Poster Collection. She kindly had Hubert Hilscher’s *Cyrk* poster (featuring a lion on a unicycle with red background) matted and it was displayed under Plexiglas as the first visual example in my series.

Professor Remington suggested I consider the possibility of showing all of the book pages as full spreads on the wall behind the book. Although this idea would have made a valuable and informative “book macro-view” addition to the exhibit, I calculated that the cost would be prohibitive and the production of a wall of spreads would have required an earlier completion of book prototype, which was not feasible.
Book
The first single copy of the book prototype was included in the thesis exhibition at RIT’s Bevier Gallery. The process of implementing the book included writing, printing, binding and jacketing a copy of prototype, version one which was included in the gallery exhibition, and five copies of the final version of the prototype.

While I was writing the copy following the outline included in *Synthesis*, p. 11, I also began sketching ideas for page layout design. I chose to have imagery, when it shares a page with text, appear at the top third of the page. This format is meant to recall a row of posters, and the shaded gray rectangles which extend behind the illustrations are the realization of this concept. The gray rectangles became useful as devices to link an illustration with the text related to it.

The page size was constrained by both the physical limitations of my inkjet printer (which only prints letter-sized sheets) and the fact that I wanted to include a copy of the book application prototype inside each thesis documentation. This necessitated that the final book be narrower than letter-sized paper.

The double-sided inkjet paper I used for the pages was obtained from Red River Paper company in Texas. I tested two weights before deciding on the 43 lb. stock.

Thomas Pinzon, at New Ridge Bindery, required a five-day turnaround time and allowed me to choose a linen cover from his selection. He was happy to use the red Canson paper I had brought for the inside cover sheet. This sheet matched the red background in the Hubert Hilscher lion poster (*Cyrek*) included in the exhibit. Mr. Pinzon cut my letter-sized printed stack of pages down to size before stitching them together. He was concerned that some of my live area might be too close to the gutter, and so we agreed that he could leave extra room on that edge for the prototype version one. This extra space was reduced for the five copies of prototype’s final version.

The final version of the prototype books also includes changes that reflect advice received from Kari Horowicz and Professor Meader as noted in section six, *Intermediate Evaluation* (pp. 14–15).
Dissemination

Information Display Pieces
The poster matrix and contextual timeline have been donated to the RIT Archive and Special Collections. Kari Horowicz has graciously found some space in her storage facility to allow these information display pieces to be housed in conjunction with the Polish Poster Collection. It is my hope that my efforts will be of use to future researchers who are interested in finding background information on the topic of Polish posters.

Book
Five copies of the second-stage book prototype, *Images with Meaning*, have been produced. Three of those copies are with the bound copies of this thesis documentation, one copy is with Professor R. Roger Remington, and one copy has been given to Professor John Solowski. The text from the book could conceivably be published in whole or in part as an article. Professor John Solowski hopes I might find a way to print the timeline and poster matrix as poster editions themselves, but as yet there is no definite plan to do so. Professor Solowski also hoped I might consider sending a copy of the book to the Polish Cultural Institute to see if there is any interest in publishing a project of this sort.
Retrospective Evaluation

Overall
THE AUTHOR
At the outset of my research into the symbolic content of imagery in Polish posters, my hypothesis was that the theories of psychology, mythology and symbolic imagery were evident in the posters. I believe that by increasing familiarity with these theoretical constructs, the designer can intuitively and rationally design more effective messages.

As the poster matrix shows, I did indeed find a rich and varied representation of different methods of meaning utilized in the examples. As I worked to define and sort the techniques employed, and as a viewer can discover from examining the poster matrix, certain combinations of what I termed, "methods of meaning" and the "grammar of graphic design" merge to produce especially strong and meaningful imagery. The research that I included in the timeline was also helpful in understanding how context serves to influence the communication styles and content of people living in a certain place and time. In the book I attempted to make a succinct, coherent and interesting synopsis of the two avenues of my research for presentation to other graphic designers. From formal evaluation and informal commentary by fellow students, I believe I have accomplished this goal.

Exhibition
PROFESSOR R. ROGER REMINGTON
In a meeting with Professor Remington on April 22, 2002, I brought slides of my exhibit and asked him if he would discuss the show with me. After doing so, he said that in his estimation, I had achieved my stated goals, and the information pieces showed a richness and complexity of thought. He believed I had chosen examples that were key to explaining the topic, and that including a real poster was a good decision for the exhibit.

