

the arts & crafts movement

As the nineteenth century wore on, the quality of book design and production became a casualty of the Industrial Revolution, with a few notable exceptions, such as the books by the English publisher William Pickering (1796-1854). At age fourteen Pickering apprenticed to a London bookseller and publisher; at age twenty-four he established his own bookshop specializing in old and rare volumes. Shortly thereafter, this young man with a deep love of books and outstanding scholarship began his publishing program. Pickering played an important role in the separation of graphic design from printing production. His passion for design led him to commission new woodblock ornaments, initials, and illustrations. He maintained control over the format design, type selection, illustrations, and all other visual considerations.

In spite of the efforts of Pickering and others, the decline in book design was not checked until late in the century, when a book-design renaissance began. This revival—which first treated the book as a limited-edition art object, then influenced commercial production—was largely a by-product of the Arts and Crafts movement, which flourished in England during the last decades of the nineteenth century as a reaction against the social, moral, and artistic confusion of the Industrial Revolution. Design and a return to handicraft were advocated, and the “cheap and nasty” mass-

produced goods of the Victorian era were abhorred. The leader of the English Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris (1834-96), called for a fitness of purpose, truth to the nature of materials and methods of production, and individual expression by both designer and worker.

The writer and artist John Ruskin (1819-1900) inspired the philosophy of this movement. Asking how society could “consciously order the lives of its members so as to maintain the largest number of noble and happy human beings,” Ruskin rejected the mercantile economy and pointed toward the union of art and labor in service to society, as exemplified in the design and construction of the medieval Gothic cathedral. He called this the social order that Europe must “regain for her children.” According to Ruskin, a process of separating art and society had begun after the Renaissance. Industrialization and technology caused this gradual severance to reach a critical stage, isolating the artist. The consequences were eclecticism of historical models, a decline in creativity, and design by engineers without aesthetic concern. Underlying Ruskin’s theories was his fervent belief that beautiful things were valuable and useful precisely because they were beautiful. From the philosophy of art, Ruskin became concerned for social justice, advocating improved housing for industrial workers, a national education system, and retirement benefits for the elderly.

From *A History of Graphic Design* · 3rd Edition 1998
Philip B. Meggs

A Natural History of Typography

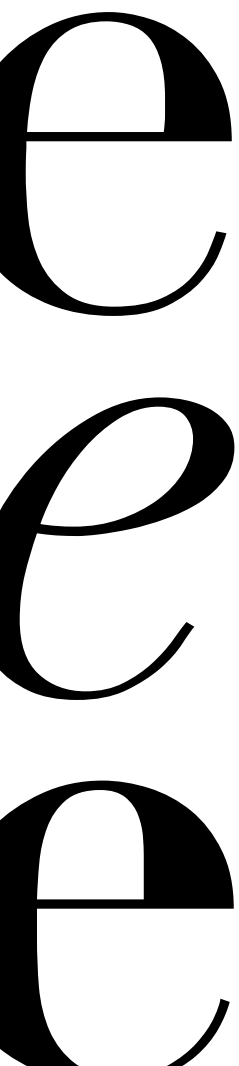
By: J. Abbott Miller
& Ellen Lupton

Signs Of Novelty

The break initiated by Didot and Bodoni helped trigger a population explosion in nineteenth-century commercial typography, spawning bizarre new specimens which rejected classical norms in favor of the incessant pursuit of novelty. Technology encouraged the proliferation of new fonts. The introduction of the combined pantograph and router in 1834 revolutionized wood-type manufacture. The pantograph is a tracing device which, when linked to a router for carving letters out of wood or metal, allows different sizes and styles of a font to be generated from a single parent drawing, eliminating the painstaking task of cutting individual punches by hand. This automated approach to type design led the historian Daniel Berkeley Updike to later denounce the pantograph for its tendency to “mechanize the design of types.”

The programmatic shifts in scale enabled by the pantograph encouraged an understanding of the alphabet as a flexible system, susceptible to systematic variations divorced from a calligraphic origin. The swelling population in the nineteenth-century of typographic mutants—compressed, expanded, outline, inline, shadowed, extruded, faceted, floriated, perspectival, bowed—signals a shift in the “signified” of typography. The notion of letterforms as essential, archetypal structures gave way to a recognition of letters as units within a larger system of formal features (weight, stress, cross-bars, serifs, angles, curves, ascenders, descenders, etc.). The relationships between letters within a font became more important than the identity of individual characters. The variety of nineteenth-century display faces suggested that the “alphabet” is a flexible system of differences, not a pedigreed line of fixed, self-contained symbols.

The proliferation of typefaces available for use in books and advertising led the American Type Founder Company (ATF) to organize fonts into “type families” in the early twentieth century. Each family consists of variations of a single parent design—book, italic, bold, condensed, etc. This system—still in use today—aimed to encourage printers and their clients to use genetically related characters rather than combining fonts of mixed heritage. The use of type families, claimed the 1923 ATF catalogue, had “added dignity and distinction... to commercial printing.” It also reflected the structuralist view of a type-face as a set of genetic traits that could be mechanically translated across a series of siblings.



On White Space

When Less Is More

by Keith Robertson

THE HISTORY OF WHITE SPACE

White space has always been with graphic design. White space could simply be understood, in a *value free* sort of way, as negative space – that area not occupied by image, headline, and copy. The problem however, when assessing a void, is that a void so easily fills up with meaning.

Value, for instance, was represented by ornament up to and into the nineteenth century and so presented an aesthetic that was primarily historical, representing status by expressing a knowledge of past styling and reproducing it. This trend started in the Renaissance with the rediscovery of classicism and the recycling of classical motifs and literature. In graphic design, this period coincided with the invention of movable type, so historically inspired ornament has been a very important device to give value to design. When white space was used in Renaissance publications (and I am thinking here particularly of Aldus Manutius's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*) it was used not so much to give status through design, but out of that Renaissance sense of correct mathematical proportion so evident in Renaissance architecture. Hence the continuation of the medieval golden mean in book page design, which was only abandoned in the nineteenth century, when economy in publication became of greater importance than aesthetic tradition.

In the nineteenth century a new design aesthetic came about. This aesthetic grew out of the development of a mass media and of the newly competitive commerce of capitalism. The letterpress poster of the mid-nineteenth century, with its mad mixture of often highly decorative and newly design faces, is often referred to as the crassest aesthetic to blot the supposedly constantly improving and modernizing world. The same was said of Victorian architecture.

