New Perspectives:
Critical Histories of Graphic Design

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Guest Editor:
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Advisory Board

New Perspectives:
Critical Histories of Graphic Design

Part 1:
Critiques

Andrew Blauvelt, guest editor

Contents

Foreword:
Disciplinary Bodies:
the Resistance to Theory
and the Cut of the Critic

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The true difficulty of theory, however, springs not from this sophistication, but from exactly the opposite — from its demand that we return to childhood by rejecting what seems natural and refusing to be fobbed off with shifty answers from well-meaning elders.

Terry Eagleton [1]

What has been widely labelled the "resistance to theory" one encounters in the fields of design history is itself a struggle over just whose theory is being held under the light of critical scrutiny. Theory is thought to be something intrusive, a virus invading the (healthy?) body of disciplinary knowledge. The idea of a foreign invasion of theory into the corpus of sacrosanct knowledge is a metaphor which effectively banishes the perpetrator into the realm of the other and thereby preserves the homology of the discipline. The condition of naturalness to which Eagleton refers, from the passage quoted above, is the prevailing state of graphic design history. This naturalness is the enveloping theory which shields itself from detection, occasionally masquerading as common sense. It is the allergic reaction to theory which allows us to glimpse its existence. This anti-theoretical backlash allows us to see what is being defended as natural is itself a construct, that is to say, just another theory. Not just any theory however, but one that has gained such prominence that it "goes without saying" and is registered as second nature.

It is the operation of criticism that allows us to see the condition of naturalness. Eagleton posits the *social* function of criticism as being historically situated in the public sphere of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe. Its role, according to Eagleton, was to offer rational and sound judgments in lieu of authoritarian rule.[2]

Of course, the definition of criticism has shifted since that time, and for Eagleton and other theorist/critics its social function must be recuperated. The

1
Eagleton, Terry. 1990.
The Significance of Theory.
Oxford: Blackwell Publishers,
35.

2
Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory*, 8.

prevailing notion of criticism operative in recent times has been characterized by the embrace of the negative — fault finding rendered in censorious terms. Rather than equating criticism with condemnation, recent critical, theoretical activities have tended more towards the relative nature of positions and the historical specificity of applications. What might have been lost in terms of expansiveness has been gained in greater depth and precision. It is perhaps this tighter focus and the "cut of the critic" which is felt so strongly in the reactions to theory.

More specifically, graphic design history has resisted the intrusions and discursions of the theoretical and methodological operations which have been in full force, at least, since the 1960s in the humanities and social sciences. This intense period of theoretical activity ranges from revised conceptions of Marxism, the articulation of various feminisms, the advent of structuralism, the rise of literary criticism and the developments of post-structuralism and deconstruction in particular.

The constant oppositional thinking of theory and practice, with the privileging of the latter, is undoubtedly to be found at the heart of such resistance.

This comes as no surprise since graphic design history has been constructed in service to the legitimization of professional practice.

The precondition of genuine history-writing may be the necessity to critically stand outside, as well as within the phenomenon we try to explain.

Clive Dilnot [3]

The five essays contained in this volume have been gathered in service for the critical appraisal and theoretical reassessment of graphic design history and history-writing. While all essays in this project speak to these tasks, these five were selected for their general approach to the subject. There is no claim to exhausting the possibilities of such a task, even if that were possible. Collectively they represent but five perspectives in a larger discourse.

I have included an introductory text which will, hopefully, serve as a useful background for some of the recent arguments, but will also push forward the growing debate around graphic design history and design history at-large. It attempts to implicate, in a larger web of discourse, a

3
From a footnote (79) of an essay by Clive Dilnot, "The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities," in: Margolin, Victor, ed. 1989. *Design Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

critical account of the contestation of graphic design history. This account moves from discussions of the activity of graphic design to implications for history by its practice and ultimately argues for a reconfigured alternative to the prevailing conceptions and practices of graphic design history. This alternative is indebted to many of these theoretical notions which have, up till now, found a space only outside the discipline. Its critical position is formed in contradistinction to traditional narrative accounts in favor of the study of discursive spaces around and between "positive" historical elements, understood as both the subjects (designers and audiences) and objects of graphic design.

The concept of discursivity is taken up in a general account of historical positions in Anne Bush's essay, "Through the Looking Glass: Territories of the Historiographic Gaze." Bush draws upon the work of historian Martin Jay, who in his essay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," outlines three distinct modes of vision at play in the early Modern period. Bush skillfully adopts these visual modes in order to explicate the notion of the subject/object "perspectives" of historiography. Arguing within the context of the dominant mode of Cartesian perspectivalism, Bush shows that narrative history, like its visual counterpart which she labels the "external gaze," "directs the reader's perspective to the center of an illusory world." Bush juxtaposes this orientation with a discussion of the "internal gaze," understood through her evocation of art historian Svetlana Alpers's discussion of seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting. In contrast to the subjective orientation of narrative history we find the objective orientation of a positivist history. Bush implicates the role of assumed naturalness in her discussion of such historical accounts. Jay's third visual mode, which Bush discusses as the "reflected gaze," is to be found in the representational qualities of Baroque painting. Here, the subject/object positions are understood as "ambiguous" through their reciprocity. It is at this juncture that Bush discusses the attributes of discursive history under the influence of Michel Foucault. In this discursive circularity the "observing 'eye' is reflected back onto the historian, creating an infinite reciprocity of meaning." After a discussion of these approaches in relationship to graphic design history, Bush proposes a fourth alternative, "the reflexive gaze." Using

historian Donald Lowe's concepts of "prospectivity" in relationship to the historiographic problem of "presentism," Bush argues for the use of reciprocal subject/object positions as a way of acknowledging that history is both a historian's subjective representation of the past from a present perspective, and one which is also involved in understanding the historical specificity of such events including the "anticipatory vision that the past held for itself."