One formal decision Professor Remington had hoped to see in the exhibit—that the real poster example be hung next to the poster matrix—was not realized. His reasons for the suggested placement are included in Intermediate Evaluation, p. 14. He did say, however that he understood that I had chosen the real poster example's far-left placement in order to provide a strong introductory element for the detailed information that was to follow. In all, he said it was an effective presentation.

PROFESSOR KRZYSZTOF LENK
Professor Lenk was a guest lecturer at the RIT School of Design on May 2, 2002. He is a faculty member at Rhode Island School of Design, and an expert in information design. Born and raised in Poland, he received his MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts, Cracow. Professor Lenk was a participant in the design field in Poland during the time I studied.

In a meeting on May 3, 2002, Professor Lenk reviewed my timeline and poster matrix. He paid special attention to the timeline and pointed out a misunderstanding I had formed in the course of my research. He explained to me that between 1943 and 1944 there were two Warsaw Uprisings, the first being the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the second being the Warsaw Uprising. I was glad he was careful enough to find the mistake and I changed the timeline before including it here (Appendix 4) and as pages 10–11 in the book. Images with Meaning.
Professor Lenk shared his knowledge of designer Roman Cieslewicz and the circumstances behind Cieslewicz's move to Paris. He also reminded me that the initial reason for Polish designers' use of hand-drawn typography was that they were not allowed access to regular foundry type due to the fact that presses were state run and tightly controlled. The evolution of the hand lettering to free and expressive forms grew out of this early constraint.

**Book (final version)**

**The Author**

The changes I made from version one to the final version of the book prototype (Appendix 7) included addressing Professor Meader's and Karl Horowicz's suggestions as documented in *Intermediate Evaluation*, pp. 14–15.

If this book was to be further developed for publication, I would first have to obtain permission to reproduce the included imagery. This could prove to be complicated due to the fact that the posters were created for the now non-existent Communist government. This would be an area where the assistance of Professor Solowski could prove essential.

In terms of content, if publication was to be considered, I would like to take time to carry out the Polish poster survey, discussed in *Ideation*, p. 13. This research could then provide a basis for an in-depth discussion of individual posters from the era and their perceived meanings among their original audience. It would also be valuable to expand the section that discusses designers individually. Although this is a common feature of existing books on the subject of Polish posters, the information typically included is not much more than a perfunctory list of important commissions and awards rather than a synopsis of design approaches and meaningful concerns.

Following these additions a proposal would be written for publishers to review. It would include the working title, *Images with Meaning*, an outline of content, number of illustrations, time plan and resources (the RIT collection being the major resource). The intended audience would include graphic designers, visual artists and readers interested in Polish culture.

**Questions to keep in mind as the project further develops**

- Is the content organized in a sensible and meaningful way?
- Is the text written in an engaging and appropriate tone?
- Do the included photographs and examples serve to enrich the text?

**In terms of information design**

- In what ways could the timeline and poster matrix be improved?
- Are there any inherent problems with presenting subjective content as information?
Conclusion

What Has Been Gained Through My Research?
The products of my research: the timeline, poster matrix and prototype book can help to provide a concise background in the study of works from the golden age of Polish posters. Since they are now part of the RIT Archive’s collection, the timeline and matrix will serve as a valuable resource for future researchers studying the Polish Poster Collection.

The contextual timeline provides an accessible visual tool for explaining to non-Poles some of the unique circumstances that helped create a very special phenomenon in graphic design history. The poster matrix is a unified source for examining how combinations of “methods of meaning” and the “grammar of graphic design” can work together in the development of meaningful imagery. From my synthesis and study of the poster matrix, I discovered that several of the intersections of “methods of meaning” and the “grammar of graphic design” produce especially powerful meaningful imagery.

In the first row of the matrix, “synthesize a symbol” intersects with “manipulate figure/ground” to display four strong symbol synthesis solutions. The dual nature of an adjusted figure/ground relationship allows the visual symbol to have a new meaning created by a combination of two known symbols. A particularly arresting example from this intersection is Tadeusz Trepkowski’s 1952 Nie. In this poster the shape of a falling bomb is filled with the image of a ruined building. The cause and effect are synthesized into a visceral unified image that retains both of its separate references as well as the new one.

