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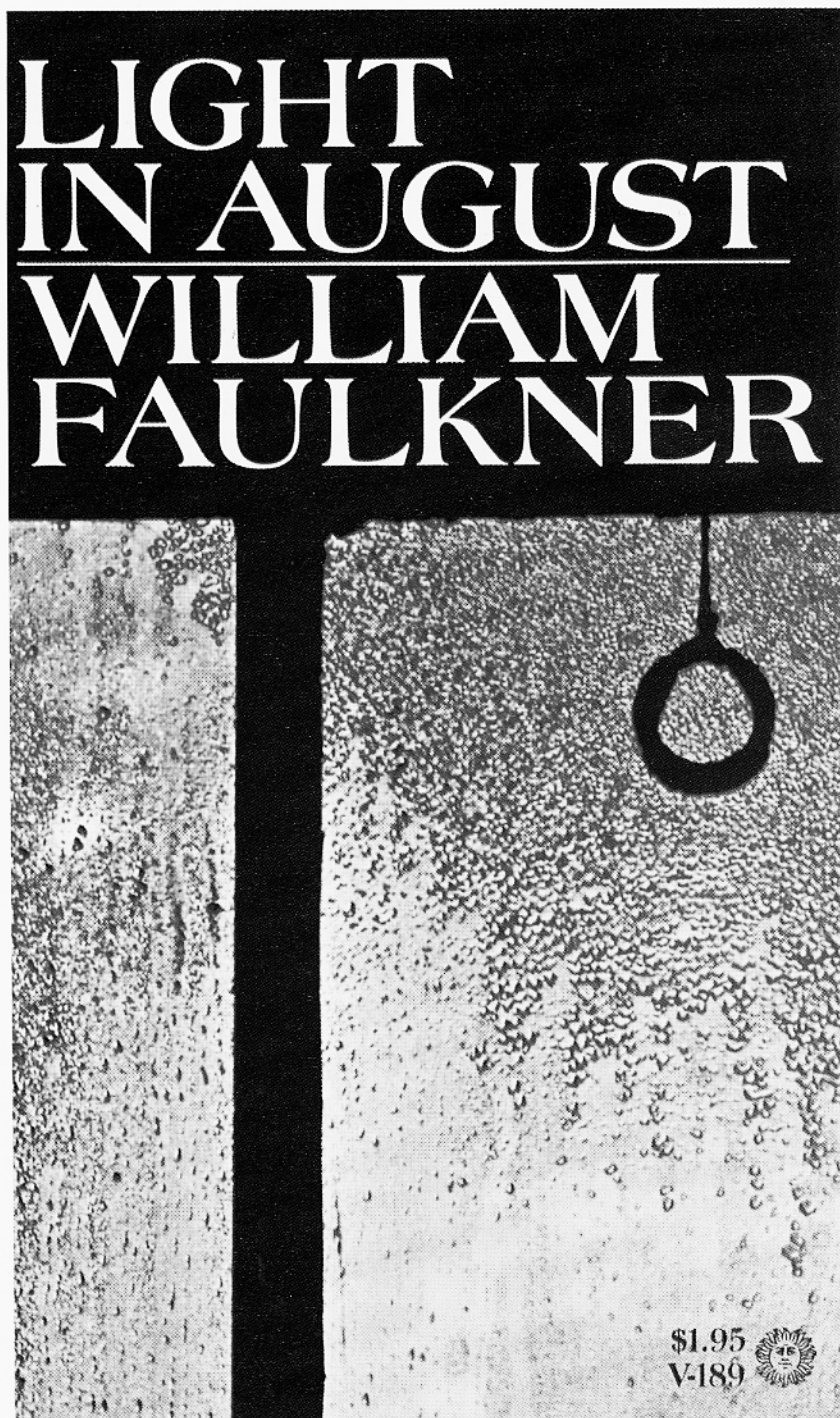
Language as a model for graphic design


A language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings through signs (sounds, visual gestures, or marks) having understood meaning. Our language is our principal communications system, and its grammar and rhetoric are the primary model for other forms of communication, including fine art and hybrid forms that combine pictorial and verbal information: film, video, computer graphics, and graphic design. Graphic design gains richness from the combination of multiple language and optical forms—words, pictures, signs, and colors—into complex communications.