Victor Margolin discusses three of the major accounts of graphic design history in his essay, "Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History". Focusing primarily on texts by Philip Meggs, Enric Satué and Richard Hollis, Margolin identifies two major problems: one related to the practice of graphic design itself, including what histories of it use as examples and the other related to the narrative strategies of each of the authors as revealed through their handling and positioning of these examples. As Margolin notes, all three authors are graphic designers and share a similar conception of what constitutes their canon while their incorporation of works from outside the construct of the professional practice of graphic design varies. What is

rendered problematic is the effacement of the historical specificity of these works as they are assimilated into a historical account and removed from distinct practices such as advertising and typography. What Margolin ultimately proposes is an acknowledgement of these differences so that we can "understand better how graphic design practice has been shaped by borrowings and appropriations from other discourses instead of seeing it as a single strand of activity that embraces a multiplicity of things."

Perhaps the most radical proposal put forward in these essays comes from Steve Baker when he asks, through the title of his essay, "A Poetics of Graphic Design?" Drawing heavily upon two French feminist theorists,[4] Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, Baker investigates the specific problem associated with the writing of history. Using Irigaray's rhetorical analysis of history's patriarchal privileging of time over space, Baker rightly questions the implications of our arguments against a linear, narrative chronology and the positing of a discursive, spatial alternative, on the form that this writing will take. Focusing on the distinguishing characteristic of graphic design, namely its

4
The problem with the use of the word feminist in relationship to the theoretical positions of both Cixous and Irigaray is taken up, along with a concise account of their work, by Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.* 1985. London and New York: Routledge.

conjuncture of word and image, Baker asks us: "Might a form of graphic design history-writing be imagined which was consonant with the practice of graphic design, and which would challenge this sign's gendered priorities by weaving a way of writing from (or around) one of the particular characteristics of its subject: the endlessly changing and infinitely complex relation of word and image?" Baker's provocative call for a poetics of graphic design would replace the transparency of history with an opaque alternative, one which would not necessarily strive for the "proper limits" of the discipline or even the safe knowledge that it was somehow done "right," or even "well." Such a writing practice takes it theoretical cue from "écriture féminine" developed by Cixous which recognizes the power of speaking, or more appropriately of voice, as a transgressive act while writing is seen as the privileged space for intervention. Such a writing practice would ignore the fixity of things like categories and hierarchies and, instead, favor the flux of pluralities and shifting positions. Unfixing the position of the observer, Baker seems to locate the historian's position ahistorically within the process itself, moving forward, "pushing

out towards, a working for, rather than a backward-looking gathering up of its significant moments." As Baker states, such a form of writing may be "hardly recognizable as history."

In the concluding essay of the first issue, Gérard Mermoz takes up the particular problem of typographic histories. Mermoz's essay is included in this volume because of the relevancy of its questions not only to typographic history but also to graphic design history, which has incorporated discrete histories of other practices to account for its historical origins. Mermoz organizes his arguments around two dualisms. The first dualism regards the problematic representation of differences found in typographic histories where issues of "cultural, aesthetic and semiological specificity" are ignored or effaced because the "typographic scene" (as Mermoz describes it) has been unable to transcend its own particular, singular "ideological frame of reference." The effect has been the inability of the scene to engage in a meaningful discussion of typographic difference that is not dogmatic and polemical or to include into its discussions the role of other important discourses, such as linguistics, semiotics, cultural theory, anthropology,

etc., which would tend to curb the technological determinism surrounding most historical accounts. The second dualism concerns the assessment of typographic literature, a place where Mermoz finds a lack of critical positioning and theorizing. As Mermoz states, "recent histories of typography and graphic design display a marked theoretical naiveté in their assumption that the facts of typographic history can speak for themselves, when allowed to unfold along a chronological path, unhindered by theory or ideology." The production of critical histories is necessary to impede the further consolidation of "typographic orthodoxies," and in the failure to do so we will, in Mermoz's words, "continue legitimating entrenched dogmas, tracing their genealogy from a mythical origin, along a Vasarian path — oscillating between grandeur and decadence — towards an ever-deferred promise of perfection." Mermoz's call is for a understanding of the pluralistic nature of typographic practices and their historical specificity which, in turn, requires a decentering of not simply the canon but the ideological frameworks which guide present understandings of typographic history and practice. As with Baker, Mermoz suggests

that the current models available for presenting such a history may be inadequate. For Mermoz, however, the suggestion is the investigation of computer-based multimedia presentations and/or the multilinear accounts available through hypertexts.

I believe that these essays begin to provide the necessary inroads toward what will constitute critical histories of graphic design. Tackling issues, from general to specific, of historical perspective, narration and writing, the essayists gathered here provide a valuable critique of the current situation. Although their individual positions may be different, the object of their critical focus is similar. Thus far, graphic design history has gestated in safety, awaiting its birth and the recognition of its autonomous status. It still waits, its body in crisis. □

Andrew Blauvelt
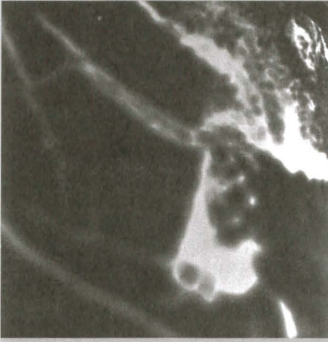
Andrew Blauvelt

An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces

A review of the particular problems which have been identified with the history of graphic design as a field of study and the emerging discipline of graphic design history is undertaken as an introduction to the special issues of *Visible Language* entitled, "New Perspectives: Critical Histories of Graphic Design." Operative definitions are provided to delimit the project and explicate the notion of critical histories. A case is put forward for the examination of graphic design through its relationships with larger discourses. A proposal is made for the exploration of graphic design's discursive spaces as an alternative form of historical inquiry.

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Solutions are not to be found in history. But one can always diagnose that the only possible way is the exasperation of the antitheses, the frontal clash of positions, and the accentuation of contradictions.

Manfredo Tafuri[1]

The Particular Problem of Graphic Design (History)

It is helpful at the outset to distinguish the disciplinary aspirations from the field of inquiry, or paraphrasing historian John Walker; graphic design history from the history of graphic design.[2] Many events could be cited to demonstrate the existence of what could be best labelled a proto-discipline of graphic design history: books and journals published, conferences organized, papers written, archives established, exhibitions presented, courses of study formed and persons claiming the status of "historian."[3] I use the term "proto-discipline" to describe graphic design history because, despite these numerous activities, a coherent body of autonomous knowledge has not formed which would be a prerequisite for any disciplinary status. The reasons for this seem quite numerous, but probably lie in the activity and social status of graphic design itself.

