

# Introduction

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With this first general issue of 1999, *Mosaic* features a new cover design, as well as changes in the internal format. Prompting this renovation were a number of factors, just as planning the new design necessarily involved many individuals and the need to consider possibilities from a wide variety of perspectives.

One factor, admittedly, could be called "commercial," since it involved making the journal more visually attractive with a view to increasing the number of readers and subscribers. For while it may be true that one "can't tell a book by its cover," such knowledge is contingent upon being attracted in the first place; similarly, if "that book is good in vain which the reader puts away," then even more so is it true of the book that is never picked up at all.

More than being purely commercial, however, attention to visuals is central to the entire image/text relationship that has currently become a major area of scholarly investigation, and indeed it should be noted the redesign of *Mosaic's* general issues was preceded by our publication of *The Interarts Project*, a 4-part special issue devoted to the exploration of how the various arts and their media relate to each other. Nor is the question of packaging very remote from the age-old but still persisting interest in the form/content dynamic.

In contrast to the previous general issues, then, one of the most noticeable changes in the cover design is the elimination of all but the most essential verbal identifiers, just as characterizing the new internal format is the use of more "white space." While such minimalism was not deliberately intended as any attempt to encode "the disappearance of the author," it was motivated by the sense that sometimes "less is more" and that a certain degree of visual freedom would be conducive to a better engagement with the text and a more active reader.

In determining specifically what type of cover design would be most effective, the decision to use a collage graphic with a seasonal motif was again based on a combination of practical matters and a semiotic concern with registering change and continuity, coordination and plurality. The collage technique, that is, was chosen to suggest the *mosaic* nature of the journal—both the period and genre eclecticism of the literary focus and the multiple interdisciplinary approaches that the essays collectively represent. The seasonal motif of the collage, in turn, in conjunction with the background color, was designed to indicate the serial placement (number) of the issue by evoking the month/quarter of the year in which it is published. Thus the components of the graphic for the current issue are all related to the concept of "Spring," and the covers of subsequent 1999 issues will feature collage elements and background colors suggestive of Summer, Autumn, and Winter, respectively.

Insofar as the cover is therefore designed for documentary purposes, there is of course no intended correlation between the components of the collage and the contents of a given issue—any more than there would be a correlation between the volume/issue number and the essays. Nor were any of the essays in the present issue selected because they had a "Spring" quality. Where there does seem to be a "match" is at the level of affinities between the thinking that prompted *Mosaic* to adopt the new design and the concerns expressed in the respective essays. And while this will probably be equally true of the essays published in subsequent issues, it may be provocative to highlight apparent "contact" points in the present collection.

If one notes, then, that the seasonal motif suggests a grounding in the physical universe, while the cover graphic itself features a mix of "natural" and "manufactured" objects, the overall connection would seem to be the concern of the various authors with the possible forms that the relationship between these two components can take. One essay (von der Lippe), for example, is explicitly centered on the impact of environment or place on the human psyche and with how registering this impact recurs but also changes in the translation from a verbal to a visual mode. Equally

grounded but in a more political way are two other essays: one (Krapp) focuses on the topic of blood-ties and shows how interpretations of what is natural differ and are dependent upon the ideology operative in a given historical period; another essay (Jehenson) enlists insights from cultural anthropology to place theoretical debates about the connection of violence and its representation within the concrete context of social realities in a recent repressive militaristic regime.

Whether amassing details, howsoever grounded, constitutes "realism" is the focus of another essay (Hitchcock), which explores this question in the context of Marxist materialism and its quarrel with the aesthetics of modernism. Relatedly but slightly conversely, another essay (Berryman) discusses how the legitimizing of autobiography entailed not only the changing attitudes toward historical factuality promoted by postmodernist theorizing but also redefinitions of the Self in terms of the *real politics* of race, class, and gender. That texts, like human beings, are polysemous and therefore not reducible to any single interpretation, even if interdisciplinary, is the argument of another essay (Kelly) which in the process attempts to show that Derridean deconstruction may be more "true to life" than sociological approaches.

Nothing, perhaps, could be more artificial than a money economy, and two other essays deal with the corporealizing strategies of capitalism. Thus one (Phillips) discusses how biography and a rhetoric of Christian charity were enlisted to justify the commercial energies of the 19th-century entrepreneur. Another (Fabijancic) shows how capitalism effects the reification of space and how this urbanization and abstraction leads almost invariably to the virtual reality of a cyberculture. Adopting a different slant and employing the Freudian/McLuhanesque theory that technology functions as an extension of the human body, another essay (Tremblay) explores how the "pleasure principle" is involved in attempts to police new media modes and genres, of which censorship of the Net is the current manifestation.

Serving, finally, to bring all these different perspectives together is another essay (Easterlin) which in the process of showing how a bioepistemological approach can mediate between a nature/culture bind or binary also helps to address a question posed by *Mosaic's* use of a seasonal motif: namely, are the colors and objects—whether natural or artificial—that symbolize any given season the same for all persons?

Undoubtedly further connections and questions of this kind could be noted, and we invite comments along these lines for *Mosaic's* "Reader Response" section—including whether in an age of interarts such a section might not better be titled "Reader and Viewer Response."