

Contributions of supra-level design to visual rhetoric in quilt books

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication)

Major Professor: David Roberts

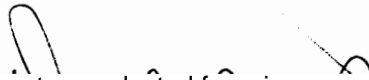
Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1997


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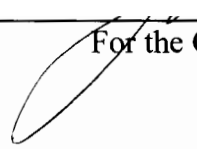
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## INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL RHETORIC

Imagine a quilt. It is three feet wide by four feet long. It is made of four different fabrics, each one with a small print of pale blue figures on cream or cream figures on pale blue. Six blocks make up the body of the quilt, each with the same pattern: eight hearts arranged in a circle with points toward the center, forming a star at the center of the block. Tiny hand quilting stitches hold the quilt top to the back and create a pattern of shadows on the quilt's surface. The edges of the quilt are frayed so much that all the layers of fabric and batting are visible. The fabrics are faded.

What can we know about this quilt? We know that it is well used, even loved, probably by a child or children. It has been around for a long time. We know that someone spent many hours constructing the quilt, possibly as a gift for a beloved child. The maker values tradition, creativity, and children.

How can we know these things? Because the visual cues in the quilt communicate. The size and color of the quilt suggest it was intended for a baby or small child. Tiny hand stitches and the original design suggest that the maker spent hours creating an object which expresses the maker's feelings. Traditional colors and symbols communicate love. The faded fabrics and ragged edges suggest that the owner of the quilt used it extensively over several years.

Visual cues communicate in documents as well. In this thesis, I will examine visual communication as it occurs in books that instruct readers in how to make quilts. Perhaps because they are written almost exclusively by and for women, these books have not previously been studied as examples of technical communication. I will show that quilt books use effective visual rhetoric and are excellent examples of technical communication. First, however, I will present an overview of visual communication in general, as it applies to professional documents, and explain supra-level visual communication—that “level” of visual rhetoric which applies to the document as a whole.

### **Elements of Visual Communication**

Any act of communication is governed by the rhetorical situation in which it occurs: its audience, purpose, and context. The visual elements of communication are also governed by rhetorical situation and, in turn, influence the rhetorical effect of a communicative act. In other words, the visual elements of a document create meaning just as the verbal elements do and can even contradict the meaning of the verbal elements. For example, a business letter’s verbal message of “we use cutting-edge computer technology” is contradicted if the letter looks as though it has been produced on a mimeograph machine.

Visual elements of communication create meaning through attention to six *cognate strategies*: arrangement, emphasis, clarity, conciseness, tone, and ethos (Kostelnick and Roberts 10). Arrangement involves the hierarchical or sequential organization of information as well as the spatial orientation of information. Emphasis is closely related to arrangement,

and involves the visual prominence of a piece of information. Clarity involves the presentation of information so that readers can understand the message. Conciseness combines with clarity to present readers with the appropriate amount of information. Tone indicates the attitude of a document towards its subject. Ethos involves the appropriateness of that attitude to that subject. Through these cognate strategies—arrangement, emphasis, clarity, conciseness, tone, and ethos—a document visually conveys meaning to readers.

Cognate strategies, however, are abstract concepts. To convey information, they must be applied to visual elements that readers can see. In the case of the quilt I introduced at the beginning of this thesis, these visual elements include fabrics, patterns, colors, shading, and the size and shape of the object as a whole. In the case of documents, these visual elements include everything we see when we look at a document: font size and style, punctuation, graphics, white space, shading, lines, binding, and size and shape of the document as a whole. The application of cognate strategies to visual elements results in visual rhetoric.

Kostelnick distinguishes four levels of visual design in professional documents: intra-textual, inter-textual, extra-textual, and supra-textual. Intra-textual design occurs at the most local level and incorporates choices in font style and size, letter spacing, and punctuation marks. Inter-textual design takes a slightly broader view and includes such elements as headings levels, margin and column width, lists, bullets, and tables. Extra-textual design consists of elements outside the primary text, including pictures, graphs, captions, and call-outs. Supra-textual design occurs at the broadest, most global level of a document (or even a set of documents), and includes such elements as document size and shape, page headers and

footers, page color, texture, and thickness, and layout (“Supra-Textual” 10-15). All these elements of visual design contribute to the visual rhetoric of a document.

### **Visual Rhetoric**

Visual rhetoric is “the ability of the writer to achieve the purpose of a document through visual communication” (“Visual Rhetoric” 77). The success of visual rhetoric depends upon the extent to which a document’s visual elements consider audience, purpose, and context. For example, if a document intended for elderly readers uses 8-point type, audience has not been properly considered and the document’s visual rhetoric fails at the intra-textual level. If a textbook uses only one degree of heading but attempts to present a hierarchy of information, purpose has not been considered and the document’s visual rhetoric fails at the inter-textual level. If an annual report includes minute details in graphs intended to show general trends, purpose has not been considered and the document fails at the extra-textual level. If a field guide intended to be carried in a scientist’s pocket is sixteen inches wide and twenty-four inches tall, context has not been considered and the document’s visual rhetoric fails at the supra-textual level.

The contributions of intra-textual, inter-textual, and extra-textual elements to visual rhetoric are documented through published studies of such topics as font size and style, data display, and illustrations. My study focuses on supra-level elements, those elements of a document that are evident at the broadest, most global level. Specifically, I will explore how supra-level design elements achieve the rhetorical goals of professional documents.