William Morris in England led what became an international critique of nineteenth-century design and industrial production and proposed a cleaner and leaner aesthetic for graphic design in the future. Though some of his frontispieces do not suggest it, most of Morris's work does give new values to white space and it is from this period that a new and generous aesthetic of white space grew for the twentieth century.

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“It is obvious,” wrote Aldous Huxley in 1928, “that the machine is here to stay. Whole armies of William Morris and Tolstoy could not now expel it.... Let us then exploit them to create beauty—a modern beauty, while we are about it.” Ideas from all the advanced art and design movements were explored, combined, and applied to problems of functional design and machine production at a German design school, the Bauhaus (1919-1933). Twentieth-century furniture, architecture, product design, and graphics were shaped by the work of its faculty and students, and a modern design aesthetic emerged. On the eve of world war in 1914, the Belgian art-nouveau architect Henri van de Velde, who directed the Weimar Arts and Crafts School, resigned his position to return to Belgium. Thirty-one-year-old Walter Gropius (1883-1969) was one of three possible replacements he recommended to the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. During the war years the school was closed, and it was not until after the war that Gropius, who had already gained an international reputation for factory designs using glass and steel in new ways, was confirmed as the new director of an institution formed by merging the applied arts-oriented Weimar Arts and Crafts School with a fine arts school, the Weimar Art Academy. Gropius was permitted to name the new school Das Staatliches Bauhaus (literally translated, The State Home for Building). It opened on 12 April 1919, when Germany was in a state of terrible ferment. The catastrophic defeat in “the war to end all wars” led to economic, political, and cultural strife. The prewar world of the Kaiser was dead, and a quest to construct a new social order pervaded all aspects of life. The Bauhaus Manifesto, published in German newspapers, established the philosophy of the new school: “The complete building is the ultimate aim of all the visual arts. Once the noblest function of the fine arts was to embellish

The Bauhaus and the New Typography

buildings; they were indispensable components of architecture. Today the arts exist in isolation...architects, painters, and sculptors must learn anew the composite character of the building as an entity.... The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending his conscious will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in his craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination.” Recognizing the common roots of both fine and applied visual arts, Gropius sought a new unity of art and technology as he enlisted a generation of artists in a struggle to solve problems of visual design created by industrialism. It was hoped that the artistically trained designer could “breathe a soul into the dead product of the machine,” for Gropius believed that only the most brilliant ideas were good enough to justify multiplication by industry. The Bauhaus was the logical consequence of a German concern for upgrading design in an industrial society that began in the opening years of the century. As discussed in chapter 14, the Deutsche Werkbund worked to elevate standards of design and public taste, attracting architects, artists, public and industry officials, educators, and critics to its ranks. The Werkbund attempted to unify artists and craftsmen with industry to elevate the functional and aesthetic qualities of mass production, particularly in low-cost consumer products. Gropius had served a three-year assistantship in Peter Behrens’s architectural office beginning in 1907. Behrens’s advocacy of a new objectivity and theories of proportion had an impact on the development of the young Gropius’s thinking. Henri van de Velde declared the engineer to be the new architect and called for logical design using new technologies and materials of science: reinforced concrete, steel, aluminum, and linoleum.

MORALITY & MYTH THE BAUHAUS REASSESSED

by: DIETMAR
R. WINKLER

Designers have been nourished by the Bauhaus' teachings and wearied by its doctrines. Since its close in 1933, the Bauhaus legend has exerted profound impact on late Modern graphic design. The author believes that in recent years these repeated myths have obscured many truths about the Bauhaus' failure to cope with real world issues. In spite of its utopian promises, the Bauhaus never really succeeded at working for the public good.

The exalted status that the Bauhaus has assumed in the history of the design profession, a status fostered and enhanced by publications and exhibitions, some sponsored even by governments of East and West Germany, has had the unique luxury not to be scrutinized or held accountable for its behavior and ideology. Little has been published on its moral and ethical positions, and most assumptions rest in the closing of the Bauhaus by the authoritarian fascist government as an indicator of the school's moral positions. Indeed, prevailing assumptions portray an educational institution of integrity and high moral fiber: open-minded, anti-fascist, cross-culturally responsive, and universally astute. But are those assumptions correct, in part or at all? Or is the super-heroic mystique only a shadow of human traits which, besides great accomplishments, include some severe shortcomings?

Why worry about it now? Maybe for the reason that the professional design field has matured and is looking at its information base to establish guidance for future endeavors? Maybe because design mirrors its attitudes in either selfish opportunism or ethical responsibility? Maybe because it's important to clear the wholehouse to be able to examine present behavior in the design community?

ON OVERCOMING MODERNISM

lorraine wild

AGE OF DISCONTENT

In the world of graphic design there is still abundant sentiment that nothing is inherently wrong with contemporary design that a little economic upturn wouldn't cure; and if only our clients would cooperate, we designers could return to the production of the same kinds of "problem solving" we have been engaged in since 1950. The trouble with that attitude is that the entire backdrop against which we solve our problems has radically shifted, and a lot of designers either haven't noticed the change, or they harbor fantasies of being able to fend it off.

In recent years universality has collapsed into multiculturalism, focus groups, zip-code clusters, etc.; objectivity has collapsed into subjectivity, at the same time as the author and the subject, or both, have been declared dead in some quarters; and the optimistic march of progress has been canceled. The linear is harder to detect and simultaneous has become habitual.

All of these conditions are symptoms of what is called Post-modernity. But this term has been very appealing to graphic designers; the "post" past of it seems to imply exhaustion, decline or missed opportunities. There is also the lingering confusion of Post-modernism with a conservative, historically allusive style that characterized much architecture and graphic design of the 1980s. Some still confuse nostalgia with the sum total of Post-modernism, because a few earlier interpretations of Post-modern theory (such as Charles Jencks' use of semiotics to elevate the stylistically eclectic work of Robert A. M. Stern) were used to support the growing conservatism of the 1980s.

Another characteristic of Post-modernity is the intellectual acknowledgement of the existence of many Modernisms—a range of strategies, from the merely aesthetic to the attainment of social reform (or complete revolution). Some Modernists, such as Heartfield, were extremely temporal, and posed direct challenges to the political status quo; other Modernists, such as Mies van der Rohe, searched for an aesthetic absolute that would transcend the particulars of context and politics. Some other Modernists, such as El Lissitzky or van Doesburg, did both. But recent attempts by graphic designers to declare the definition of Modernism as a successful search for either aesthetic absolutes or social reform are symptomatic of the alienation of those who want to avoid the complexity of both the past and present.