In the second row of the matrix, “create a metaphor” intersects with “representational illustration” to find imagery with a befitting mix of straightforward depiction and sly intended meaning. Metaphors rely on previous knowledge and an interest and willingness on the part of the viewer to make the mental connection intended by the designer. The metaphorical intention is conveyed through the combination of referents included. For instance, in Hubert Hilscher’s 1967 Oryk, a lion (a traditional symbol for a king or ruler) stands atop a unicycle in front of a red background. For a viewer in 1960s Poland, the lion might be viewed as the Communist (red) government in a position of instability or lacking support (on a unicycle). The fact that this poster was produced by an arm of the government only intensifies the irony of its metaphor.

In the third matrix row, “invoke an archetype” intersects with “juxtapose or reintegrate through montage” to collect four vivid examples which make use of archetypes. Through the use of juxtaposition (placement of very different types of imagery side by side) or reintegration (combination into a new whole) a representation of an archetype can be modulated and applied to a specific situation. This enables the image to convey the broad idea of the archetype employed and the focused point of the intended message. In Tadeusz Trepkowski’s 1955 Second International Youth Sports Games, a photograph of a Greek statue of a discus thrower has small renditions of the flags of the participating countries superimposed on the discus. Instantly the idea of the noble and heroic pursuit of sport as a unifying catalyst bringing diverse nations together is conveyed through a spare and memorable image.

This research has vividly demonstrated to me the value of internalizing theoretical study and creative methodologies. Due to my greater understanding of the techniques and methods I studied, I feel much better equipped to produce richer “Images with Meaning.”
Summary of My Experience

The initial planning report (Appendix 2) for this thesis included seven major goals, the first one being to define and plan the project. This planning report was completed before the actual thesis work began in the winter quarter of 2001. Secondly I delved into the research phase through reading, viewing the poster collection, consulting with committee members and resource persons. This was an extensive process of searching for, organizing and absorbing information. Thirdly, the struggle began to synthesize my research into a meaningful form. This involved a procedure of selecting and combining my findings into a systematic whole. Fourthly, I embarked on the ideation process to create a useful method of presentation for my work. The final methods chosen were a timeline, poster matrix and a book.

After I finalized my decision on the chosen presentation methods, came the fifth task of designing and producing the timeline and matrix as exhibition-sized wall panels. These were shown in the spring thesis show at RIT’s Bevier gallery. The first version of the book prototype was also produced and bound in time to be included in the show. Sixth, for the dissemination phase, I decided to donate the timeline and poster matrix to the RIT Archives where they might prove valuable in conjunction with the Polish Poster Collection.

Five copies of the final version of the book prototype, Images with Meaning, were produced and bound. Three are included with the three copies of this bound thesis documentation, and the other two are with Professor R. Roger Remington and Professor John Solowski. Seventh and lastly, I met individually with Professor Remington, Professor Solowski, Kari Horowicz, Professor Meader and Professor Lenk to obtain and address their feedback.

Design for the public realm has the primary responsibility to disseminate critical social messages and also to deliver interesting, intellectually challenging and persistent ideas.
As design pioneer Gyorgy Kepes proposed in 1944 concerning the increasingly ubiquitous nature of the products of visual communication, “They could train the eye and thus the mind with the necessary discipline of seeing beyond the surface of visible things to recognize and enjoy values for a useful life.”

As designers we must be aware of the ever more widespread impact of our work and insure that the message to its audience is carefully considered. Design historian and writer Victor Margolin wrote, “The graphic designer is moving into a position of ever greater influence which prompts a consideration of his or her possible role in fostering a state of community at every level in life.”

The most important result of this research process for me is my enhanced appreciation of the value of design and the opportunity it has to have an impact on the community it is destined to speak to. I have developed a profound sense of the task we undertake as graphic designers.

Glossary of Terms

ARCHETYPE
An archetype is a definite pre-existent form in the psyche, evident in all cultures. It is an ideal or basic type. Mythological research calls archetypes motifs. Archetypes frequently manifest themselves in dreams and in literature and reveal themselves in symbolic fashion. The list is long and fluctuating, but would certainly include, birth, death, mother, father, wisemen, heroes and demons.

METAPHOR
The qualities of one thing are presented as characteristics of another thing. The purpose is to explain a characteristic of dissimilar elements or to emphasize differences between similar elements.

PICTURE
A picture visually portrays the thing it represents through similarity of shape, color, or direction. It may stylize or present its subject in such a way that it points to the essence of the subject in some way. A picture can have nearly infinite levels of abstraction.