## SUPRA-LEVEL DESIGN

### Definition of Supra-level Elements

Supra-level elements are the “global, top-down visual elements—textual, spatial, and graphic—that orient us perceptually and rhetorically when we encounter a document” (Kostelnick, “Visual Rhetoric” 9). Supra-level elements lie outside the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters of the text; instead, they convey meaning through global design and document layout—elements that are sometimes considered primarily the domain of “production.” Because supra-level elements convey meaning to readers, however, communicators must attend to these elements to ensure that their rhetorical effects are intentional and consistent with those of other elements—both visual and verbal—in the document.

Supra-level elements can take several forms. Letters or numbers can be supra-level (Kostelnick’s textual mode): titles (on the spine of a book, the cover, and wherever they appear in a naming role), chapter headings, headers and footers, and letters or words used as watermarks are textual supra-level elements. Shapes or lines can be supra-level (Kostelnick’s graphic mode): page shape, tone, and color; rules and bars; icons; and graphics used as watermarks are graphic supra-level elements. “Production” elements can also be supra-level (Kostelnick’s spatial mode): page size and texture, binding, orientation of the document,



placement of graphics, folds, inserts, perforations, and cutouts are spatial supra-level elements (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 12-13). Perhaps because they are so global, supra-level elements are often overlooked, especially when they are appropriate and effective. The functions that supra-level elements serve, however, are essential to the success of the document as a whole.

Supra-level elements perform two different types of functions, mapping functions and interest and attention functions. They perform mapping functions by:

- signaling the organization of the document
- enhancing the usability of the document
- allowing readers to customize the document
- creating cohesion among all elements of the document and among documents in a series

I will discuss each of these functions briefly, then explore the interest and attention functions of supra-level design elements: to create the ethos, pathos, and tone that draw readers into a document and hold their attention.

### **Mapping Functions of Supra-level Elements**

The mapping functions of supra-level design choices guide readers through a document, help them to understand it, and enable the document to achieve some of the rhetorical goals specific to its audience, purpose, and context. Gilreath suggests the mapping function of visual design elements when he calls these elements "graphic cues," and argues

that these graphic cues can reinforce or even replace the verbal (textual) cues in a document. Graphic cues increase usability by improving the completeness and coherence of the document. Many advertisements rely almost completely on graphic cues, often using those graphic cues to evoke particular emotions in readers. Gilreath suggests that advertisers would not spend so much money on such advertisements if they did not perform their intended rhetorical purpose (342).

### **Signal Organization of the Document**

One mapping function of supra-level design is to signal the organization of a document. Supra-level elements such as headers and footers, consistent within documents or sections of documents, create “visual coherence” and signal to the reader that all pages with similar headers and footers belong together. For example, if a book uses a consistent header that displays the book title on the outside left of every two-page spread and the current chapter on the outside right of every two-page spread, readers recognize the last page of chapter one as belonging to the same section as the previous pages of chapter one. Similarly, supra-level elements such as cover stock, title style, and layout, consistent among documents in a series, signal to the reader that all documents with similar covers and layouts belong together (Kostelnick, “Rhetoric of Text Design” 196). For example, the size, cover and page layout, special title font, and distinctive use of color identify issues of a particular journal as belonging together.

Another way supra-level elements signal organization in a document is by using variation in supra-level elements to signal hierarchy among documents with some relationship (Kostelnick, "Rhetoric of Text Design" 196). For example, the Society for Technical Communication publishes a number of periodicals, three of which will illustrate hierarchy among documents: *Technical Communication*, the quarterly Society journal, *Intercom*, the monthly Society magazine, and *Tieline*, the monthly newsletter for Society chapter leaders. *Technical Communication* employs a two-column page layout, perfect binding, heavier cover stock, a complete table of contents on the cover, and continuous page numbering from one issue to the next. *Intercom* employs a three-column page layout, stapled binding, a full-page cover photograph, titles only of selected articles on the cover, and independent page numbering. The more formal supra-level elements of *Technical Communication* suggest that the journal is the more important publication, a hypothesis that is supported by the stated mission of the magazine: "to provide practical examples and applications" of the more theoretical issues discussed in the journal. The hierarchy is further evident in the supra-level elements of *Tieline*, which is printed on inexpensive paper and does not have a separate cover.

Supra-level elements can also signal hierarchy *within* a document. Kramer and Bernhardt envision the page as a grid on which information is mapped to show organization: elements which occupy corresponding spaces on the grid function in like ways (39). Doblin indicates that hierarchy must be visually represented if readers are to properly understand it (102). For example, some computer manuals indicate the importance of tips, warnings, or

notes by using an icon printed outside the regular margin. Readers know that icons printed in the margin indicate important information. Likewise, headings that extend into a margin are seen as higher level headings than those which are flush with the text margin.

One supra-level technique useful in indicating hierarchy is color. Color can organize and classify information as well as reveal organization (Horton 161). Technical communication as early as the Renaissance used color to reveal a document's organization. Some versions of *The Boken of Saint Albans*, for example, indicate divisions in the text by using red for paragraph marks and capital letters (Tebeaux 254). Today, the yellow pages of a telephone book signal the document's advertising section, where businesses are grouped by type; the color has become a convention which signals the classification of this information. Readers recognize this convention and turn immediately to the yellow pages for information about businesses.

### **Enhance the Usability of the Document**

Closely related to organization is the second mapping function of supra-level design elements: enhance the usability of the document (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 27). As they guide readers to appropriate parts of a text and help them find specific information, visual design elements increase the usability of a document (Floreak 376; Bernhardt, "Seeing the Text" 71, 73). For example, the header in a dictionary includes the first and last word defined on that page. Readers can tell at a glance if the information they need is on the current page, or whether they need to move to a previous or a later page. The document is more usable

because the header, a supra-level design element, cues the reader. Some dictionaries further enhance usability with cutout tabs, another supra-level design choice which allows readers to turn immediately to words that begin with a particular letter.