Most discussions of graphic design history are subsumed under the rubric of design history, a field that potentially comprises *all* design activities but that eschews certain design practices, namely architecture (which it sees as somehow distinct) and, more specifically, graphic design, in favor of the study of industrially-produced consumer products and certain (mostly pre-industrial) decorative art forms. While all forms of design activity must, by definition, conform to some shared traits, their historical specificity would reveal differences and demand certain approaches. It is these conditions or situations which, for better or worse, established the bracketing of art history, then design history from the larger field of historical studies. An umbrella approach of design history under which would fall the history of graphic design (among others) strives for a

1
Tafuri, Manfredo. 1980. *Theories and History of Architecture.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 237.

2
See Walker, John A. 1989. *Design History and the History of Design.* London: Pluto Press.

3
See Margolin, Victor. 1988. "A Decade of Design History in the United States 1977–87," *Journal of Design History,* 1:1. 51–72.

problematical unifying philosophy of design which undermines the significance of graphic design as a distinct field of inquiry, with specific historical contexts which demand particular attention.

If graphic design history has as its field of study the thing we have come to call "graphic design," then it is this term and its changing definitions that constitute a fundamental problem for sketching the limits of the discipline. While Philip Meggs ascribes the origins of graphic design to the cave paintings of Lascaux, others trace its development from the invention of movable type (Western with Gutenberg, rather than Eastern with Pi-Shêng). The current definitions of graphic design, however, come from the middle of this century and have as their objective the consolidation of certain activities and the exclusion of others for the benefit of professional autonomy (i.e., specialization of the designer and the segregation of production). Even the most general definitions regarding its status as printed matter have been rendered problematic by advances in electronic technologies and the often predicted demise of printed materials. As Victor Margolin noted in an essay about a decade of design history in the United States, the impetus for graphic design history as a field of study comes largely from those persons affiliated with educational institutions — teachers of the professional practice of graphic design.[4] This scenario has helped to shape the constitution of this proto-discipline. The ambiguity of definitions is reflected in the shifting terminology of the academy as educational programs have changed titles from "commercial and applied art" to "visual communication" and eventually "graphic design." To compensate for this, graphic design history has absorbed discrete histories of relevant areas such as those of technologies like printing and photography as well as the aesthetic models and approaches of art history. The ad-hoc nature of graphic design history creates its share of disadvantages since its incorporation of other disciplines' histories and methods has been undertaken with a characteristically unproblematic critical assessment. Ironically, many graphic design historians have treated the importation of "theory"

(as somehow distinct from history) from other disciplines with prejudicial scorn, particularly if it emanates through graphic designers or, if it emanates from those individuals outside of graphic design, with resistance to academic "carpetbagging."[5]

The shortcomings associated with the developments of a graphic design history have been reflected more recently in a series of articles written by both design historians and practitioners. I will attempt to reprise some of the major problems associated with the history of graphic design as a field of study and graphic design history as an emerging discipline.

The distinguishing characteristic of graphic design from both architecture and product design lies in its inherent ephemeral state. The ephemeral nature of most graphic design simply means that many of the objects of study no longer exist and are not normally collected nor archived. The transitory nature of graphic design creates a condition of "presentness" which, in turn, creates an ahistorical sensibility about the objects and the conditions of their formation and reception. Design historian Bridget Wilkins has commented that "[m]ost graphic design...is not an 'object of desire,'..." and, therefore, does not afford the attention and the significance attributed to certain product designs.[6] Paradoxically, this lack of objects has nevertheless contributed to the object-oriented nature of most, if not all, histories of graphic design. This orientation developed as an inheritance of art history, which itself developed out of the connoisseurship, historical attribution and classification of objects. For graphic design this has meant the selection of objects which testify to the value of design, or more appropriately the cultural capital of "good design." This selection process with its nebulous criteria and its accompanying rejection of certain objects of graphic design as somehow unworthy have been recently challenged.[7] Similarly, the focus accorded designers in the various accounts of graphic design history can be linked to the need for an emerging profession's legitimization including the desires of teachers to offer historical "role models" for students studying the contemporary practice of graphic design. The combined effects of both of these orientations (understood as the subjects and objects of heroicism) has

5
Margolin, Victor, editor. 1989. *Design Discourse*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 158. The term and concept are borrowed from an essay by Frances Butler, "Eating the Image: The Graphic Designer and the Starving Audience." Clive Dilnot addresses the "resistance to theory" encountered in design history in his essay "The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities," in the same collection.

6
Wilkins, Bridget. 1992. "No more heroes," *Eye*, 2:6, 6.

7
For one account see: Frascara, Jorge. 1993. "Graphic Design History: Its Purpose and Relevance," *Design Statements*, Winter, 13–16. The types of graphic design shown in history classes and reproduced in books tends to cater to an art historical tendency in which the things closest to paintings, like posters, get shown and where entire areas of graphic design produced for society are ignored, like the products of "information design," product packaging and even print advertising.

been to underplay the significance of the complex processes which allow for the production of both designers and design artifacts. What is also lost is the complexity surrounding the circumstances in which such artifacts are distributed, received and/or consumed in and through various segments of society, and increasingly, societies.[8] As it is currently most often taught, at least in the United States, the history of graphic design has been organized around the notion of contemporary professional practice wherein all previous subjects and objects ("history") are traced back and unfold in a linear, chronological fashion segmented through a series of stylistic successions — a procession that takes its cue from the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. The unfolding story is a *progression*, both technological and professional, from its past to its teleological present. The professional benefits of this type of history are, as Victor Burgin has related, "to legitimate careers and commodities — history-writing as underwriting."[9] Clive Dilnot has noted the consequences of this myth-making process:

> *How is myth manifested in design history? Most obviously by the* reduction *of its subject matter to an unproblematic, self-evident entity (Design) in a form that also reduces its historical specificity and variety to as near zero as possible. This reduction also restructures the history of design to a repetition of designers' careers and to the past as simply anticipating and* legitimating *the present.*[10]

As Dilnot has noted, the legitimizing function of a history in service to its profession denies the historical specificity, and thus understanding, of the professionalization of graphic design as a condition of its *current* state as well as its relative position to the vast amount of graphic design produced as a vernacular activity with anonymous contributors.[11] More importantly, the social significance of the activity of graphic design (i.e., the process of designing) is rendered absent as it is taken for granted, this at a time when the profession of graphic design tries to demonstrate its efficacy to both clients and society at large by relating its abilities against those of untrained professionals. Thus, the mythologizing of graphic design as a story related through its history and told to its future practitioners

8
I am attempting to describe two effects. One is the circulation of design in and through socially defined audiences (as opposed to a "mass" audience) and the other is the circulation of design across national boundaries mostly in the form of multinational corporate capitalism.