The art of rhetoric, as developed by the ancient Greeks, was a study of principles and rules for preparing and delivering speeches that were effective communication and persuasion. Although many of its ideas have limited application to modern graphic design, its classification of the figures of speech from everyday language and literature is useful because visual symbols and images are often used in the same way. In a presentation at the 1975 Icoграда conference, Claude Cossette said, "If we define rhetoric as the science of figures of speech capable of convincing by means of an image, one can imagine that makers of functional images would latch on to this art. . . ." ¹¹ Hanno Eshes uses principles of rhetoric to analyze graphic design. He writes: "Broadly defined, rhetoric is the art that deals with the use of spoken or written discourse. Its object is eloquence, which is defined as effective speech. According to Aristotle, its concern is with 'discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given situation' either to inform (rational appeal), to delight and win over (ethical appeal) or to move (emotional appeal) an audience." ¹² Designers should not ignore the vocabulary of rhetoric simply because it uses unfamiliar terms and very precise definitions of similar concepts, for rhetoric actually defines many communications techniques used daily by graphic designers to solve problems.

Figures of speech that show a relationship or resemblance are most important and have graphic parallels in visual communications. Perhaps the simplest of these is the *simile*, which is a comparison or parallel between two unlike things. These sentences contain similes: "The grade on the term paper was like a slap in the face"; and "His heart is as hard as a rock." A visual simile was created in an announcement for an exhibition of sculpture by Alberto Giacometti. Dietmar Winkler configured typography (fig. 1-51) to look like one of Giacometti's sculptures (fig. 1-52) by replicating the tall, thin, upward movement. Giacometti's name is made to look like one of his sculptures.

A *metaphor* also points out resemblance, but does so by substitution. "A ship moves through the ocean like a plow through the field" is a simile. "The ship plows the sea" is a metaphor. In a book jacket for William Faulkner's *Light in August* (fig. 1-53) designed by R. D. Scudellari, the shade pull becomes a metaphor for a noose and, by extension, death. This design works on two levels of understanding. The rain-splashed detail of a window in late afternoon creates a pervading resonance and mood, and the nooselike form signifies impending doom.



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Personification is the representation of inanimate objects or abstractions by a human image; for example, Cupid signifies love. *Anthropomorphism* is attributing human traits, thoughts, action, and speech to animals or even inanimate objects. John Tenniel's illustration of the White Rabbit from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (fig. 1-54) demonstrates this concept.

Metonymy is using the name of one thing to stand for another, related thing. When a newscaster states that "the *White House* said today," we know that he means "the president's spokesman said today." The White House is a metonym for the president and his staff. In the poster published by the Twentieth Century Bookstore in Tel Aviv, Israel (fig. 1-55), headlined "Independence Day," Yehudah Raviv photographed an Israeli flag and a Palestinian flag tied together by a large knot. These intertwined flags become metonyms that stand for the Israelis and the Palestinians, signifying the peaceful coexistence of the two peoples. Daniel J. Walsh of Liberation Graphics observes that May fifteenth is celebrated by the Israelis as their Independence Day, and the Palestinians observe it as the Day of Disaster, the day they lost their land to the Israelis.¹³



יום העצמאות תשמ"ה



המאה ה-20, חנות ספרים, רח' שינקין 7, תל אביב, סל. 280761

Synecdoche is the use of a part to represent the whole, or vice versa. It achieves a powerful effect in a booklet explaining the movement problems of handicapped people (fig. 1-56), designed by Frank Armstrong and photographed by Thomas Wedell. A detail of the hands of a person teaching a handicapped person to open a jar represent two people—helper and handicapped—and their relationship.

The essence of a *pun*, observes Eli Kince, is the “phenomena that one symbol can have two or more meanings, or that two or more symbols can have similar or identical images but different meanings.”¹⁴ It is the use of words in a way that suggests different meanings or plays upon similar sounds or spellings.

A man approached Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great literary figure of eighteenth-century London, in a restaurant and taunted, “Dr. Johnson, make us a pun!”

Dr. Johnson retorted, “Upon what subject?”

“Er, upon the king!” snapped his challenger.