Supra-level design can create emphasis on certain information (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 27), control the flow of information to readers (Kostelnick, "Rhetoric of Text Design" 198), and orient the reader (Kramer and Bernhardt 39). Fold-out pages of some magazine advertisements, for instance, create emphasis on those advertisements. Not only do the fold-out pages mark the information on them as somehow different from the information on surrounding pages, but readers are encouraged by curiosity to act—to unfold the page—and thereby are engaged with the information in an active way. Fold-out pages also control the flow of information to readers by hiding the information inside the fold until the reader has attended to the information outside the fold.

Tebeaux reports that some manuals written as early as the Renaissance enhance the usability of a document through page design that invites easy access to information (250). Modern documents, too, use format to sort information and cue readers about the structure of a document (Rude 65). For example, many computer manuals leave a wide left margin of white space into which certain important information, such as headings and graphics, intrudes. The information that intrudes into the margin attracts the reader's attention, cueing the reader that this information is important. Along the same line, computer manuals often employ a two-page spread for the introduction of a new chapter or section, signaling to the reader that a new topic will be introduced.

Supra-level elements such as binding can also affect the usability of a document. For example, instruction manuals with comb or wire binding allow a document to lay flat so readers can use both hands to perform tasks. Libraries often prefer sewn binding to perfect binding because the sewn binding is more durable, allowing the books to be in circulation longer and reducing the time spent on book repairs.

### **Allow Readers to Customize the Document**

Usability is closely related to the third mapping function of supra-level design: allow readers to customize the document. When the organization of a document is clear and the information is easily accessible, readers can attend to the parts that interest them. Such reader control over the text allows selective learning (Rude 65). The arrangement of books into chapters and sections is an example of organization that allows selective learning.

Reader control also allows a document to more completely reflect the context of its use (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 27). The handbooks, manuals, and other documents of many government and private institutions are bound in three-ring binders so that when some information in the document must be updated, only pages which contain that information need be printed and distributed to readers. Readers may then replace the pages containing old information with pages containing new information, customizing the document to reflect the needs of their individual offices.

Another way supra-level elements allow readers to customize documents is through visual design choices that provide "filters for readers, tracking them toward or through

various information paths so that each reader is guided to appropriate text for the task at hand” (Bernhardt, “Shape of Text to Come” 168). For example, the “Getting Started” document packaged with Microsoft’s *Creative Writer* and *Fine Artist* software has separate instructions for Macintosh users and Windows users. To guide readers (who may be children) to the appropriate instructions, the booklet is printed so that either cover can be the front. Macintosh readers read the booklet from one cover to the center, and Windows readers read the booklet from the other cover to the center. When each reader gets to the center, the page orientation changes so the layout appears upside down, signaling that the other major chunk of information is not appropriate for that reader.

#### **Create Cohesion Among all Elements of the Document**

A fourth mapping function of supra-level design elements is to create cohesion among elements of a document and among documents in a series (Kostelnick, “Visual Rhetoric” 80). Earlier I explained how consistent supra-level design elements signal the organization of a document. That same consistency ties disparate parts of a document together, even when they are separated by space or time. For example, consistent supra-level elements such as headers, footers, and page layout tie together parts of a document separated by space, so that the last chapter of a book is recognizable as belonging with the first chapter. Consistent supra-level elements such as size, shape, paper stock, and layout tie together parts of a document separated by time, so that the November edition of a newsletter is recognizable as belonging to the same series as the January edition.

Supra-level design enables readers to recognize pages or documents as part of a series because readers expect parts of a series to have a common visual identity (Bernhardt, "Seeing the Text" 71). Readers expect established conventions to be followed. When a document follows convention, readers are able to use it quickly and accurately; when a document does not follow convention, readers can be confused and irritated (White 151). Conventions also shape reader expectations: readers expect supra-level elements in a document to share some qualities with supra-level elements they have experienced in other, similar documents (Kostelnick, "Rhetoric of Text Design" 200; "Visual Rhetoric" 77). For example, readers expect a field guide to plants to be small, so it is easily portable; to have color photographs, so plants are easily identified; and to have a durable cover and binding, so it can withstand outdoor use.

### **Interest and Attention Functions**

Although signaling organization, enhancing the usability of the document, allowing readers to customize the document, and creating cohesion are all important functions for supra-level design, its most critical function is to attract the interest of readers and to hold their attention. Because readers process visual information before textual information (Kostelnick, "Visual Rhetoric" 82), the first impression of a document is created by supra-level elements. Those elements therefore must persuade the reader that the document is interesting (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 26) or that the document contains what the reader wants or needs.



Supra-level elements such as dust jackets and front covers of books mediate between the document inside and the reader outside (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 17). The primary purpose for these elements, according to White, is advertising: they attract readers, identify the product, and "create an aura of value" (152-53). An annual report, for example, may feature an embossed cover of heavy card stock to attract the attention of its readers and suggest that the document has value; after all, readers recognize the expense of embossing and heavy card stock.

While "advertising" usually indicates persuasion to purchase, in this context it also means persuasion to attend to the document. For example, Floreak and his team created child-care materials for parents with low-level reading skills who were "at risk for neglecting or abusing their children" (374). That audience needed motivation to keep the child-care documents Floreak's team produced, to attend to them, and to understand the message they contained (374). The team used supra-level elements to create that motivation; because of their size and visual appeal, the resulting large, colorful, very visual posters were unlikely to be ignored (379).