9
Burgin, Victor. 1988. "Something About Photography Theory," reprinted in *The New Art History*. A.L. Rees and F. Borzello, editors. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 45.

10
Dilnot, Clive. 1989. "The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities," reprinted in *Design Discourse*. Victor Margolin, editor. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 237.

11
Here I would distinguish the role of vernacular design, which Dilnot suggests has passed in relationship to disciplines such as architecture and industrial design, with the increase of non-professional graphic design practice which has surfaced with the advent of the personal computer. See Dilnot, Clive. "The State of Design History, Part II," 245.

confronts the technological de-mystification of its production through the advent of personal computers, software programs and desk-top publishing.

The overall effect is a lack of critical positioning and contextual understanding surrounding the practices of graphic design and its historical antecedents. The lack of critical dimension and theoretical application was noted as early as 1983,[12] again in 1988 by Victor Margolin[13] and who, in 1992, commented on the continuing failure to provide an adequate set of limits with which to organize a coherent body of knowledge that could be considered "Design History."[14] In response, Margolin's proposal called for a reappraisal of the notion of design history for a more inclusive concept of *design studies* which he described as:

> *...that field of inquiry which addresses questions of how we make and use products in our daily lives and how we have done so in the past. These products comprise the domain of the artificial. Design studies encompasses issues of product conception and planning, production, form, distribution, and use. It considers these topics in the present as well as in the past. Along with products, it also embraces the web of discourse in which production and use are embedded.[15]*

In a similar gesture, the British historian John Walker offered an alternative model for understanding the social context of design which describes its production, distribution and consumption.[16] Again disciplinary coherence, or rather the lack of it, precipitates his proposal:

> *The bulk of the literature on design consists of "partial" studies in the sense that there are books on designers, products, styles, design education, etc., but what is lacking is a general account of how all of these specific studies interrelate and, taken together, constitute a coherent totality.[17]*

Both Margolin's and Walker's models share a common concern for the social context of design and could be compared with similar events occurring in art history which fostered the development of the social history of art out of the same kind

12
See Vignelli, Massimo. 1983. "Keynote Address," in *The First Symposium on the History of Graphic Design: Coming of Age.* Rochester, New York: Rochester Institute of Technology, 8–11.

13
Margolin. "A Decade of Design History in the United States 1977–87," 58.

14
Margolin, Victor. 1992. "Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods." *Design Studies*, 13:2, 105-6.

15
Margolin, "Design History or Design Studies...," 115.

16
See Walker, John A. "Production-consumption Model," in *Design History and the History of Design*, 68–73.

17
Walker, "Production-consumption Model," 68.

of criticisms that have been levelled at the history of graphic design. The social history approach seeks an understanding of art and design outside of the objects and their creators — the transcendence of aesthetics and the artist/designer genius.[18] It provides a context for the objects insofar as they could be understood to manifest class struggle, and thus is indebted to a Marxist approach to interpretation. While Margolin's and Walker's models develop out of a Marxist understanding of production and consumption as reciprocal moments in an economic cycle, the type of context offered in both propositions goes beyond a traditional Marxist approach and has yet to be applied in most analyses of graphic design. What graphic design history has applied is not an understanding of class struggle or even the economic forces which serve to constrain design practices, but rather context as a background of world events or the filler of biographic anecdotes.[19] As with the social history of art, the effect has been to simply reproduce the canon (with more "details" or "context"), albeit without the economic determinism of a Marxist analysis. Graphic design history has yet to undertake the task of understanding its social context, understood as a range of effects: from the reproduction of cultural values through the work of graphic design to the shifting nature of consumption and reception, both conspicuous and symbolic, by audiences.[19]

Instead it is the canon of graphic design history which has served as the site for most contestation. The first inroads made were from feminist theories which challenged the operation of patriarchy in design (mainly architecture, product design and advertising). Not surprisingly, feminist theories have provided design history with its most developed critique for understanding design's social effects.[20] The specific response of graphic design history to the critiques provided by feminism has been the recuperation of the roles of certain women graphic designers who are "lost" to history.[21] Similarly, the canon is being challenged as individuals endeavor to understand the role race has played not only in terms of the existence and achievements of designers of color but also in the understanding of how racism is socially reproduced in the practices of design. Again,

18
For the incorporation of a post-structuralist account of authorship and intentionality in the social history of art see: Wolff, Janet. 1993. *The Social Production of Art*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. For an account of the development of the social history of art, particularly in Great Britain, see: Rees, A.L. and F. Borzello, editors. 1988. *The New Art History*.

19
For an argument of the conventional call for context understood as a set of social influences on graphic design see: Scott, Douglass. 1991. "Graphic Design History— In Context," in *Spirals*. Providence, Rhode Island: Rhode Island School of Design, Department of Graphic Design, Book Six, 217–225.

20
See Buckley, Cheryl. "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," in *Design Discourse*. Victor Margolin, editor, 251–262 and Judy Attfield, "FORM/female FOLLOWS FUNCTION / male: Feminist Critiques of Design," in Walker, John A. *Design History and the History of Design*, 199–225.

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graphic design history has responded by seeking the recupera-
tion of individual practitioners and by an examination of the
representations of "others" in the work of graphic design.[22]
Additionally, the impetus provided by the heightened aware-
ness of cultural relativity (i.e., multiculturalism) has served
to challenge the centrality of the canon with its focus on
graphic design from the United States and Western Europe.[23]
The response has been a call for the expansion of the canon
to accommodate work from outside these boundaries, but
little attention has been paid to a critical assessment of what
the canon actually allows as examples of graphic design or of
the seemingly operative definition of graphic design as an
exclusive product of industrialized, late-capitalist democracies.