PRAGMATIC
A term from semiotics, pragmatic refers to the functionality of a sign. In graphic design this word is frequently used to discuss the physical nature and production methods of the "sign" object, or how it was made.

SEMANTIC
A term from semiotics, semantic is the term for the relationship of a "sign" to the object to which it refers, or its meaning.

SEMIOLOGY
Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols that deals with their function in language and art. Three useful definitions from semiotics are semantic, syntax, and pragmatic.

SHANNON-WEAVER COMMUNICATION MODEL
A functional model of communication developed by two scientists at Bell Laboratories. The parts of the model are the source (instigator or encoder of the message), the message (the idea to be transmitted), the channel (or method of transmission) and the receiver (the intended recipient of the message, or decoder). This model also includes the concept of noise, or competition the message must surpass in order to reach its recipient.

SIGN
A sign stands for a thing or concept without attempting to represent it. Letters and numbers are signs. The simplicity and specificity of a sign makes it an exacting conveyor of meaning. A sign is an indirect media because it always acts as a reference to the thing for which it stands.

SYMBOL
A symbol visually portrays a thing, as well as alluding to more abstract concepts. Any recognizable image is a symbol in the sense that it is a representation of a larger idea of the thing depicted.

SYNTAX
A term from semiotics, syntax refers to a sign and its formal relationship to other signs, or rather, what it depicts or looks like.

UNCONSCIOUS
The part of the psychic apparatus that does not ordinarily enter an individual's awareness.
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Journals


Magazines


Bibliography
Web Sites

<http://www.theartofposter.com/red/rpd.html>

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RIT College of Imaging Arts and Sciences. 1988. VHS.
Appendices

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Semantics of Form
or Image with Baggage

How does a visual symbol communicate its message? This thesis proposes to study historical and current examples of symbols and images found in graphic design to evaluate their communicative power. Models of study may include gestalt theory, cognitive psychology and Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious." I propose to look at Wallace Library's Design Collection, i.e. Polish posters, etc. for examples to study, hoping to find if these strong images created at a time of social upheaval exemplify ideas proposed by these theories.

I hope to find in my research how increased understanding of the ways humans perceive, or read symbols may help direct a designer in the development of conceptual images.

Research will culminate in an application to aid designers in development of communicative imagery.
Needs Analysis

Graphic designers spend countless hours brainstorming to come up with effective and inventive ways to communicate with a viewer or user, but how often do we really know how our graphic communication will be perceived, and how often is the message intended the same as the message understood?

A powerful image is one that elicits a reaction, but when there is a goal of communication behind the production of that image, the perception of the message is very important. Graphic designers can benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of theories that guide creation and comprehension of visual messages, and need to learn ways to evaluate our solutions to see how well we have met our communication goals. As Jay Doblin said, "theory can provide a structure for understanding problems and help generate methods for solving them."

What are some of the methods we can use to study how the understanding process unfolds? Cognitive psychologists believe humans think in images rather than words, and Carl Jung proposed that we all share an ancient inborn knowledge he called the collective unconscious which holds that "there exists a second psychic system of a collective universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. this collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of preexistent forms, the archetypes." These archetypes are manifested through symbols. This is but one of the lenses I will use to look at the process of developing conceptual imagery.

Graphic designers, as the creators of symbols need to enhance their power as communicators through a deeper understanding of theories which attend to the creation and perception of visual messages.
Problem Statement and User Profile

The task of graphic designers is to transmit knowledge by focusing ideas into a visual means of communication. As creators of symbols and communicative imagery, designers need to enhance their abilities as communicators through greater understanding of the theories that pertain to creation and perception of visual messages as well as systems of evaluation for our work.

Several areas of study can offer a wealth of insight for graphic designers. Communication theory, Gestalt theory, Cognitive psychology, and Jungian psychology all in some way address the questions of how people perceive and process visual information. I will use these and other models to study examples of graphic design deemed to be powerful and inventive to discover if and how the examples uphold the ideas of the theories.