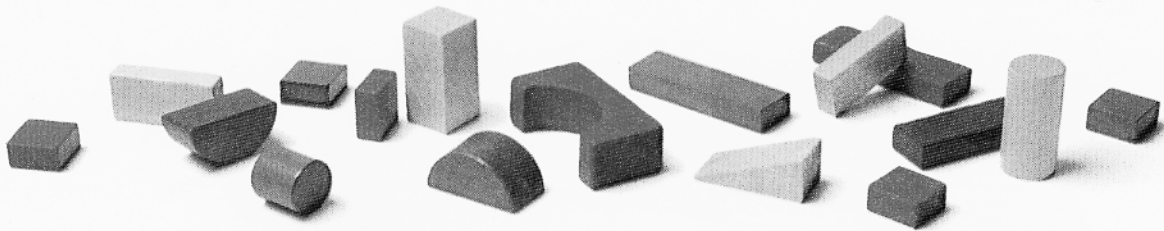
To gales of laughter from his companions, Dr. Johnson roared, “The king is no subject.”

The man walked away believing that Dr. Johnson had failed his challenge, not realizing that Dr. Johnson had only required eight words and two brief sentences to deliver two puns.

Puns can be visual, verbal, or a combination of both. Joseph Michael Essex created a visual pun—a photograph of a child's blocks—in the design of stationery for Ira Block (fig. 1-57).



IRA BLOCK PHOTOGRAPHY, Ltd. 215 West 20th Street New York, NY 10011 212.242.2728



For those unforgettable evenings...



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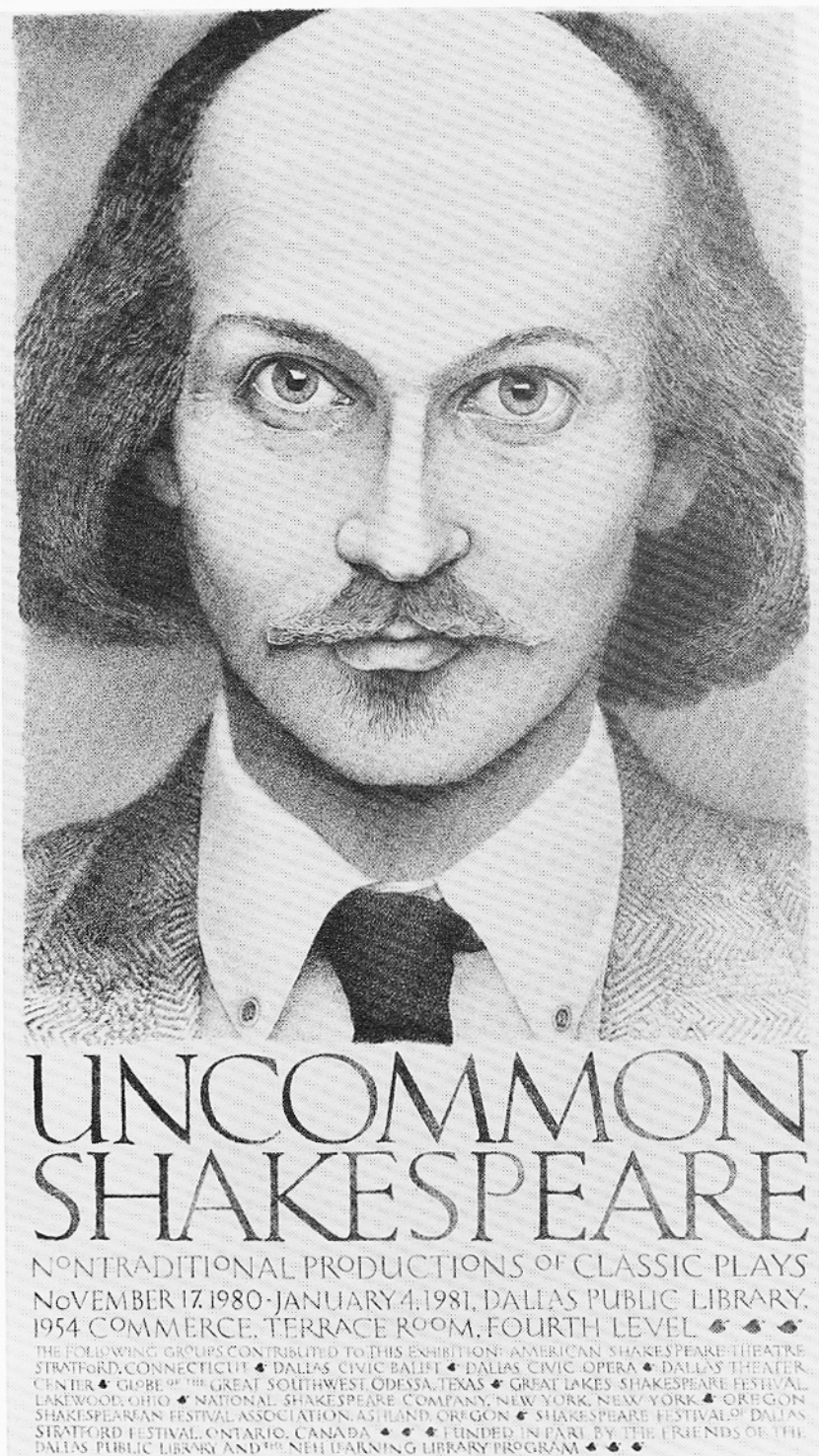
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A verbal pun—the similarity between the perfume Chanel No. 5 and the public television station's channel number 2—was used by Chris Pullman to create an arresting advertisement (fig. 1-58). This is also an example of *parody*, which is a work imitating the style of some other work, often with humorous or satirical intent.