New Perspectives: Critical Histories of Graphic Design

*Historical perspective therefore authorizes the
operation which, from the same place and within
the same text, substitutes conjunction for disjunction,
holds contrary statements together, and, more
broadly, overcomes the difference between an order
and what it leaves aside.*

Michel de Certeau[24]

What all of the aforementioned arguments suggest is an under-
standing of the cultural activity of graphic design as one rooted
in particular social practices. The activity of graphic design
would be understood as historically relative and therefore
changing, contributing to the notion of multiple *histories* of
graphic design. The subjects and objects of graphic design
history would move beyond the artifacts and designers to
encompass the complexity of the forces which allow for their
very existence. This *critical* positioning would include an
awareness of the limits of any historical project as revealed
through the historian's particular *perspective*. Incumbent in such
a heightened awareness would be the acknowledgement of the
disciplinary forces at work which serve to constrain the roles

21
The direct reference is to
a lecture by design critic
Karrie Jacobs entitled "Lost
Women in Design,"
presented at the 1992
Modernism and Eclecticism
Conference (School of
Visual Arts, New York).

22
Although sparse, the recu-
peration of graphic design-
ers of color has been
carried forward by several
individuals through various
forums such as lectures and
articles. In particular see:
Miller, Cheryl D. 1987.
"Black Designers Missing in
Action." *Print*, 41:5, 58–65,
138. Fath Davis Ruffins of
the Smithsonian Institution
in Washington, D.C.
provided an historical
account of ethnic represen-
tations in her lecture at the

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of not only graphic design and graphic designers but also of historians and history-writing, including the constitution and uses of knowledge. This concept of historically specific constraints was theorized by Michel Foucault,[25] whose work, as outlined by Mark Poster, suggests that:

> [t]he emancipatory interests promoted by historical materialism are sustained only with a detotalized theoretical stance such as that proposed by Foucault, a theoretical asceticism that severely restricts the truth claims of texts. There are two constraints of particular importance: 1) that the historian acknowledge his or her political orientation and 2) that the historian's text not claim to exhaust the meaning of the field to be investigated.[26]

Bearing these constraints in mind, the collection of essays contained in three consecutive issues of this journal have been positioned by the editor in order to facilitate certain ideas presupposed by the project itself and those suggested by common themes among the essays. The first collection of essays, contained in this issue, has been arranged with an emphasis on a critical appraisal of current approaches undertaken in the name of graphic design history. These essays address both general problems of historiography and history-writing as well as specific problems arising from current narrative accounts of graphic design history and the particular problem of typographic histories. The second collection of essays, found in volume 28, issue 4, has been grouped under the rubric of practice. They speak to a conception of graphic design as a variety of theoretically informed and socially engaged practices. Eschewing many current operative definitions of (mainly professional) practice, they address the role that graphic design does and could play when understood in its greater social context and the plurality of its activities. The diverse range of concerns shown in these essays moves us to an understanding of the cultural context of the practice of graphic design; from issues of social activism and the making of history to the methodological problems of examining the historically specific roles that women practitioners have played in patriarchy. The third collection of essays, found in volume 29, issue 1, offers specific case-studies of graphic design. They

1994 Modernism and Eclecticism Conference (School of Visual Arts, New York) entitled, "Race and Representation: Ethnic Imagery in American Advertising 1800–1960."

23
Works of graphic design have been allowed into the canon from outside the U.S.and Western Europe when they conform to the expectations of what constitutes graphic design in "first world" terms, such as posters which show the influence of European modernism.

24
de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Writing of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 89.

25
See Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books.

26
Poster, Mark. 1989. "Foucault, the Present, and History," in *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 73.

represent a critical position in relationship to their object of study, focusing on the roles of historical interpretation, from the assignment of meaning(s) to the understanding of performative effect(s). The subject matter of these case-studies ranges from a reassessment of historical icons from graphic design history's canon to the inclusion of previously ignored products of the vernacular practice of graphic design. These essays strive for an understanding of their subject matter as a product of greater cultural forces while acknowledging the active role designers and society play in their construction.

An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces

Acknowledging the homogenizing tendency of the editorial process of ordering wherein differences are effaced, the texts represented in these volumes are in service to the project at hand. They have been arranged in three issues, each issue with a particular focus (critiques, practices and interpretations) and each essay serves this ordering purpose and simultaneously defies it. The act of ordering texts only serves to undermine the editorial purpose as each focus overflows the boundaries of its imposed limits. The artificial nature of these foci is exposed in the overlapping themes of the essays across all three issues. In this way, we can detect, for example, critical assessments of graphic design history either explicitly or implicitly in all essays. While the ordering of texts has been determined and the foci fixed, the connections between essays are indeterminate and unfixed. History is thus understood as a production, one which is completed fully only when it has been engaged — and its meanings negotiated — as it passes from an (un)fixed writing to an (un)fixed reading. The accentuation of the boundaries and the play between the three foci determine the limits of this project. As such, this historical project is simply another work on the margins as it defines itself against some contiguous "other." In turn, the marginal limits of historical projects form the field of investigations. The historian Michel de Certeau relates:

> *Whatever the author's own position, his work both describes*
> *and engenders the movement which leads history to become a*
> work on the margins: *to situate itself through its relation to*
> *other discourses, to place discursivity in its relation to an elimi-*
> *nated other, to measure results in relation to the objects that*
> *escape its grasp; but also to establish continuities by isolating*
> *series, to analyze methods closely by distinguishing distinct*
> *objects which they grasp at once in a single fact, to revise and*
> *to compare the different periodizations that various types of*
> *analysis bring forth, and so forth. Hereafter the "problem is no*
> *longer of tradition and trace, but of delimitation and margins."*[27]