Others (Bernhardt, "Seeing the Text" 71, Kramer and Bernhardt 42, Southard 174, Horton 161) have found that such supra-level elements as paper choice, print quality, format, color, and an attractive visual style attract readers, draw them in, make them want to use a document, and hold their attention. Because readers must attend to a document before they can interact with it on any level, drawing readers into a document is imperative. Readers

nearly always *choose* whether or not to attend to a document; therefore, those elements which draw readers into a document are rhetorical.

### **Create Ethos**

One way documents draw readers in is through ethos, that quality that persuades readers that the document is valid or truthful. Readers must trust the visual message of a document, understand that they are part of its intended audience, and believe that the writer knows what they as readers need (Kostelnick, "Cultural Adaptation" 194). The initial impression readers get from a document does much to establish its credibility (Kostelnick, "Supra-Textual" 26-27), which is important because readers must *believe* a message before they can be persuaded by it (Doblin 104).

Along with credibility, ethos involves the image of the document and of its creator (Southard 174). Supra-level design choices affect the way the reader feels about a document's value (White 170), appropriateness to its subject, and relevance to the reader's particular needs. For example, annual reports often use heavy, glossy paper, embossed covers, color photographs, and liberal white space. The resulting document projects an image of the document and, by extension, of the company it represents as prosperous, serious, and upscale.

### **Create Pathos**

Closely related to ethos is pathos, the feelings that a document invokes in its readers. Aristotle believed that creating the appropriate feelings in the audience is an essential prelude

to persuading that audience (Murphy and Katula 55). Certainly much of the persuasive power of advertising, for instance, relies on the audience's emotional state.

The emotions of readers are especially apparent in documents which represent things for which readers already have strong personal attachments. For example, school yearbooks, with their liberal use of personal snapshots, eclectic layout, and school identification, evoke feelings of pride and school spirit in readers because the documents represent the intense friendships and experiences of youth. Bibles, with their thin paper, distinctive leather covers, and gold-embossed titles, evoke feelings of reverence and respect because they represent religion.

### **Create Tone**

A third way documents achieve interest and attention functions is through tone. Supra-level elements can signal the tone or mood of a document and indicate to the reader whether the document is serious, businesslike, casual, lighthearted, ironic, or some other tone (Kostelnick, "Rhetoric of Text Design" 199; "Supra-Textual" 26). Tone is always subjective, and closely tied to context and culture. Renaissance how-to books, for example, made use of specific supra-level design choices (small size, inexpensive paper and type) to convey an understated tone to readers who might be intimidated by large, expensive-looking documents (Tebeaux 247, 250).

Today, the tone of annual reports is usually professional, formal, upbeat, and serious. Much of this tone is conveyed through the supra-level cues of the document: heavy, glossy

paper, color photographs, embossed cover. A telephone bill, while it may also be professional and serious, is printed on inexpensive paper without extraneous illustrations; as a result, the tone of the bill is much less formal. Indeed, if the bill used the supra-level elements of the annual report, readers might not recognize it as a bill; if readers did recognize such a document as a bill, they would probably resent the obvious expense incurred in the publication of the document, which they realize must be passed on to them as customers.

### **Summary of Supra-level Elements**

Supra-level elements of document design help create ethos, pathos, and tone in a document, thereby enacting the interest and attention functions of drawing readers into a document and keeping them there. Together with the mapping functions of a document, interest and attention functions achieve the rhetorical purposes of individual documents as defined by each document's audience, purpose, and context.

## QUILT BOOKS

### Quilt Books as Examples of Technical Communication

The making of quilts is an ancient craft which enjoyed a resurgence of interest with the back-to-nature trend in the late 1960s. In 1971, an exhibit of antique quilts at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City marked the beginning of an awareness of quilts as art. Quilters, most of them women, have found an outlet for creative expression in this traditionally feminine act that was at once hobby, craft, art, and expression of love. Indeed, quilting is an activity endorsed by traditionalists and feminists alike; this “form of art practiced by women for four hundred years and, for the most part, reserved exclusively for them” formed the focus of a project conceived as a means of celebrating the International Year of the Woman in 1975 (Robinson 10).

In the United States, 15.5 million people over age 18 quilt. Those quilters spend \$1.554 billion per year on quilting-related purchases and own an average of \$2572 worth of quilting supplies. Dedicated quilters (the 5.4% of quilters who account for 50% of quilt industry expenditures) spend an average of \$1203 per year on quilting-related purchases, including an average of \$152 per year on books, magazines, and videos (NFO, Inc., and ABACUS Custom Research, Inc.).

Quilters lavish attention as well as money on their art. At least ten different quilting magazines in the United States have a combined circulation of over 900,000 issues. In addition to these, several general craft magazines regularly feature quilting articles. The National Quilt Association boasts 6000 members worldwide and 200 active local chapters, and other state and local quilting guilds flourish. Untold numbers of quilters practice their art at home, taught by grandmothers, mothers, sisters-in-law, friends, and books. Sixty-nine books on the subject of quilting were published in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and France in 1994-95.

Quilt books have a significant and diverse audience. Although they have not been previously studied as such, they are a widely read genre of professional communication. Quilt books, as I use the term here, are those books which instruct readers in the making of quilts. I do not consider those books which catalogue quilt collections, explore the history of quilts, feature quilts in some fictional treatment, or otherwise mention quilts unless they also instruct the reader in some facet of the creation of quilts. I do not consider magazines, newsletters, or other periodical documents.