The influence of Modernism on American graphic designers may have originated in the work of the European Futurists or

the Constructivists or the designers of the Bauhaus, but the social utopianism of the aesthetic that accompanied early Modernism never reached the United States. Indulging in sloppy thinking, fake history and romance, we attribute a fantasy of ethical accomplishment to Modernism as a reaction against the uncomfortable unknowns of Post-modernism. Some design fields have recognized this, but not graphic design. "Design is communication." "Design is problem solving." One hears these clichés repeated endlessly, the mantra of the graphic designers stuck in the denial and the anger phases of mourning for a time when we thought that the values by which we lived and defined ourselves made sense in the larger world.

Despite those who would attribute functionalism solely to Modernism, functionalism can be seen as inherent in the definition of design itself; a series of actions taken to produce a desired effect. It may be time to detach the notion of function from the failed ideology of Modernism in order that function might regain its simplicity and clarity as a design value. Weren't pre-Modernists such as Gutenberg or Diderot or Benjamin Franklin rational functionalists? Recent design historians have clarified that under Modernism, function (or simply the imagery of function) was more often dedicated to the production or distribution of an artifact than to function dedicated to the object itself. Yet graphic designers persist in talking about function as our invention, a gift we generously grant to our audiences.

Another aspect of Modernism some would like to retain (even if it is deeply misunderstood or misinterpreted by those yearning for the old days) is defined visual style. The aesthetic security of the International Style is now missed by many of those who so many other aspects of design practice affecting form have been destabilized.

First and perhaps foremost, the complete rethinking of the production of printed materials wrought by digital technology has thrown graphic design's identity as Modern into question. The computer has affected all design practices; CAD programs are now commonly used in architecture and industrial design. The professional identity of graphic design developed at a time when the conceptual processes of layout and form were separated from the setting of type and print production, but current technology reunites those activities, and what should be merely convenient or even liberating turns out to be traumatic.

During the 1950s a design movement emerged from Switzerland and Germany that has been called Swiss design or, more appropriately, the International Typographic Style. The objective clarity of this design movement won converts throughout the world. It remained a major force for over two decades, and its influence continues into the 1990s. Detractors of the International Typographic Style complain that it is based on formula and results in a sameness of solution; advocates argue that the style's purity of means and legibility of communication enable the designer to achieve a timeless perfection of form, and they point to the inventive range of solutions by leading practitioners as evidence that neither formula nor sameness is intrinsic to the approach, except in the hands of lesser talents.

The visual characteristics of this international style include a visual unity of design achieved by asymmetrical organization of the design elements on a mathematically constructed grid; objective photography and copy that present visual and verbal information in a clear and factual matter, free from the exaggerated claims of much propaganda and commercial advertising; and the use of sans-serif typography set in a flush-left and ragged-right margin configuration. The initiators of this movement believed sans serif typography expresses the spirit of a progressive age and that mathematical grids are the most legible and harmonious means for structuring information.

More important than the visual appearance of this work is the attitude developed by its early pioneers about their profession. These trailblazers defined design as a socially useful and important activity. Personal expression and eccentric solutions were rejected, while a more universal and scientific approach to design problem solving was embraced. In this paradigm, the designer defines his or her role not as an artist but as an objective conduit for spreading important between components of society. Achieving clarity and order is the ideal.

THE INTERNATIONAL TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE

Long Live Modernism!

by Massimo Vignelli

I was raised to believe that an architect should be able to design everything from a spoon to a city. At the root of this belief is a commitment to improve the design of everything that can be made—to make it better. To make it better not only from a functional or mechanical point of view, but to design it to reflect cultural and ethical values, ethical integrity. Integrity of purpose, materials, and the manufacturing process.

Integrity of purpose implies a severe analysis of what the problem is; its mean, what the possibilities for a range of solutions are: solutions which have to be sifted through to determine the most appropriate for the specific problem—not just alternatives I may like, but one that answers all of the questions posed by the problem. The solutions to a problem are in the problem itself. To solved all the questions posed by the problem, however, is not enough. The solutions should reflect the approach taken, and by virtue of its configuration, stimulate cultural reactions in the viewer, rather than emotional titillations. In this process, nothing is taken for granted, no dogmas are accepted, no preconceived ideas are assumed or adopted without questioning them in the context of the project.

I was raised to believe that, as a designer, I have the responsibility to improve the world around us, to make it a better place to live, to fight and oppose trivia, kitsch, and all forms of subculture which are visually polluting our world. The ethics of Modernism, or I should say the ideology of Modernism, was an ideology of the fight, the ongoing battle to combat all the wrongs developed by industrialization during the last century. Modernism was a commitment against greed, commercialization, exploitation, vulgarization, cheapness. Modernism was and still is the search for truth, the search for integrity, the search for cultural stimulation and enrichment of the mind. Modernism was never a style, but an attitude. This is often misunderstood by those designers who dwell on revivals of the form rather than on the content of Modernism. From the beginning, Modernism had the urgency of utopianism: to make a world better by design. Today we know

better. It takes more than design to change things. But the cultural thrust of the Modernist belief is still valid, because we still have too much trash around us, not only material trash, but intellectual trash as well. In that respect, I value, endorse, and promote the continued relevance of the Modern movement as the cultural mainstream of our century.

The cultural events of the last twenty years have expanded and deepened the issues and values promoted by the Modern movement. The revision of many of the Modernist issues have enriched our perception and have contributed to improving the quality of work. The increased number of architects and designers with good training has had a positive effect on our society and our environment. Much still has to be done to convince industry and government that design is an integral part of the production process and not a last-minute embellishment.

The cultural energy of the Modern movement is still burning, fueling intellects against shallow trends, transitory values, superficial titillations brought forward by the media, whose very existence depends on ephemera. Many of the current modes are created, supported, and discarded by the very media that generates that change and documents it to survive. It is a vicious circle. It has always been, only now it is bigger than ever.

As seen in a broad historical perspective, Modernism's ascetic, spartan look still has a towering position of strength and dignity. Modernism's inherent notion of timeless values as opposed to transient values still greatly appeals to my intellectual being.