Consequently, the boundaries of each study and the project as
a whole begin to create a set of limits to the field of inquiry,
both through their presence — their positive formations
with discernible edges — and through their absence — their
negative ground by which they are rendered visible. This
project creates a group of present or visible points (the essays)
as well as a field of absences, what de Certeau refers to as the
"eliminated other." Thus, I would contend that this project
defines as much by what it leaves aside as by what it includes.
This opening in the field of graphic design history creates a
discursive space for investigation insofar as we are able to
conceive of the absences that are generated by history itself.
These absences could be understood as those elements which
are effaced in conventional historical accounts which favor
the transparency of objects, the assignment of meanings, the
attribution and classification of objects, the centrality of the
designer and (usually) his intentions, the evolution and refine-
ment (development) from past to present, the logical succession
of events and styles, etc. In contrast, discursive accounts would
emphasize the opacity and complexity of relationships which
allow for the production of graphic design and graphic designers,
the understanding of the performative effects of such produc-
tion, a critical understanding of the role of the subject (designer
and audience) neither solely as a free, autonomous agent nor
as an individual completely dominated or determined by the
prevailing hegemony, the examination of the exclusions of
graphic design history's canon and a move away from history as
a chain of events to history as a space of critical positions.[28]

Perhaps we should be pleased with the proto-disciplinary nature of graphic design history, in the sense that it has not achieved full disciplinary status. After all, it is the instrumental uses of knowledge and its segregation into discrete units which has been rendered so problematical in the last few decades by the blurring of boundaries between disciplines. The complex nature of the design process necessitates an understanding of it which intergrates knowledge from many different disciplines and in the process develops its own particular account. For the discursive spaces of graphic design to be opened for investigation requires that the defensive posturing and the shoring-up of the walls of graphic design history be exchanged for the active examination of the "limits" of graphic design.[29] □

29
I use the term "limits" here instead of Michel Foucault's "discontinuities," because, as Michel de Certeau observes, it is too suggestive of a rupture in reality. I do not intend to set definable or defendable limits for the field of graphic design.
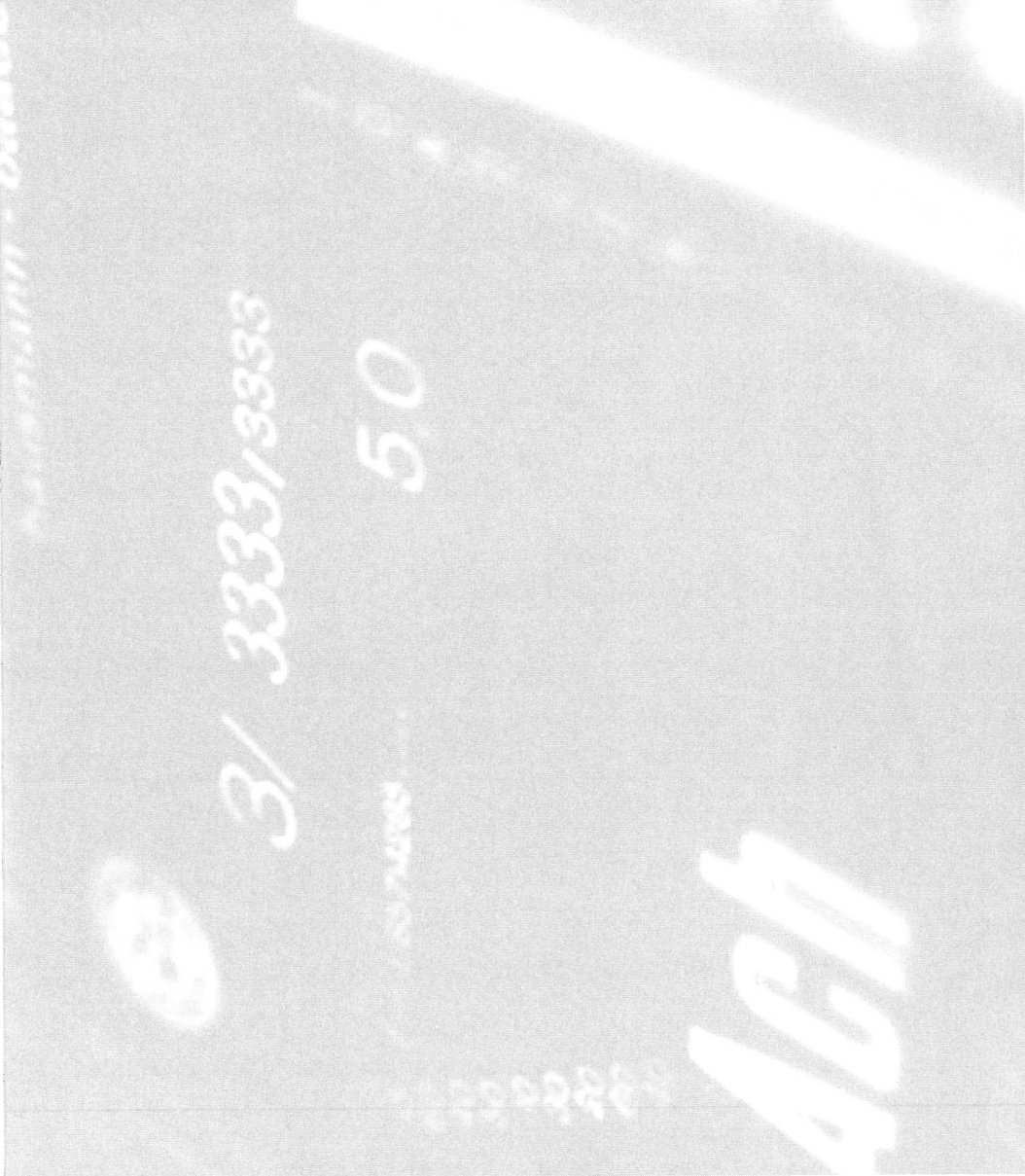
Anne Bush

Through the Looking Glass: Territories of the Historiographic Gaze

This essay introduces the subject/object juxtapositions inherent in the writing of history. By comparing these "perspectives" with subject/object positions in the visual arts it will present not only a background to current historiographic models, but will also suggest ways to extend beyond traditional historical method.