Quilt books are instructional manuals for a specific task, and the audience is likewise specific. The resulting data set is sharply focused and supra-level differences among documents are likely to result from differences in purpose rather than from differences in subject matter. Therefore, I will use quilt books to illustrate the rhetoric of supra-level design.

### Rationale for Data Set

Quilts are themselves visual communication; long recognized as beautiful craft objects, quilts have recently been studied as art and as expressions of quilters' experience of the world. Only the very naive believe that quilts, because they cover us at night, are merely blankets, just as only the very naive believe any instructions, as long as they are technically accurate, are effective. Quilts communicate because they have traditionally been made to celebrate important events, both personal (such as marriage) and public (such as a presidential election). Some quilts communicate verbally as well; album quilts feature blocks made by several people, who write names and messages on their blocks.

Quilts elicit emotional responses from people who experience them: they drip with pathos. "For generations, quilts have been mentioned in American conversation, fiction, essays, and poems" (Steward 9). Consider these words from Eliza Calvert Hall's *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*:

I've had a heap o' comfort all my life makin' quilts, and now in my old age I wouldn't take a fortune for 'em. . . . You see, some folks has albums to put folks' pictures in to remember 'em by, and some folks has a book and writes down the things that happen every day so they won't forgit 'em, but, honey, these quilts is my albums and my di'ries, and whenever the weather's bad and I can't git out to see folks, I jest spread out my quilts and look at 'em and study over 'em, and it's jest like goin' back fifty or sixty years and livin' my life over agin (104-05).

Even those people who don't know the details of the story a quilt tells can sense the essence of a story, of love, of comfort. Quilts inspire thoughts of hearth and home, nostalgia for an ideal life long ago, dreams of creative expression. Quilt books, because they deal with this

very visual, very communicative subject matter, are perhaps designed with particular attention to visual communication as well.

Another reason I chose quilt books for my data set is to help legitimize this genre of technical communication. Buckley, in her “Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” argues that “women’s design is ignored and unrepresented in the history books” (254) because the patriarchy of the Western world values men’s activities and designs more highly than those of women and values items created for exchange in the marketplace over items created for family use. Quilting is largely a women’s art and quilts are usually made for family use; therefore, quilt books do not receive the attention in the technical communication field that is afforded to traditionally male genres such as computer manuals or annual reports.

I surveyed the supra-level design choices of twenty-six quilt books published between 1962 and 1996. Of these twenty-six books, I discuss the individual supra-level elements of eighteen which offer a representative cross-section of the various audiences and purposes and illustrate most clearly the effects of supra-level design choices on visual rhetoric. These books are, in the order in which I discuss them:

- *Quilting Basics*
- *Quilter’s Start-to-Finish Workbook*
- *The Nature of Design: A Quilt Artist’s Personal Journal*
- *The Passionate Quilter*



- *Rags to Rainbows*
- *Super Quilter II*
- *Quilter's Complete Guide*
- *Easy Machine Paper Piecing*
- *American Patchwork & Quilting*
- *America's Heritage Quilts*
- *Quick Country Quilting*
- *Once Upon a Quilt*
- *The Quilt Patch: Fairfax, Virginia*
- *Grandmother's Flower Garden*
- *Quilting by Machine*
- *Soft-edge Piecing*
- *Angel Wings and Growing Things*
- *101 Patchwork Patterns*

Full bibliographic information for all the books I surveyed is included in the Quilt Books section of my bibliography.

Although quilt books employ a wide variety of supra-level design elements, I focus my attention on the rhetorical effects of design variations in six elements:

- binding

- running headers and footers
- document size
- cover type
- paper type and color
- layout

### **Audience**

The audience for quilt books is primarily female, adult readers who have an interest in quilts. Some readers are experienced quilters, some are beginners, and some will probably never actually make a quilt. All of these readers value beauty, tradition, and creativity. Some readers value self-sufficiency, economy, innovation, or self-expression. Some will use the books to learn technique, some will use them for inspiration, and some will use them as art objects in themselves. Not all quilt books will appeal to all readers, but the designers of each book use supra-level strategies to appeal to specific members of the audience.

### **Rhetorical Goals of Quilt Books**

Quilt books have two primary rhetorical goals: to instruct readers in the making of quilts and to celebrate quilts as art. Each quilt book defines these goals in a unique way, so that some quilt books put more emphasis on instruction while others put more emphasis on celebration. Regardless the emphasis of each book, however, all the quilt books achieve these two rhetorical goals through careful employment of supra-level design elements.

## SUPRA-LEVEL DESIGN IN QUILT BOOKS

Quilt books use supra-level design to achieve their primary goals: to instruct readers in the making of quilts and to celebrate quilts and quilting as art. Although the functions enacted by the supra-level elements work together to achieve these goals, the mapping functions tend to enable instruction, while the interest and attention functions tend to enable celebration.

### Instruct Readers in the Making of Quilts

The most obvious rhetorical goal of quilt books is to instruct readers in the making of quilts. Quilt books use supra-level elements to achieve this goal just as other instructional manuals do. Supra-level elements enable quilt books to instruct readers by fulfilling the mapping functions of signaling organization, enhancing the usability of the document, allowing readers to customize the document, and creating cohesion. Mapping functions make use of conventions and reader expectation to guide readers through a document.

The mapping functions enable readers to identify *Quilting Basics* as part of the “Country Wisdom Bulletins” series because all books in this series feature the same supra-level design elements: 5½ x 8½-inch size, paper cover, strong vertical bar, horizontal bars underlining the book title, two-color cover illustration, and inexpensive paper and printing.