The best architects in the world today are all Modernists at the core, and so are the best designers. The followers of the Post-modernist fad are gone, reduced to caricatures of the recent past. Post-modernism should be regarded at best as a critical evaluation of the issues of Modernism. None of us would be the same without it. However, the lack of a profound ideology eventually brought Post-modernism to its terminal stage. In the cultural confusions provided by pluralism and its eclectic manifestations, Modernism finds its *raison d'être* in its commitment to the original issues of its ideology and its energy to change the world into a better place in which to live.

Long live the
Modern movement!

RETHINKING MODERNISM REVISING FUNCTIONALISM

When I think of the undercurrents that shape my graphic design, I think of ideas about language and form. Ideas about coding and reading visual form, about challenging the viewer to construct individual interpretations, about layers of form and layers of meaning. These are at the forefront of my mind, but behind that lie other deeper and older concerns that go back to my earliest years of design. Perhaps these are what could be called a philosophy or an ethic, a personal set of values and criteria, a thread that winds through the lifetime of work and sustains its rigor, the continuity in the cycles of change.

Undergraduate school in industrial design was a very idealistic time. The strong emphasis on problem-solving and a *form follows functionality* struck a resonance with my personal approach toward the opportunities and problems of daily life. As a college junior, I enthusiastically embraced the rationalism of the Museum of Modern Art's Permanent Design Collection, abandoning the ambiguously intuitive territory of fine art. This somewhat vague midwestern American Modernist ethic had its roots in the Bauhaus, and our group of students gained a dim understanding of its application by the Ulm School of Germany. Added to this was a reverence for the insights of George Nelson, Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. In hindsight I continue to appreciate the foundation built by those years of industrial design training. At that time, in the middle 1960s, even the best American education in graphic design would not have gone much further than an intuitive '*ah ha*' method of conceptualizing design solutions and an emulation of the design masters of the moment.

This faith in rational functionalism (and not a polished portfolio) found me my first job, at Unimark International, then the American missionary for European Modernism, the graphic heir of the Bauhaus. There I had the opportunity to learn graphic design from "real" Swiss and to have my junior design work critiqued by Massimo Vignelli, the greatest missionary of them all, the master of Helvetica and the grid. Our ethic then was one of discipline, clarity and cleanliness. The highest praise for a piece of graphic design was, "*This is really clean.*" We saw ourselves as sweeping away the clutter and confusion of American advertising design with a professional rationality and objectivity

that would define a new American design. This approach was fairly foreign to American clients and in 1968 it was remarkably difficult to convince corporate clients that a grid-ordered page with only two weights of Helvetica was appropriate to their needs. Now, of course, one can hardly persuade them to let give up their hold on "Swiss", so completely has the corporate world embraced rationalist Modernism in graphic design.

But after a few years of striving to design as "purely" as possible, employing a minimalist typographic vocabulary, strongly gridded page structures and contrast in scale for visual interest, I came to view this desire for "cleanliness" as not much more than housekeeping. A number of us, mainly graphic designers in the "Swiss" method, began to search for a more expressive design, paralleling a similar movement in architecture now known as Post Modernism. Eventually what came to be called "New Wave", for lack of a better term, emerged in the 1970s as a new operating mode of graphic design. This included a new permission to employ historical and vernacular elements, something prohibited by "Swiss" Modernism. Then in the mid 1980s at Cranbrook we found a new interest in verbal language in graphic design, as well as fine art. Text can be animated with voices and images can be read, as well as seen, with an emphasis on audience interpretation and participation in the construction of meaning. But now, as the cycles of change continue, Modernism may be reemerging somewhat, a renewed minimalism that is calming down the visual outburst of activity of the past fifteen years.

Through these years of continual change and new possibilities, where does the ethic lie? Does not the idea of ethic imply some sort of unshakable bedrock impervious to the winds of change? For me, there seems to be a habit of functionalism that shapes my process at the beginning of every design project, the rational analysis of the message and the audience, the objective structuring of the text. Each cycle of change during the passing years seems to have added another visual or conceptual layer laid upon that foundation of functionalism, but inside of every project it is always there. Although this emphasis on rationalism would seem to be at odds with recent experimentation at Cranbrook, in fact it has been the provocation to question accepted norms in graphic design, stimulating the search for new communications theories and visual languages. I have never lost my faith in rational functionalism, in spite of appearances to the contrary. The only thing lost was an absolute dedication to minimalist *form*, which is a completely different issue from rationalist *process*.

Part of this ethic is a strong conviction and enthusiasm that design is important, that it matters in life, not just mine, but in the lives of our audiences and users of designed communications. Graphic design can be a contribution to our audiences. It can enrich as it informs and communicates. And there is a faith in not only the possibility, but the necessity for advancement and growth in our field, an imperative for change. That only through change can we continue to push ahead in knowledge and expertise, theory and expression, continually building our collective knowledge of the process of communication. These convictions were formed early and sustain me today.

I was brought up in a world in which Modern was taken for granted rather than discovered. Modern was at my doorstep as a way of contemplating and dealing with the visual and tactile world. My father, Serge Chermayeff, was involved in the Modern movement almost by default. Although he was not trained as an architect or designer, he worked his way into these professions. I was taught that Modern art, design and architecture are presentations of expression that is clean and simple.

For the past several years, however, there has been a betrayal of Modern in the form of endless rationalizations about decoration, coupled with complaints about the coldness of Modern design. Post-modern is a desire to return to the appearance of things, rejecting the idea of Modern as a background for whatever else is going on. Modern is not an end in itself, but rather a framework in which to accomplish something else.

For example, I work in a completely white room. It was bequeathed to me and was once Marcel Breuer's office. But if it hadn't been white, I would have painted it white right away. The room is merely a canvas in which other things happen. It is not an end in itself. If it were, I'd have to take all the art off the walls and anything else that gives it focus. I would have to remove myself as well.

Painting and sculpture have had a tremendous influence on the way I look at design. I grew up with the usual gang of classic Modern painters - Klee, Miro, Leger, and Mondrian. The explorations that they made generally lead one away from coldness, repetition, and sterility, which can exist in Modern art. As a young boy, Miro was my favorite painter, but later as a young man, I went through a long period of thinking how wrong I had been. A decade later I came back to feeling that Miro had tremendous, original qualities - comic, fresh, vibrant,

immediate. That made it easier to intuitively understand the artists who came later; de Kooning, Tomlin, Brooks, Kline. With all their rawness and immediacy, the Abstract Expressionists still the same predecessors. Modern art and design grows in a logical way. And that is the Modern's virtue; it changes and expands, becoming endlessly redefined and forward moving. It is an attitude that invites reconsideration and shifting according to time, yet holds on to the best of what has been accomplished.