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I reflected that everything, to everyone, happens precisely, precisely now. Century after century, and only in the present, do things happen. There are innumerable men in the air, on land and on sea, and everything that happens, happens to me.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*

In 1822, Hegel proclaimed that all history is the history of thought. As part of his famous lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel distinguished the past, or actual events, from history, or human *reflection* upon those events.[1] According to Hegel, our knowledge of all previous actions, whether human or natural, is based on the extrinsic manifestation of our *conception* of those actions. It is a view from a distanced position, an interpretation from a separate temporal and spatial moment. With this said, it follows that historiography, or the writing of history, cannot be an *objective* documentation of human or natural actions per se, but can only be a perspective, the *subjective* interpretation of those actions. It is a representation composed in the present, an articulation of an object conceived by the cognitive, subjective gaze. Thus, verbal histories bear a close affinity with the visual realm. Both verbal and visual perspectives encompass a tripartite structure that includes the object being "observed," as well as the method of observation and the ways in which the "observer" *subjectively* alters it.

Following the model of nineteenth-century art historiography, histories of graphic design have traditionally been object-centered, focused on aesthetic or contextual analyses of the designed product. This perception is narrow at best. Recent theoretical discussions have extended design "beyond the object," into the dimensions of both action and ideology.[2] If the purpose of historical investigation is self-knowledge, then we must not fall prey to the fallacy of *objective* evaluation. All representations are subjective constructions.

Attention to these points of view, or the privileging of sight, has been described by the historian Martin Jay as a singularly Modern phenomenon. In his essay, "Scopic Regimes of

1
Hegel, G.F. 1956. *The Philosophy of History.* New York: Dover, 8-9.

2
For further discussions of this topic see: Baudrillard, Jean. 1981. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.* St. Louis: Telos Press, and 1983. "The Ecstasy of Communication" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture.* Hal Foster, ed. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 126-134. Also see: Thackara, John. 1988. "Beyond the Object "in *Design After Modernism.* London: Thames and Hudson, 11-34.

Modernity", Jay defines three visual "modes" — Renaissance linear perspective, seventeenth-century Dutch observational perspective and Baroque reciprocal perspective — that have significantly effected the way we understand the world.[3] By highlighting these subject/object positions in the visual arts, he presents a conceptual scaffolding around which I will build relations between visual and verbal perspectives of history.

The External Gaze

The narrative view of history as storytelling is inexorably linked to humanism. If the Christian world privileged the divine "eye," then the secular world championed the human eye as the controlling subject. This conception, which permeated fifteenth-century intellectual discussions, became visually manifest with the introduction of linear perspective.

Discovered by Brunelleschi, the theoretical attributes of linear perspective were first outlined in Alberti's treatise, *De Pittura*. According to Alberti, the goal of perspective was to center the subject's vision at a critical point in the visual narrative, to draw the viewer into the scene, to fix his or her gaze.

> *These instructions are of such a nature that [any painter] who really understands them will both by his intellect and by his comprehension of the definition of painting realize how useful they are. Never let it be supposed that anyone can be a good painter if he does not clearly understand what he is attempting to do. He draws the bow in vain who has nowhere to point the arrow.*[4]

Optically, linear perspective attempts to represent a three-dimensional world within a two-dimensional plane. As a geometric structure it consists of two cones which meet at the canvas surface in a diamond-shaped configuration. The apexes of these cones then extend in opposite directions; one to the controlling eye of the artist, the other into the painting. This juxtaposition, points to both the story being told and the painter who visually controls the narrative. Evident in Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin*, the artist becomes Alberti's

3
Jay, Martin. 1992. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Modernity and Identity*. Scott Lash and Johnathan Friedman, editors. Oxford: Blackwell, 178-195. (First appeared in a shorter form in Foster, Hal ed., *Vision and Visuality*, 1988. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press).

4
Alberti, L.B. 1966. *On Painting*. J.R. Spencer, editor. New Haven: Yale University Press, 59. First published 1435-6.

archer. Here, Raphael constructed an unambiguous narrative where the viewer is led to both the central action of the wedding and, by way of the perspectival pathway, the open doorway in the building directly behind the ceremony. This visual link connects the foreground and background of the painting. It becomes a unified target for the visual marksman, a coherent, transparent window to which the viewer is drawn, yet physically separated by the canvas surface. Edged by a hypothetical frame, the canvas delineates a concrete boundary between reality and illusion, spectator and spectacle. Here a threshold is created, a *mise en scene*, a contained moment in which the observer is solely a voyeur. The world of the painting becomes a contained visual reality where all interaction is dictated by the artist's static and hegemonic eye.

As a complement to this visual supremacy, the dominant eye of linear perspective finds its philosophical counterpart in the cognitive "I" of René Descartes. In an effort to expand philosophical inquiry beyond meaningless conjecture, Descartes sought a methodology through which he could rationally test assumptions. Viewing reality as a mental construct, Descartes denounced all phenomena which could be questioned and championed a process of rational deduction. Identified primarily as a mathematician, Descartes believed that the only actuality which could not be doubted was the doubting self, hence his famous dictum; *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am). He perceived all reality outside the doubting self as separate and detached, as "entities modeled on retinal images – representations which are in the mind."[5] In keeping with linear perspective, the apex of the conceptual "cone" in the Cartesian model is now the human mind, the vantage from which the subject determines his or her environment. Paradoxically, this reasoning led Descartes to denounce history as a valid intellectual discipline. In his *Discourse on Method* he argued that suppositions about previous events are always subject to doubt and, as such, do not adhere to methods of rational inquiry.

5
Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 45.

> *...even histories, true though they be, and neither exaggerating nor altering the value of things, omit circumstances of a meaner and less dignified kind in order to become more worthy of a reader's attention; hence the things which they describe never happened exactly as they describe them and men who try to model their own acts upon them are prone to the madness of romantic paladins and meditate hyperbolic deeds.*[6]

Narrative historians, however, fully understand the futility of trying to recreate the past objectively. History to them is a rhetorical endeavor and they not only acknowledge but also utilize their subjective position as a historiographic device. As architects of historical representations, narrative historians understand the modes of rhetorical construction to which their audience will respond. Predominantly, these compositions are determined by factors outside history including social, cultural and ideological conventions. Thus, as Hayden White observes, narrative histories become, "symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that 'liken' the events reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar."[7] So conceived, history-as-storytelling directs the reader's perspective to the center of an illusory world. Like the Renaissance canvas, narrative history is not concerned with the *objective* documentation of human and natural actions, but with a *subjective*, monocentric conception of those actions relayed to us as a kind of fiction.