The poster designed by Jim Jacobs Studio for nontraditional productions of classic plays achieves remarkable impact through a visual-verbal pun (fig. 1-59). Entitled "Uncommon Shakespeare" to express nontraditional productions, the illustration of William Shakespeare is made uncommon by his twentieth-century clothing.



1-59



Lemon.

This Volkswagen missed the boot. The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blemished and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn't have noticed it. Inspector Kurt Kopper did.

There are 3,389 men at our Wolfsburg factory with only one job: to inspect Volkswagens at each stage of production. 13,000 Volkswagens are produced daily; there are more inspectors than cars!

Every shock absorber is tested. Spot checking won't do it, every windshield is scanned. VWs have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye.

Final inspection is really something! VW inspectors run each car off the line onto the Funktionspflanzstand (car test stand), tote up 189 check points, gun ahead to the automatic brake stand, and say "no" to one VW out of fifty.

This preoccupation with detail means the VW lasts longer and requires less maintenance, by and large, than other cars. It also means it used VW specialties less than any other car!

We pluck the lemons; you get the plums.



1-60

ONE FOR THE ROAD.



Drink and drive, and you may lose something on the way home from the party.

1-61

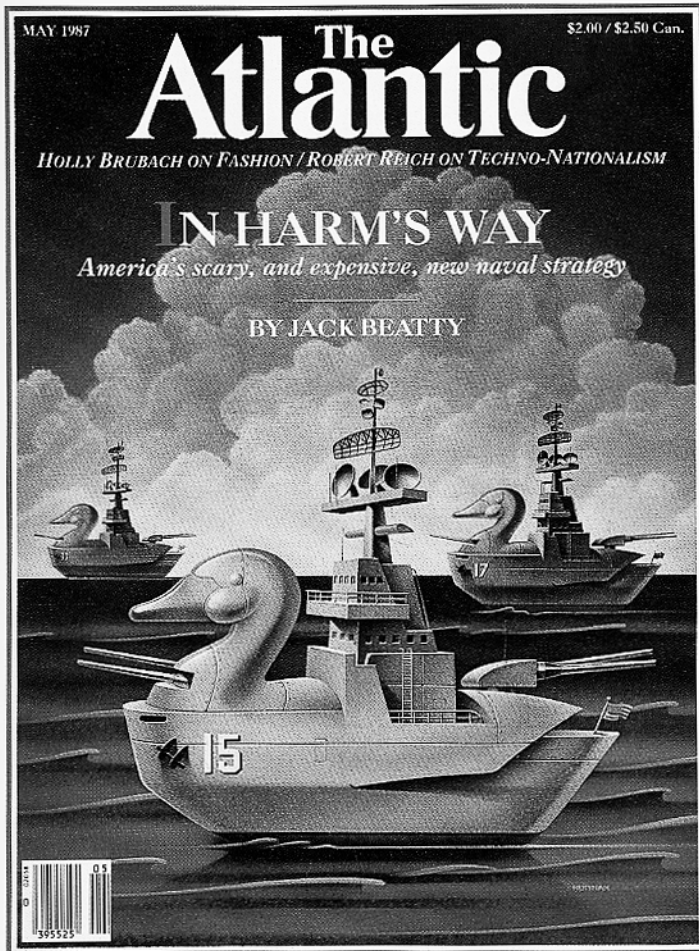
Hyperbole is exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Charles B. Falls's poster entitled "Books Wanted for Our Men" (see fig. 1-41), discussed earlier, achieves hyperbole by exaggerating the image. One soldier would be unlikely to read or carry that many books; however, it emphasizes the need.