All my thinking about the process of design in the development of graphic tone and composition comes more from painters than from any other source. The strength of painters like Leger or Stuart Davis comes from the simple directness in their development of forms and flat colors; the whole, a bridge between symbol and picture, and a change from illustrations to symbol-making. I would not say that I made the same explorations, but nevertheless, contemporary graphic design deals with similar problems, like eliminating unnecessary elements.

I do not have the belief that there is a proper way to do things. What makes graphic design so interesting is that there are few real rules. However, having said that, there are nevertheless purposes. I am not sympathetic to purposelessness in design. What is called "New Wave" is a revisionist return to bygone periods, arbitrary and incredibly boring. Art Deco and Art Nouveau are important to be aware of as styles. The Bauhaus and Pop Art are important as ideas, which are greatly reduced in value when distilled into style alone. To bring any style out of the drawer unrelated to the subject matter at hand is depressing. If there is a single rule, it is that there should be some logic in the application of the past to current communication needs. And this logic has to be based on more than predilections of taste.

Some Thoughts on Modernism : Past, Present, and Future

by
Ivan Chermayeff

From
Looking Closer
Critical Writings on Graphic Design
1994

Postmodern

PHILIP B. MEGGS

u b i s e D

By the 1970s, many people believed the modern era was drawing to a close in art, design, politics, and literature. The cultural norms of Western society were scrutinized and the authority of traditional institutions was questioned. An era of pluralism emerged as people began to dispute the underlying tenets of modernism. The continuing quest for equality by women and minorities contributed to a growing climate of cultural diversity, as did immigration, international travel, and global communications. Accepted viewpoints were challenged by those who sought to remedy bias, prejudice, and distortion in the historical record. The social, economic, and environmental awareness of the period caused many to believe the modern aesthetic was no longer relevant in an emerging postindustrial society. People in many fields—including architects, economists, feminists, and even theologians—embraced the term postmodernism to express a climate of cultural change. Maddeningly vague and overused, postmodernism became a byword in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

In design, postmodernism designated the work of architects and designers who were breaking with the international style so prevalent since the Bauhaus. Postmodernism sent shock waves through the design establishment as it challenged the order and clarity of modern design, particularly corporate design. (Some observers reject the term postmodern, arguing that it is merely a continuation of the modern movement. Late modernism and mannerism are proffered as alternative terms for late twentieth-century design.) Design forms and terminology have political and social meaning, expressing attitudes and values of their time; postmodernism gained a strong foothold among the generation of designers who emerged in the 1970s. Perhaps the international style had been so thoroughly refined, explored, and accepted that a backlash was inevitable. Historical references, decoration, and the vernacular were disdained by modernists, while postmodern designers drew upon these resources to expand the range of design possibilities.

As the social activism of the late 1960s gave way to more self-absorbed personal involvements during the 1970s, media pundits spoke of the Me Generation to convey the spirit of the decade. The intuitive and playful aspects of postmodern design reflect personal involvement. Postmodern designers place a form in space because it “feels” right rather than to fulfill a rational communicative need. As radically different as a psychedelic poster and a visual-identity manual might be, both are corporate design, for or relating to a unified body of people with common values. On the other hand, much postmodernist design is subjective and even eccentric; the designer becomes an artist performing before an audience with the bravura of a street musician, and the audience either responds or passes on.

The umbrella term postmodernism does not tell the whole story, because while architecture may fit rather neatly into historical categories (Victorian, art nouveau, modern, and postmodern), graphic design is far too pluralistic and diverse to fit such a simplistic system. Just three examples of graphic-design expressions having no parallel in architecture are World War I posters, the work of the Push Pin group, and the psychedelic poster. Graphic design, rapidly changing and ephemeral, was never dominated by the international style the way architecture was. Postmodern graphic design can be loosely categorized into several major directions: the early extensions of the international typographic style by Swiss designers who broke with the dicta of the movement; New-Wave typography, which began in Basel, Switzerland, through the teaching and research of Wolfgang Weingart (b. 1941); the exuberant mannerism of the early 1980s, with significant contributions from the Memphis group in Milan, Italy, and from San Francisco designers; retro, the eclectic revivals and eccentric reinventions of earlier models, particularly European vernacular and modern design from the decades between the world wars; and the electronic revolution spawned by the Macintosh computer in the late 1980s, which drew upon all of the earlier thrusts.

Since the fifties, zero seems to have slipped as a role model. Far from announcing the end of graphic design, because the machine age had at last found its true expression, International Style has simply become one of a number of what are now recognized as being design options. Each decade since the fifties seems to have spawned a range of graphic styles but only aspects of psychedelic and Post-modern design can be described as being primarily historicist in orientation. Pop, Punk, and New Wave (or post-Punk) do at least relate to their contemporary industrial cultures just as legitimately as International Style did to the consolidation of the corporate giants after the war. ¶ There have, however, been some interesting reverberations of International Style through most of this period. More often than not, it performs the role of the safe haven to which many top designers can retreat, especially after their innovation has been ripped off by the style vultures who make up the rest of the industry. ¶ Instead of reaching back into history, Pop simply reaches across to its contemporary commercial culture for inspiration and symbology. This approach to design is less critical, in terms of being less insistent on an aesthetic that comes from outside the symbols being represented. It is more imitative/appreciative simply of what exists—a value-free acceptance of the status quo whether that status quo be commercial, capitalist, or popular. ¶ To understand Post-modern sensibilities in design is to bring to contemporary design both the critical and uncritical aesthetics. Part of the appeal of Post-punk design is the juxtaposition of the refined and the vulgar, the classic and the gaudy, the kitsch and the technocratic. ¶ From the Modern movement has come the reawakening of the potential of typography as the primary communicator in design. Typography is the hook on which Post-modern design hangs. At first this “new” typography followed the same progression as the Modern movement had taken itself—first the anarchist Dada fruit salads of ransom-note type to classic, controlled, centered and seriffed elegance. ¶ Along with a new type consciousness there is also a new grid awareness which tends to wear its design process on its sleeve. The process of design, of preparing finished artwork, of being printed in four-color printing process, of being laid out using mathematical precision and geometry is something that is often being exposed through the artwork. Post-punk design, when it is plundering the rules of the Modern movement for ideas, tends to use Modernism simply as the formal layer of their artwork. Most likely, the contemporary layer, be it an illustration, a photograph or even a digitally distorted device will be there by nature of its juxtaposition and incongruity.