Because the designers follow the same conventions for each document, these supra-level elements create cohesion across documents in the series.

Quilt books follow many supra-level conventions common to most instructional manuals:

- two- or three-column instructional text
- tables of contents
- indexes
- illustrations or diagrams printed near the text

Conventions common to quilt books but not necessarily to other instructional manuals include color photographs of quilts, patterns or templates, and full-color covers.

Conventions of other genres are introduced to add to the ethos of some quilt books. For example, *The Quilter's Start-to-Finish Workbook* follows a coloring-book convention: outline drawings of shapes printed on matte, low-quality paper pages with little or no text.

This coloring-book convention encourages readers to explore the creative possibilities of each basic quilt design by coloring the pages with colored pencils, crayons, or markers.

Because readers associate low-quality paper and little or no text with coloring books, they are comfortable “coloring” in the book. The ethos of a coloring book is one of impermanence as well as creativity: people express their creativity by coloring in the books, then discard the books when they are used up. By using supra-level coloring-book conventions, *Quilter's Start-to-Finish Workbook* encourages readers to believe that they really should color in the book.

Art books are another genre from which quilt books borrow supra-level conventions. Art books tend to have heavy, glossy pages, hard covers with or without paper jackets, many high-quality color photographs, and effective use of white space. *The Nature of Design: A Quilt Artist's Personal Journal* has heavy, glossy pages filled with high-quality color photographs and line drawings. Wide outside margins, into which only photographs occasionally intrude, leave plenty of white space on each page. The cover, although it is paper, has extensions which fold to the inside like the paper jacket on a hardcover book, suggesting that more traditional art book feature. *The Passionate Quilter* and *Rags to Rainbows* both feature a hard cover with a paper jacket, quality color photographs on nearly every page, and heavy paper. Such art book conventions encourage readers to browse, to leave the beautiful books on a coffee table and read them beside the fire in the evening. Some readers may never make a quilt from these books, but the art book conventions suggest that the books themselves are worthy of display.

*Super Quilter II* follows the very different conventions of a textbook. This very serious book borrows headings, a two-column format, diagram illustrations, and very narrow margins from the textbook genre. As a result, the book's visual language suggests that it is a serious reference for quilting technique. A reader leafing casually through this book, filled as it is with diagrams and equations, might easily mistake it for a mathematics text, but would not mistake it for an art book.

### Signal Organization

Quilt books signal their organization through tables of contents, indexes, headers and footers, the grouping of different types of information within a document, and page layout. In *Quick Country Quilting*, for example, the header highlights the organization of the book because it includes the book title on each even-numbered page and the chapter title on each odd-numbered page. In addition, a small line drawing reflecting the theme of the chapter appears in the header on every page.

The organization of *Once Upon a Quilt* is indicated by a change in paper stock and the use of color. General instructions sections of the book are printed on matte white paper, with all text and illustrations in black ink. The section containing patterns and instructions for specific quilts, however, is printed on shiny white paper, with color photographs printed on even-numbered pages and patterns and instructions printed in black on a 1/4-inch gray grid on odd-numbered pages.

*Quilter's Complete Guide* signals the beginning of a new chapter with a full-bleed, full-color, two-page spread photograph of a quilt, over which is printed a boxed chapter title and introduction. Sections within each chapter are divided by a color photograph of a quilt detail, which forms a 1/2-inch horizontal rule and runs to each margin.

### Enhance the Usability of the Document

Quilt books enhance the usability of a document through chapter arrangement, page layout, binding, and patterns or templates. For example, each chapter in *America's Heritage*

*Quilts* is separated into two parts: a magazine-like expository section and an instructions section. The quilts for each chapter are displayed in the expository section through color photographs which run over several columns and often bleed off one or more sides of the page. Text in this section is minimal and set in four columns per page, except where photographs span two or more columns. Text in the instructions section is set in three columns per page, instructional steps are numbered or bulleted, and illustrations include line drawings, diagrams, templates, or patterns.

Binding enhances the usability of quilt books in several ways: *Quilter's Complete Guide* and *Super Quilter II* feature comb bindings, and several other books feature quality sewn bindings, which allow the books to lay flat so readers can follow their instructions without holding the book open with their hands. *Easy Machine Paper Piecing*, which features patterns intended to be photocopied so that fabric can be sewn directly to the photocopied pattern, is printed on photocopy-size paper bound in a way that lays flat on the copier. *The Quilter's Start-to-Finish Workbook* is small, printed on inexpensive paper, and perfect bound because it is intended to be a design aid; the supra-level elements of this book encourage readers to color in it, take it apart, and literally use it up. *Quilter's Complete Guide*, *American Patchwork & Quilting*, *America's Heritage Quilts*, *The Passionate Quilter*, and *Rags to Rainbows*, however, are intended to be displayed as well as used, and therefore feature hard covers, glossy, heavy pages, and more substantial binding. The wire binding of *Quilter's Complete Guide* is hidden by its hard cover, allowing this book to preserve both its art book look and its comb binding usability.

Another supra-level element of *Super Quilter II* that enhances its usability is the cardboard templates included with the book. The paper stock for these templates is much heavier than the paper of the rest of the book, and the user is expected to cut out the templates and trace around them onto fabric. Similar templates are provided in other books, but most require the reader to trace the template from the book, apply it to his/her own cardboard, and proceed from there.

### **Allow Readers to Customize the Document**

Quilt books that separate different types of information into sections allow customization by encouraging readers to attend to what interests them and allowing them to ignore other sections. *The Quilt Patch*, for example, has general quilting instructions in one section, separate from instructions for individual quilts. Readers can review the general instructions if necessary, but may just as easily ignore them.