The opposite of hyperbole is *litotes*, which is an understatement using a negative as a way to express an affirmative, such as saying "He is not a bad photographer" to mean that he is a good photographer. This can be very effective in visual communications, as evidenced in figure 1-60. Art director Helmut Krone and writer Julian Koenig described the car with a one-word headline, "Lemon," the most negative thing you can say about an automobile. It implies defective manufacturing. The text explains that this particular vehicle did not pass inspection due to a blemish on the glove compartment chrome strip, so it was not shipped until this minor defect was corrected. A negative understatement becomes the entry point to tout outstanding quality control, inspection, and attention to detail.

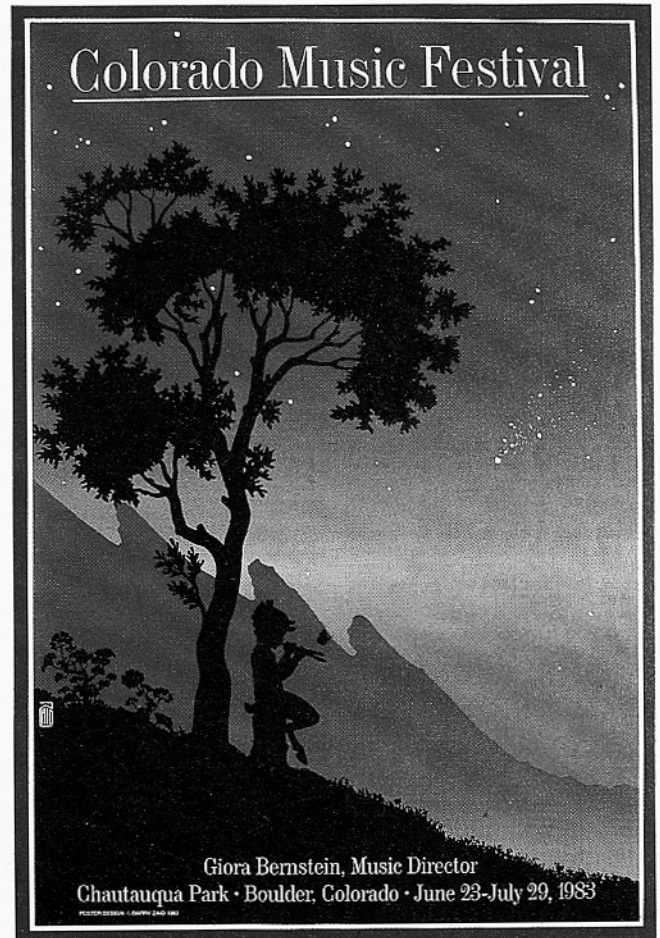
Antithesis is the sharp contrast between two opposing ideas or thoughts to intensify their difference. "The revolution promised freedom but brought slavery" is more intense than "The revolution brought slavery." Antithesis, through the sharp contrast between freedom and slavery, increases its emotional fervor. Antithesis is used in a poster directed toward high school students to warn of the hazards of drunk driving (fig. 1-61). Taking one last drink before departing—"Having one for the road"—contrasts sharply with a photograph depicting the loss of a leg in a traffic accident. Art director Tom Roth and copywriter Steve Trygg created this poster in a national competition sponsored by *Reader's Digest*.