Starting From Zero
by Keith Robertson

*Looking Closer: Critical
Writings on Graphic Design*
1994

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NEW-WAVE TYPOGRAPHY

Just as Herbert Bayer, Jan Tschichold, and others employed a new approach to typographic design in the 1920s, opposition to the cool formalism of the modernist tradition emerged first in Switzerland, then spread around the world. In 1964 young Wolfgang Weingart, who had already completed a three-year apprenticeship in typography and studied art, arrived in Basel from southeastern Germany to study with Emil Ruder. Weingart joined Armin Hofmann on the faculty of the Basel School in 1968. Originally, Weingart had worked under the influences of Ruder and Hofmann; when he began to teach, however, he determined that he must teach type differently from his mentors. Weingart began to question the typography of absolute order and cleanness. He wondered if perhaps the international style had become so refined and prevalent throughout the world that it had reached an anemic phase. Rejecting the right angle as an exclusive organizing principle, Weingart achieved a joyous and intuitive design with a richness of visual effects. Ideology and rules collapsed in the face of his boundless energy. Drawing on broad technical knowledge and a willingness to explore the untried, he heated up the intensity of the page.

From 1968 until 1974 **Weingart** worked with lead type and letterpress systems. In his teaching and personal projects he consciously sought to breathe a new spirit into the typography of order and neatness by questioning the premises, rules, and surface appearances that were hardening the innovations of the Swiss masters into an academic style in the hands of their followers. Time-honored traditions of typography and visual-language systems were rethought. Why must paragraphs be indicated by indents? What other ways could be invented to divide text visually? Why not change weights in midword? To emphasize an important word in a headline, Weingart often made it white on a chunky, black rectangle. Wide letterspacing, discarded in the fetish for tight type in the revolution from metal to photographic typographic systems in the 1960s, was explored. In response to a request to identify the kinds of typographic design he created, Weingart listed sunshine type, bunny type, ant type, five-minute type, typewriter type, and for-the-people type. This sense of humor and expressive use of language metaphor to define his work finds close parallels in his typographic invention.

But by the mid-1970s Weingart set off in a new direction when he turned his attention toward offset printing and film systems. The printer's camera was used to alter images and the unique properties of the film image were explored. Weingart began to move away from purely typographic design and embraced collage as a medium for visual communication. A new technique – the sandwiching or layering of images and type that have been photographed as film positives – enabled him to overlap complex visual information, juxtapose textures with images, and unify typography with pictorial images in unprecedented ways. He took particular delight in the graphic qualities of enlarged halftone dots and the moiré patterns produced when these dot patterns are overlapped and then shifted against each other. His design process involved multiple film positives and masks that are stacked, arranged, then exposed with careful registration to produce one negative, which goes to the printer. In color work such as the Kunstcredit exhibition poster, the process was extended into an interaction of two colors, using overprinting to build dimensional layers of illusionistic forms.



D Type & c n struction in the Digital Era

In the age of the desktop computer, font design software and page make up programs, type has acquired a fluidity of physical outline, an ease of manipulation and, potentially, a lack of conceptual boundaries unimaginable only a few years ago. Everyone agrees that the new digital tools remove typography from the exclusive domain of the specialist — whether type designer, typefoundry or typesetting company — and place it (not always firmly) in the hands of the ordinary graphic designer. The results of this freedom, however, are the subject of intense and continuing debate. Traditionalists argue that the accessibility of the technology will accelerate the decline in typographic standards that started when the first clumsy photocomposition systems began to replace lead type. Evangelists enthuse about a soon to be realized digital paradise in which everyone will compose letters in personally configured typefaces as idiosyncratic as their own handwriting.

This essay is an interim report on these changes, filed while they are still under way. It addresses new work — from America, Britain, Germany, France, and the Netherlands — which is rē•dēf•īn•{ing} our approach to typography. Some of these designs are entirely dependent on the new technology — in production terms it would be simply too time consuming, co\$tly, or awkward to generate them in any other way. Some of them anticipate the aesthetic concerns of the new digital typography, or reflect the freedoms that typography makes possible, while still being produced at the drawing board, or by letterpress. Some will stand the test of time; others will prove to have been representative of their period, but of no greater significance. All of them demonstrate their designers' reluctance to accept that the conventions of typography are inscribed inviolably on tablets of stone.

Among these articles of faith, legibility is perhaps the first and most emotive. If there's is one characteristic that links the many visual strategies of the new typographers, it is their combined assault on this most sacred of cows. Swiss Style Modernism composed orderly, linear, well-tempered messages using supposedly objective, and certainly inexpressive, sans-serif letterforms. The new typographers, reacting against this bloodless neutrality, justify their experiments by arguing that no typeface is inherently illegible; rather, in the words of type designer Zuzana Licko of Emigre Graphics, "it is the reader's familiarity with faces that accounts for their legibility." We might find it impossible to read black letter with ease today, but in prewar Germany it was the dominant letterform. Baskerville, rejected in 1757 as ugly and unreadable, is now regarded as one of the most serviceable typefaces for loooooonng text setting.

Type design in the digital era is quirky, personal and unreservedly subjective. The authoritarian voices of modernist typography, which see to permit only a single authorized reading, are rejected as too corporate, inflexible and limiting, as though — it may be forlorn hope — typographic diversity itself might somehow re-enfranchise its readers. "I think there are a lot of voices that have not been heard typographically," says type designer Jefferey Keedy, head of graphics at CalArts. "Whenever I start a new job and try to pick a typeface, none of the typefaces give the voice that I need. They just don't relate to my experiences in my life. They're about somebody else's experiences, which don't belong to me."

t h e m e m
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A new sensibility in postmodern design was catapulted into international prominence as the 1970s closed and the 1980s began. This work was pluralistic, eclectic, and hedonistic. Designers were deeply enamored of texture, pattern, surface, color, and a playful geometry. It almost seemed as though the rational ethic of the modern-design movement was being flouted and mocked by designers willing to introduce whimsy and exaggerated form and proportions into their work. Innovation occurred in many cities and countries around the globe, with important contributions from diverse groups, including architects and product designers in Milan, Italy and graphic designers in San Francisco, California.