Another interesting element that allows *The Quilt Patch* to be customized is the pull-out pattern section tipped into the book. This pull-out section unfolds to several large sheets of paper which are printed on one side with pattern pieces. Readers can pull out the section to cut out and use the appropriate patterns. Similarly, the cardboard templates in *Super Quilter II* can be removed from the book, cut out, and traced onto fabric. The plastic comb binding of the book allows the template pages to be removed without damaging the binding or the book's other pages. *The Quilter's Start-to-Finish Notebook* encourages readers to customize it by coloring on the inexpensive pages.



### Create Cohesion

Supra-level elements in quilt books also create cohesion within a book or among books in a series. *Quilting Basics* and *Grandmother's Flower Garden*, for instance, are each part of a series. *Quilting Basics* is one of more than 125 "Country Wisdom Bulletins," small pamphlets which offer "expert advice on country living" on such topics as gardening, home energy, home care and repair, animals, and cooking and preserving, as well as home crafts. All the "Country Wisdom Bulletins" are 32 pages, 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches, and black and white with a two-color cover. The layout of each cover features a solid vertical bar down the right side of the book. *Grandmother's Flower Garden*, on the other hand, is one of eight books from the Quilt Digest Press in the "Classic Quilt Series." Each book provides patterns and instructions for one traditional quilt pattern. Books in the "Classic Quilt Series" are all 8 3/4 by 11 inches, with glossy color covers and color photographs within. Covers of these books all feature identical layouts. Readers familiar with the "Country Wisdom Bulletins" or the "Classic Quilt Series" can identify these books as part of these series because of the supra-level design elements.

Supra-level design elements also create cohesion within a document. The headers of *Quick Country Quilting* all include a shaded, dashed rule that resembles hand quilting stitches, creating coherence among all pages of the book. A small illustration in the header differs with each chapter, creating coherence among all pages of the chapter.

### **Celebrate Quilts as Art**

A second rhetorical goal of quilt books is to celebrate quilts and quilting as art. Quilt books achieve this goal primarily through attention to the interest and attention functions of creating ethos, pathos, and tone. By using supra-level elements, quilt books appeal to readers' interests and values. All the quilt books appeal to some shared interests, such as quilts and tradition in general, but each book targets specific interests and values as well, such as economy, creativity, historical accuracy, or technique.

### **Create Ethos**

Quilt books celebrate quilts and quilting at the same time they attract and hold readers' interest and attention by appealing to the readers' feelings and values. For example, *Quilting by Machine* illustrates each step of its instructions with a beautiful color photograph. As a result, readers associate beauty with the quilt in progress, as well as with the finished product. Almost all my books feature at least a few quality color photographs; those photographs drew me into the books and encouraged me to purchase them so that I, too, could create beautiful quilts. The ethos created by a beautiful book persuades readers that the book can help them create beauty.

*Quilter's Complete Guide* creates ethos with its cover illustration, a full-color, full-bleed, glossy, detailed, close-up photograph of a beautiful, well-crafted quilt. The photograph assures readers that this book's idea of beauty corresponds with their idea of beauty, and that the attention to detail reflected in the precise quilting stitches and perfect

seams of the quilt in the photograph will be echoed in attention to detail in the instructions of the book.

A traditional serif font is used for the title, with the word “Quilter’s” in a larger point size than the rest of the title. The traditional font assures readers that they can trust the words in the title, that this is indeed a “complete guide,” and the size of the word “Quilter’s” leaves no doubt that they are the intended audience for this book.

The cover is hard, and conceals an internal wire binding. The hard cover assures readers that this book is durable, that it is intended to be a lasting reference. Wire binding allows the book to lay flat so readers can use their hands for quilting as they follow directions, but the cover conceals this function when the book is not in use, allowing readers to display the book which, when closed, looks much like a coffee-table art book.

### **Create Pathos**

Quilt books also celebrate quilts through appeal to pathos (Buchanan 103). Effective quilt book design evokes the same emotions that readers associate with quilts: nostalgia, comfort, warmth, and love, or economy, ecology, and tradition. For example, *The Quilt Patch: Fairfax, Virginia* features full-page, full-bleed, faded photographs of historic sites in Fairfax, Virginia that serve as backdrops for photographs of quilts. Quilts in *America’s Heritage Quilts* and *American Patchwork & Quilting* are photographed on and surrounded by household antiques. Line drawings in *Beautiful Quilts: Amish & Mennonite* depict scenes

from one hundred or more years ago. All these elements celebrate quilts as they invoke pathos by suggesting tradition and nostalgia.

*Quilting by Machine* and *Soft-edge Piecing* feature post-modern, unpredictable layouts. *Angel Wings and Growing Things* features elements of the quilt design as illustration for the book. These elements, along with the art book conventions I mentioned earlier, celebrate the creativity and art value of quilts.

Other elements encourage readers to celebrate quilts as economic and ecological. Inexpensive books with little color and low-quality paper, such as *Quilting Basics* and *Once Upon a Quilt* appeal to quilters who value economy as well as traditional patterns and methods. *101 Patchwork Patterns* has a very amateurish, cluttered look, with narrow columns of text set inexpertly next to hand-drawn diagrams of patterns. The aesthetics of this book suggest Grandma's collection of patterns and lore, and appeals to the quilter who wants to use the fabric scraps she has on hand to make quilts just like Grandma did ("waste not, want not!").