Irony is a deliberate contrast, presenting the opposite of what would be expected. The situation would be ironic, for example, if a fire truck caught fire and burned. For a highly critical *Atlantic* article about American naval strategy, Art Director Judy Garlan commissioned Theo Rudnak to illustrate mighty naval warships as sitting ducks (fig. 1-62). The cover signifies the irony of naval power that might not be effective in wartime.

An *allegory* is a symbolic representation. A literal device or character is used as a symbol for an idea or principle. The Statue of Liberty is an allegorical figure for freedom. The United States is signified by the allegorical figure, Uncle Sam. In a poster for the Colorado Music Festival (fig. 1-63), Barry Zaid symbolized the pastoral joy of music by the allegorical figure Pan, ancient Greek god of forests and shepherds who created the first reed pipe, playing music high on an idyllic mountain.



1-62



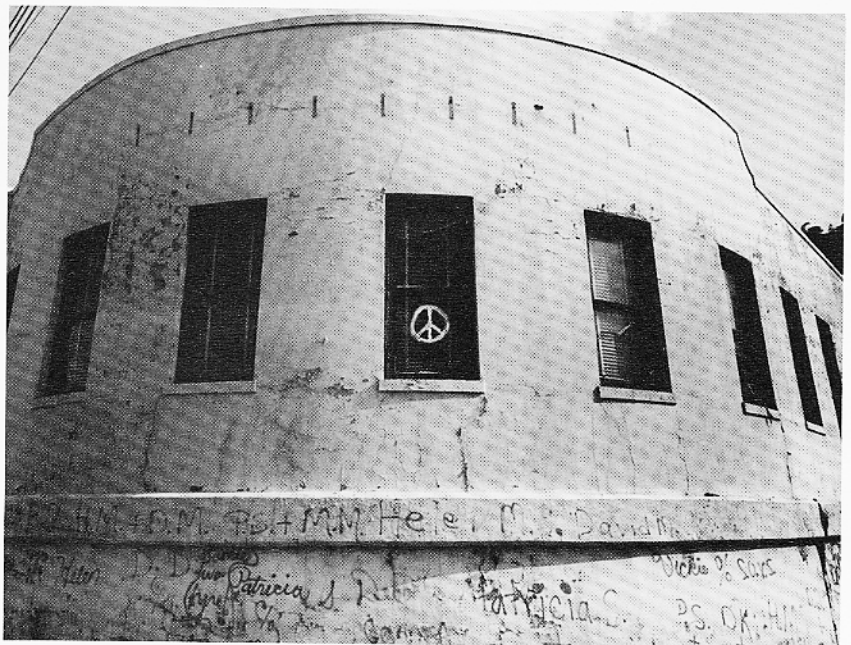
1-63

Jeremy Campbell observes: "One important property of language is that, while its symbols may be used to bring about physical results in the 'real' world of substance, they need not be used for that purpose. Symbols can be decoupled from physical reality to a greater or lesser extent. Words are not deeds, though they often lead to deeds. Symbols can be manipulated more freely than substance, and they can be manipulated to form new statements and expressions which are only tentative, playful, figurative. Symbols are at liberty to be a little irresponsible and experimental."¹⁵ This potent latitude can be used to entertain and enrich, or it can become deceptive and misleading. As conveyors of information with the power to form and connote it, graphic designers have an ethical responsibility to the audience and should not knowingly create or manipulate signs and symbols to falsely distort truth.

Graphic design is an expressive and creative activity, and each problem has many possible solutions. This chapter has discussed the elements of graphic design: signs, symbols, type, images,

and support elements. Theories about forms and how they communicate, including Crawford Dunn's theory about the modes of graphic signals, the semiotic investigation of signs and their connotations and denotations, and the use of rhetoric to categorize certain types of communicative images are all useful to a deeper understanding of visual communications.

The purpose of graphic design is to convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings between people. Its elements are the common visual and verbal currency of its culture, understood and used in daily life. Signs, symbols, and images are called forth to meet human needs. The peace symbol, shown here in the window of a vacant building awaiting the wrecking ball (fig. 1-64), was designed by Gerald Holtom three decades ago as a public symbol representing a deeply held viewpoint about life-and-death issues of war and peace. In addition to organizing graphic materials into a communicative gestalt, graphic designers sometimes invent new signs and symbols that define human experience and give meaning to our existence.



1-64