An important inspiration for all areas of design emerged in 1981, when global attention was concentrated on an exhibition of the Italian design group Memphis, led by eminent Italian architectural and product designer Ettore Sottsass (b. 1917). The group chose the name *Memphis* to reflect their interest in the inspiration of both contemporary popular culture and the artifacts and ornaments of ancient cultures. Function became secondary to the iconic image of surface pattern and texture, color and fantastic forms in their lamps, sofas, and cabinets. The Memphis sensibility embraces exaggerated geometric forms in bright (even garish) colors, bold geometric and organic patterns, often printed on plastic laminates, and allusions to earlier cultures, such as marble and granite used in column-like table and chair legs evocative of Greco-Roman architecture. In Memphis designs, form no longer follows function – it becomes the reason for the design to exist. The Memphis graphic design section was headed by Christoph Radl. The experimental attitude, fascination with tactile and decorative color pattern, and exuberant geometry had a direct influence on postmodern design throughout the world. Memphis exploded on the scene just as the prosperous 1980s began and helped set the stage for an extravagantly decorative period of design.

Postmodernist architect Michael Graves (b. 1934) became another source of design inspiration. Graves became known in the 1960s for private houses designed in the minimalist tradition of orthodox modernism influenced by Le Corbusier. In the late 1970s he rebelled against the modernist tradition and expanded his range of architectural forms. Classical colonnades and loggias were revived and combined with visual elements inspired by cubist paintings. Graves's geometry is not the cool purism of Mies van der Rohe; it is an energetic, high-spirited geometry of decorative expression in poster designed by Philadelphia graphic designer William Longhauser (b. 1947) for an exhibition of Graves's works. In this poster, which became an influential postmodern design in itself, an overall background pattern of repetitive dots is produced by the letters *MICHAEL* letterspaced on a grid.

From: *A History of Graphic Design*, 3rd Edition 1998, Philip B. Meggs.

GO N N A E M

WHY MEANING?

“All form, no content.” As designers all of us are probably familiar with this phrase. Although often said in jest, there might well be some truth behind the words. Non-designers sometimes look at our work and, failing to see beyond the surface, ask us, “Does that color (line, space, illustration, form, texture, shape, etc.) mean anything, or is it just there because you think it looks good?” At the same time, as designers, we occasionally look at the work of non-designers and mutter under our breath (again, with a grain of humor), “All content, no form.” And, again, there might be some truth behind our teasing. Take, for example, the standard text document which is usually formatted according to guidelines established when typewriters were popular, or products whose physical presence has been shaped by engineering expediency rather than by a thoughtful response to human need.

The underlying issue here is meaning. What does the use of a particular color mean on a particular product? How can the meaning inherent in a text document best be expressed through page layout? How can a designed object communicate its meaning in terms of use and in a way that will make sense to a given user in a given situation? What is meaning, with respect to design, anyway?

Until recently, the primary focus of design was on form – with a tacit recognition that the elements of the form of an object evoke a multitude of associations for the individual who interacts with it. What these associations were, though, not as well understood. The understandings we did have were primarily intuitive and superficial in nature.

As the focus of design shifted to include the experiences of those who use and interact with objects, the whole issue of what objects “mean” to users moved to the foreground. We are starting to see the form of an object less as the end of the design process and more as the beginning of the user’s experience. In designing the form of an object, we want to design it so that we create the user’s experience of it as well.

A History of Graphic Design

Philip B. Meggs

Retro and vernacular design.

During the 1980s graphic designers gained a growing understanding and appreciation of their history. Books, design magazines and exhibitions all contributed to this awareness. A movement based on historical revival first emerged in New York and spread rapidly throughout the world. Called retro by some designers, it was based on an uninhibited eclectic interest in modernist European design from the first half of the century, a flagrant disregard for the rules of proper typography, and a fascination with kinky and mannered typefaces designed and widely used during the 1920s and 1930s, then banished after World War II. This prefix charges the words retroactive and retrograde with implication of “backward-looking” and “contrary to the usual.” Retro may be considered an aspect of post-modernism due to its interest in historical revivals, yet it paraphrases modern design from the decades between the wars rather than the Greco-Roman and Renaissance motifs employed by many architects. The term vernacular design refers to the commonplace artistic and technical expression broadly characteristic of a locale or historical period; it closely relates to retro design. Vernacular design is the paraphrasing of earlier, more commonplace graphic forms, such as baseball cards, matchbook covers, and unskilled commercial illustrations and printing from earlier decades.

The New York approach to retro began with a small number of designers, including Paula Scher (b. 1948), Louise Fili (b. 1951), and Carin Goldberg (b. 1953). They rediscovered earlier twentieth-century graphics, ranging from the turn-of-the-century Vienna Secession to modernist but decorative European typefaces popular during the two decades between the World Wars. Their approach to space, color, and texture is often personal and original. Unorthodox attitudes about the rules and regulations of “proper” design and typography permit them to take risks and experiment by exuberantly mixing fonts, using extreme letterspacing, and printing type in subtle color-on-color combinations. They are, however, typographic precisionists seeking a sublime level of visual organization. In many of their designs, typography does not play a role secondary to illustration and photography but moves to center stage to become figurative, animated, and expressive. The self consciously eclectic aspects of retro continue a trait of New York design: Scher credits Seymour Chwast of Push Pin Studios and his use of Victorian, art-nouveau, and art-deco forms as an important inspiration; Fili worked with the late Herb Lubalin, who often called upon the extravagance of Victorian and art-nouveau typographic themes. Scher and Fili moved New York’s tradition of historicism forward into the 1920s and 1930s.

THE TIME MACHINE THE TIME MACHINE THE TIME MACHINE THE TIME MACHINE THE TIME MACHINE

BY STEVEN HELLER

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Some Critics call the 1980s the “decade of appropriation,” but artists and especially graphic designers have been appropriating form and style certainly since the nineteenth century – if not before – and often for good reasons. Leon Trotsky wrote in *Literature and Revolution* that “artistic creation is always a complicated turning inside out of old forms, under the influence of new stimuli which originate outside of art.” Appropriate historical use is not the recycling of hackneyed techniques but the application of new ideas.