At the same time, readers of inexpensive books like *Quilting Basics* value tradition. The serif font, the familiar old quilt patterns represented in the cover art, the book's inclusion in a series of bulletins about traditional life, and even the book's *Farmer's Almanac* size evoke feelings of respect for tradition. Readers of *Quilter's Complete Guide* also value tradition, and the supra-level elements of *Quilter's Complete Guide* reflect that tradition: the traditional, serif font (although this book adds a fancy highlight to the font), the familiar old

quilt patterns and hand stitching represented in the cover photograph, and the traditional hard cover all elicit nostalgia for the tradition celebrated in quilting.

### **Create Tone**

The tone of quilt books also celebrates quilts and quilting. Some books use supra-textual elements to create a refined, artistic tone reminiscent of art books. Others create a nonsense textbook tone that suggests serious attention to technique. Still others create a lighthearted, fun tone suitable for readers who quilt for the pure joy of the craft.

*Super Quilter II* has supra-level elements readers expect in a textbook: narrow margins, minimal white space, diagram-like illustrations, and two-column page layout. Color photographs are limited to one small section, and then are used to illustrate specific textual references to color. The tone of *Super Quilter II* is very serious, even scholarly.

In contrast, *Quick Country Quilting* has a very lighthearted tone. Whimsical illustrations in the headers not only orient the reader, but amuse the reader as well. The bottom border of the header, a feature often found in professional documents, is softened here by taking the appearance of small, straight hand quilting stitches. Illustrations are color photographs or skillful line drawings, and are often used to create a mood as much as to illustrate a task step.

Supra-level design elements create tone, pathos, and ethos in quilt books. Readers respond to the feelings and values suggested by tone, pathos, and ethos by giving interest and attention to documents with which they seem to share feelings and values. The interest and

attention functions enabled by tone, pathos, and ethos achieve the rhetorical goal of celebrating quilts and quilting.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of the supra-level design elements in quilt books suggests such elements enable certain functions, which in turn achieve the rhetorical goals of quilt books. The primary functions of professional documents include mapping functions:

- signal the organization of the document
- enhance the usability of the document
- allow readers to customize the document
- create cohesion among all elements of a document;

and interest and attention functions: creating ethos, pathos, and tone. Rhetorical goals of quilt books are:

- instruct readers in the making of quilts
- celebrate quilts and quilting as art

The supra-level elements I studied in quilt books include binding, headers and footers, size, cover type, paper type and color, and layout. Binding tends to enable the mapping functions of enhancing usability and allowing the reader to customize the document. Headers and footers signal organization, enhance usability, and create cohesion among all parts of a document. Size enhances usability, creates ethos, and creates tone. Cover type, as well as paper type and color, creates ethos, pathos, and tone. Paper type and color also signal the organization of the document and enhance the usability of the document. Layout signals

organization, enhances usability, allows readers to customize, and creates cohesion among parts or among documents in a series.

Quilt books achieve their rhetorical goals through the mapping functions and interest and attention functions common to all professional documents. One rhetorical goal of quilt books, to instruct readers in the making of quilts, is achieved primarily through the mapping functions of signaling organization, enhancing usability, allowing readers to customize, and creating cohesion among parts or among documents in a series. Another rhetorical goal of quilt books, to celebrate quilts and quilting as art, is achieved primarily through the interest and attention functions, the creation of ethos, pathos, and tone.

Each quilt book defines its specific rhetorical goals in a slightly different way, depending on the document's audience, purpose, and context. Variations in audience, purpose, and context dictate different specific rhetorical goals; specific rhetorical goals are met by differences in the supra-level design elements chosen for the document. For example, the specific rhetorical goals of *Quilting Basics* are defined by its audience (beginning quilters who value economy and tradition), purpose (to provide basic instruction in a traditional craft that is consistent with a country lifestyle), and context (read while performing the tasks indicated). Supra-level elements such as inexpensive paper, binding, and cover, small size, and simple one-column page layout are appropriate for this audience (because they are economical), purpose (because they contribute to *Quilting Basics's* identification with a series of documents on the topic of traditional crafts and country lifestyle), and context (because they are straightforward and plain).



In contrast, *Quilter's Complete Guide* has a different view of its audience, purpose, and context, and so defines its rhetorical goals in a slightly different way. Its audience is beginning and experienced quilters who value beauty and technique. Its purpose is to celebrate quilts and quilting as an expression of the quilter's creativity, and its context includes displaying the document in the home as well as using it to perform tasks. Supra-level elements such as glossy paper with color photographs, creative page layout, and a hard cover over wire comb binding help to achieve the *Quilter's Complete Guide's* purpose for its defined audience and context.

Visual rhetoric, then, is the way in which a document achieves its individual rhetorical goals by careful matching of supra-level elements to audience, purpose, and context. Further research into the contributions of supra-level design to visual rhetoric could be fruitful.

One interesting avenue of inquiry might concern the subject matter of the documents studied. Quilts are themselves artifacts of visual communication. Are supra-level design elements as important to the rhetorical goals of professional documents that deal with less visual subject matter?

Another avenue of research might concern gender. Because they are largely written by and for women, quilt books may be excellent examples of women's technical communication. Do the supra-level elements I found in quilt books achieve the same purposes in technical communication written by and for men, or by and for people of

nonspecified gender? Do ethos and pathos play the same kind of role in other instructional manuals, or are they especially relevant to quilt books?

A third area of inquiry that might prove fruitful involves the reader's preexisting motivation and feelings about the subject matter. Quilt books are read primarily by people whose interest in the subject matter is personal and recreational. Do supra-textual elements perform the same functions in documents read for work or in formal educational settings? I urge others toward further inquiry into these and other issues.

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