I aim to help fulfill the need of graphic designers for greater understanding of theories of perception and by distilling and organizing the concepts of these theories into an application that will function as a tool and evaluation system for designers to use in construction of content-rich imagery. By combining the most effective designers’ approaches with theories from visual communication, psychology and other areas, I will attempt to construct a methodology for creating more precise symbolic graphic communication geared for use by advanced students to professional graphic designers.
## Mission Statement

This thesis is a study of visual symbols and imagery that will examine the methods of creating meaningful forms in order to discover the most effective ways of infusing those forms with perceivable meaning. It will enlighten designers on strategies of developing imagery with communicative power.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Processes &amp; Strategies</th>
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</table>
| 1 To Develop a Plan for Thesis (3) | Given a chosen area of interest, the designer will assess needs (2) and define a thesis topic. | Do preliminary research  
Compose Needs Analysis  
Compose Problem Statement |
| | Given the thesis topic, the designer will do preliminary research to produce planning documents. | Do preliminary research into precedents  
Produce Precedents document  
Compose Goals and Objectives  
Evaluate documents with Professor Remington |
| | Given the project outlined in the planning documents, the designer will assemble advisors to manage the project (1). | Identify possible committee members  
Meet and discuss project with proposed members  
Obtain signatures |
| 2 To do Research and Analysis (4) | Given the thesis plan for research into methods of meaningful symbol development, the designer will examine historical and contemporary design artifacts to choose a group for study. | Consult with Kari Horowicz  
Sort through contents of the design archive  
Research materials suggested by committee  
Library and web research |
| | Given the identified area of exploration on the topic of meaningful symbol development, the designer will survey historical and contemporary precedents of symbol development and evaluation methods to insure that major techniques have been included. | Consult with Dr. Mitchell  
Library research  
Web research  
Query designers |
| | Given the identified methods of symbol development and evaluation techniques, the designer will analyze them to select methods which seem to be the most relevant to the project. | Organize research findings  
Create database  
Evaluate proposed selections |
| | Given the selected methods of symbol development and evaluation, the designer will define criteria for determining success of a symbol and methods of creation and evaluation. | Look at evaluation techniques for overlaps  
Look at chosen design examples for shared qualities |
| | Given the identified criteria, the designer will ideate to choose and combine the methods into an enlightened process of symbol development which will be useful for designers. | Evaluate methods and examples  
Try out combinations  
Evaluate combinations |
| 3 To Synthesize Research into a Meaningful Form | Given the strongest chosen combinations of symbol development and evaluation methods, the designer will shape the findings into a meaningful form for the purpose of communicating the findings. | Use principles of information design  
Combine methods into a visual presentation |
| | Given the form chosen for revealing information discovered through research, the designer will choose appropriate illustrative design examples. | Produce proposed final information design  
Evaluate these proposed formats |
| 4 To Ideate for Meaningful Presentation Format | Given the form the information design pieces are taking, the designer will ideate for ways to further demonstrate the value of the chosen theories and methods and designers. | Use the methods to create demonstration symbols  
Test by asking other designers to try the methods  
Evaluate these demonstration symbols |
| | Given the outcome from the trial of the methodology, select appropriate examples for inclusion into the final application and test effectiveness of proposed information with other designers. | Use the methods to create demonstration symbols  
Test by asking other designers to try the methods  
Evaluate these demonstration symbols |
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<th>Goals</th>
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<td>5 To Implement Findings into an Application (5)</td>
<td>Given the information design elements and chosen examples and demonstrations, and incorporating feedback, the designer will combine the parts into a useful book or website application and produce a prototype.</td>
<td>Design a form that will hold the information Evaluate and revise this form</td>
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<td>Given the outcome of evaluation of the prototype, the designer will produce the design for the final application.</td>
<td>Design for print or web Evaluate design for usability</td>
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<td>6 To Disseminate the Application (6)</td>
<td>Given the final design solution, the designer will produce several copies of a book or launch website.</td>
<td>produce output and have bound into a book or finalize and upload html files to a server</td>
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<td>Given the final produced application the designer will produce a descriptive installation for the gallery installation in the RIT Bevier Gallery.</td>
<td>Create gallery-sized display pieces Evaluate these pieces Refine and produce final informational displays</td>
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<td>7 To Evaluate the Thesis (7)</td>
<td>Given the final exhibition of the application and supporting research description in Bevier Gallery, obtain feedback from peers, viewers, faculty and advisors.</td>
<td>Printed questionnaire or website feedback area. Discussion Observation of users with any interactive elements</td>
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<td>The designer will incorporate this feedback into the final version of the thesis report.</td>
<td>Complete writing of thesis document Incorporate feedback and findings from the exhibition</td>
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<td>Time Plan</td>
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<td>Create Database</td>
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<td>Define Successful Symbolic Imagery</td>
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<td>January</td>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>Create a Form for the Information</td>
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<td>Choose Examples</td>
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<td>Retrospective Evaluation</td>
<td>Thesis Reception 4.5.02</td>
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<td>Complete Final Report</td>
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<td>May</td>
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1 Manage Project
   Kristin O'Loughlin
   Professor R. Roger Remington
   Dr. John Mitchell
   Kari Horowicz
   Evaluate