Here are some examples: In the 1890s, William Morris, the Victorian prophet and socialist thinker, returned to the medieval workshop tradition not simply as a reactionary stand against the ugliness of industrialization, but as a gateway to new social awareness. He believed that medievalism represented a more humanist philosophy. In the 1920s, the respected advertising designers T.M. Cleland and Walter Dorwin Teague borrowed rococo mannerisms from eighteenth-century French book design to enhance advertising art (specifically for automobile advertising) as a means of reconciling the fast pace of progress with traditional values. They were probably also reacting to the newly adopted concept of forced obsolescence, and used classical design forms as a code to offset any recognition that products were not being made to last. Also during the 1920s, the Dadaists and Surrealists used nineteenth-century printers’ cuts to suggest the ad hoc nature of their messages. In the forties, Lester Beall drew inspiration from Dada and Surrealism and borrowed some of their graphic and photographic elements, yet developed a distinctly American approach that reflected changes in art and media. In the 1950s, in part as a rejection of the Spartan International Style, New York’s Push Pin Studios, whose principals Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast were interested in reviving drawing as an integral element of the design process, invested the early twentieth-century styles Art Nouveau and Art Deco with new energy and thus invented their own distinctive period style. In the early 1960s, a reappraisal of nineteenth-century Victorian woodtypes, by Otto Storch, Ed Benguiat, Herb Lubalin, Phil Gips, and later Bea Feitler, offered an eclectic alternative to orthodox Modernism yet did not slavishly imitate the original models. In the early 1980s, David King (in England) and Paula Scher (in America) reintroduced Russian Constructivism to the design vocabulary and so unlocked another treasure chest of forms unknown to an entire generation of young designers. And in the mid-1980s, with his manipulation of 1930s advertising cuts, Charles Spencer Anderson brought design back full circle to its nascent period when we were lowly commercial artists. Although Anderson’s approach has ignited acrimonious responses among orthodox Moderns, who argue that this is the kind of stuff they fought so hard to eliminate forty years ago, I tend to be more generous in viewing the work as a form of satire that comments on a bygone age. An astute friend of mine put this so-called retro phase into clearer focus, asserting that we all borrow from the past but that designers are invariably limited in what they do by their knowledge. “My bookshelf,” she said, “has many more books going further back in time than does Anderson’s.”

Which raises the issue of cultural Alzheimer’s (or cultural illiteracy). I was startled to read in a recent study of New York high school students that only thirty-two percent could place the American Civil War in the correct half-century. I’ll bet that a similar level of ignorance would be exposed if graphic designers were asked to take a design history test. In fact, I met an AIGA member from Florida in her mid- to late thirties who had never heard of Paul Rand. That Chuck Anderson may be better known than Paul Rand is astonishing. And this explains why certain historical styles have become trivialized: Too many young designers – and some vets, too – are simply ignorant of original or even secondary contexts.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, electronic and computer technology advanced at a staggering pace, transforming many areas of human activity. Graphic design was irrevocably changed by digital-computer hardware and software. The industrial revolution had fragmented the process of creating and printing graphic communications into a series of specialized steps. After phototype became prevalent during the 1960s, skilled specialists who operated text and display typesetting equipment; production artists, who pasted all of the elements into position on boards; camera operators, who made photographic negatives of the paste-ups, art, and photographs; strippers, who assembled these negatives together; platemakers, who prepared the printing presses; and press operators, who ran the printing presses. By the 1990s digital technology enabled one person operating a desktop computer to control most – or even all – of these functions in one process. New photo-optical printing machines used computer-controlled lasers to photosensitize printing drums, making short-run and even individualized full-color press sheets possible.

The Digital Revolution

In spite of strong initial resistance by many designers, the new technology improved rapidly, causing rejection to crumble. Computer users were empowered by greater control over the design and production process. Digital technology and advanced software also expanded the creative potential of graphic design by making possible an unprecedented manipulation of color, form, space, and imagery.

The explosive growth of cable satellite television—estimated at 10.8 million U. S. subscribers in 1976, 37.5 million in 1986, and 61.7 million in 1996 – expanded the number of broadcast channels and inspired creative and technical advances in broadcast and motion graphics. Technology transformed the era of mass communications aimed toward mass audiences into a period of decentralized media offering hundreds of options. *Broadcasting* was joined by *singlecasting*, the ability to adjust communications toward small audiences and even individuals.

The rapid development of the Internet and the World Wide Web during the 1990s transformed the way people communicate and access information. Computer-graphics experimentation churned through modern and postmodern design ideas, retro revivals, eccentric work, and explored electronic techniques to create a period of pluralism and diversity in design.

THE WRITTEN WORD: THE DESIGNER AS EXECUTOR, AGENT AND PROVOCATEUR

BY WILLIAM DREWTTTEL

The evolution of the role of the written word is having a profound affect on graphic designers. The fodder of graphic design is, after all, words and pictures. Yet how many times have you heard, "Well, people just don't read anymore" offered as a rationale for de-emphasizing the role or amount of writing (copy, text, language, whatever its called) in a design project? Some designers seem to acquiesce to the logic of this statement. Other designers seem more cynical, taking this situation as license to render words fundamentally illegible, engaging in dense shenanigans under the guise of avant-garde typography. Still others view this as one of the challenges of being a designer today.

Of course, it is true that reading seems more and more a luxury given the frantic complexity of modern life. In a commercial sense, these changes are equally extreme, affecting the nature and form of business communication. How do designers produce brochures or promotional literature for their clients, yet trash most of what they themselves receive? (The answer that "my" work is different doesn't, of course, get the profession very far.) When was the last time you saw someone actually read CD liner notes or an employee handbook? When a magazine editor or publisher says they want their magazine to be easier to read, more scannable, they should be taken literally - they are praying that readers actually do scan it. If you are a graphic designer, producing such brochures, leaflets, magazines, or direct mail, wouldn't you rather just go home for the day? Doesn't this feel like a professional dead end? Alex Isley, the principal of Alexander Isley Design in New York City, succinctly noted, "I just have to believe that people still read."

Many people, of course, still do read, especially the staples of books, magazines, and newspapers. I believe the reason is simple, and that hidden within this reason is a way for graphic designers to approach this issue. These books(or magazines, whatever) were meant to be read. They were written to be published, sold, taken home, and read. Generally, the better they're written, the more they're read. (If some of them become decoration on a coffee table, thats okay too. Books have a way of taking on a life of their own: someone else picks it up off the coffee table, and a new reader is found. It is this glow of an afterlife that makes a good bookstore interesting and a large urban magazine shop exciting.) There is the assumption that these objects of commerce are for you - that you might be interested, that they're worth your time, and they might educate, entertain, or just relax you.