2 Assess Needs
   Thesis Proposal
   Needs Analysis
   Evaluate

3 Develop Plan
   Problem Statement
   Mission Statement
   Goals and Objectives
   Processes and Strategies
   Evaluate

4 Research and Analyze Precedents and Examples
   Identify Appropriate Examples to study
   Analyze Examples
   Define Useful Methods of Imagery Development
   Ideate for Effective Combinations of Methods
   Select Best Examples of Creation and Evaluation
   Evaluate

5 Implement Application
   Inventory
   Classify
   Synthesize
   Develop
   Produce
   Evaluate

6 Disseminate Application
   Design Artifact
   Thesis Show
   Thesis Report
   Evaluate

7 Evaluate Thesis
   Focus Group
   Survey
   Thesis Report
Appendix 3  Introduction and Timeline

Images With Meaning
A Critical Study of the Polish Poster Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology Archives and Special Collections

Why Polish Posters?
The Polish Poster Collection at RIT spans the years known as the Golden Age of Polish Posters, from the 1950s through the 1970s. The period was notable as a unique development in the history of graphic design. These posters were remarkably expressive and emotional which contrasted to contemporary design in other countries where the tendency was toward strong typography following the structure of a grid. The format of the Polish posters tended to be image dominant with frequent use of hand lettering.

Because of their powerful imagery, I have chosen the Polish posters to study methods of constructing visual messages. The function of a poster in the words of Russian designer, El Lissitzky, is to first seduce the eye and then address the intellect. These posters fulfilled the additional function of engaging and uplifting their viewers.

The timeline to the right shows political events and the social context which contributed to their unique development. The posters were all created with the Communist government as the client, and the topics of these posters were usually cultural events, public service messages, films, and the circus. There was little need for product advertising (there were no competing manufacturers and scarcely enough supply to meet demand).

The government saw the possibility for these posters to uplift spirits on the grey post-war streets where television was scarce and radio mistrusted. For this reason, they hired talented artisans to create them. But the the creators of these posters also used this this opportunity to include their own messages, which were very much enjoyed by their viewers.

Meaningful Imagery
The second part of my study focuses on how imagery can be used to communicate an intended meaning.

To create a framework for analysis, I researched how semantics (meaning) and syntax (form) function to convey meaning.

I developed the matrix at the far right as a tool in my study of how combinations of Methods of Meaning and techniques from the Grammar of Graphic Design function together to produce effective visual communications in varying degrees.

The Role of Design
Designers use many of these methods intuitively, but the better we understand our methods, the more effective our process can become. We can only benefit from deepening our understanding of these techniques.

There is much to be gained from studying these posters; perhaps most important, even beyond the refinement of our skills is understanding the power of the messages we create. In addition to fulfilling all of the requirements of a project, we have the opportunity to contribute to the visual language and hence, contribute to the mindset of our culture.

We must take care to use these occasions wisely and to better our communities.

Polish Posters in Context

Social Context

Political Events

Contemporary Design Trends

The Design of Polish Posters
Appendix 4  Poster Matrix

Conveying Meaning Through Imagery

The greatest power of visual language lies in its immediacy, its spontaneous evidence. Visuals, if you see content and form simultaneously, they must be dealt with as one single force delivering information the same way.

The Visual Expression of Ideas
Design imagery has an objective to cause understanding in a viewer. The layering of several types of indications of meaning can underscore, modulate and intensify this message.

Appendix 4

A Short List of Archetypes

Appendix 4

Special permission was granted from the Archives and Special Collections, Wallace Library, Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce 43 posters from the Polish Poster Collection for use on this poster matrix as well as within this thesis.
Appendix 5  Book Page Layout  (design development)

Methods of Meaning

Introduction

Methods of meaning are used to communicate, inform, and engage the reader. There are three main methods to achieve this: visual, textual, and context.

Image and Text

Designers use images to convey meaning and create visual interest. Text is used to provide information, explanations, and context. The combination of text and image can create a powerful message.

Page spread 20-21
version 1

Page spread 20-21
version 2
Appendix 5
Appendix 6  **Exhibition** (installation photos)
Appendix 6 Exhibition (installation photos)