The External Gaze

In 1505, the French priest, Jean Pélerin outlined a conflicting visual mode. In *De Artificiali Perspectiva*, he described the mind not as an end point at which stimuli are consumed and interpreted, but as a mirror, an impartial reflection of the surrounding world. As such, the controlling eye of linear perspective is reduced to a passive corridor. It becomes the indiscriminating conduit of information, a tunnel to a mind where empirical knowledge is documented, stored and objectively reflected back to the natural world.[8] A manifestation of this conception is evident in Dutch painting of the seventeenth century.

6
Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method.* quoted in Collingwood, R.G. 1956. *The Idea of History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 59.

7
White, Hayden. 1978. "Historical Text as Literary Artifact," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 91.

8
Brion-Guerry, 1962. *L. Jean Pelerin Viator: Sa Place dans l'Histoire de la Perspective.* Paris: Société d'Edition Les Belles Lettres, 219-220.

As an "art of observation," Dutch painting unified real and
representational worlds. Conceived as an empirical record of
everyday life, the autonomy of the subjective eye was neutral-
ized, and an ambiguous duality was created between the actual
world of the viewer and the extended world of the artificial.
In her book, *The Art of Describing*, Svetlana Alpers attributes
this observational perspective to both a Dutch interest in the
properties of light and a plethora of images in seventeenth-
century Dutch society.

> *In Holland the visual culture was central to the life of the
> society. One might say that the eye [my emphasis] was a
> central means of self-expression and visual experience a central
> mode of self-consciousness.*[9]

This self-representation, however, was austere and simplified,
an attempt at an unadulterated documentation. "Dutch paint-
ing was not and could not be anything but a portrait of
Holland, its external image, faithful, exact, complete, life-like,
without any adornment,"[10] a purity of observation that paral-
leled the Dutch purity of life. Dutch representation was neutral
and focused on the direct analysis of details, replicating
seventeenth-century perceptions of the natural world.

In making the correlation between the *"art of description"* and
historiography, the key word is *natural*. As objective compila-
tion, empirical or *positivist* historiography attempts to eschew
all ideology in favor of scientific inquiry to create propositions
that champion the natural. Akin to the textual criticism of
classical philology, empirical history focuses on the close
examination of evidence. This history is a search for authorita-
tive data. Its purpose is not interpretive conjecture regarding
authorial intention, but rather the legitimization of sources, an
objective compilation of factual, valid research. In both the
Dutch observational perspective and empirical historiography,
judgment and conclusions are curtailed. The positivist's
purpose is to locate and examine singular moments, synthesize
them without evaluation, and "reflect" them as neutral
components existing *in the world*. In each case, the viewing
subject is not relegated to a single position. He or she is only a
notational element within an infinite diversity.

9
Alpers, Svetlana. 1983.
The Art of Describing.
Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, xxv. 1 2

10
Alpers, *The Art of
Describing,* xviii.

The Reflected Gaze

In the Baroque we find Jay's third and final visual "mode." Similar to the Dutch perspectival realm, the Baroque "eye" was anti-Cartesian, existing as part of a larger milieu. But unlike the "art of description," the Baroque point of view had no pretense to the neutral gaze, and in Baroque painting, the subject/object relationship was ambiguous. The purpose of Baroque painting was to seduce and amaze through extensive formal elaboration and mystical opacity. Contrary to the controlled or neutral objects of previous examples, the Baroque object "looked back" at the subjective eye, refusing to have meaning imposed upon it, rendering the exchange incomplete. Baroque subject/object relations represent a reciprocity that is kinetic and unpredictable. Thus, traditional notions of perspective are interrupted as the viewer is teased and aroused in a futile effort to reconcile the switching positions. As Michel Foucault noted in his essay on Velasquez's *Las Meninas:*

> As soon as they place the spectator in the field of their gaze, the painter's eyes seize hold of him, force him to enter the picture, assign him a place at once privileged and inescapable, levy their luminous and visible tribute from him, and project it upon the inaccessible surface of the canvas within the picture. He sees his invisibility made visible to the painter and transposed into an image forever invisible to himself.[11]

Indeed, it is this struggle for power, this unattainable presence in a nonexistent reality that has both plagued and propelled modern historiography. In his book *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau states that "historiography has arisen from the European encounter with the unknown other."[12] Whether the subject possessed the single eye of the narrative historian or the assumed objective eye of the empiricist, history in both cases was controlled by the unilateral quality of the subjective gaze.

Discursive historiography provides an alternative to this single perspective by emphasizing the relativity of historical moments. In a discursive analysis events are not privileged

11
Foucault, Michel. 1973. *The Order of Things.* New York: Random House, 5.

12
De Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Writing of History.* New York: Columbia University Press, vii.

as historical icons but rather as factors within a structural system of multifaceted relationships. The discursive framework not only includes the striated levels of its own construction, but also its meta-systemic intersection with other historical constellations. As Foucault has outlined, "discursive historiography is an 'archeological investigation' which exposes the combination of individual events, their determinants, and their respective intersections (divergent and convergent)."[13] Like the Baroque, it serves to acknowledge, not reconcile, temporal and spatial ambiguity. "Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis."[14] It is the aim of discursive historiographers not to subjectively homogenize the past, but to describe the opacity of its construction, the intersection of concordances and contradictions. In discursive history, as in the art of the Baroque, the subjective gaze is inevitable. Yet, the observing eye is reflected back onto the historian, creating an infinite reciprocity of meaning. Thus, discursive accounts speak to both the multifarious conditions influencing historiographic perspective and the fallacious notion that history can ever be a fixed, quantifiable entity.

Reflecting Histories of Graphic Design

As in other historical studies, the concept of containing graphic design's past under a single rubric is futile. There is no *History* of graphic design, no single synthesis, no unified entity. To assume so relegates the study of the past to either a hegemonic simplification or a utopian belief in dialectical progress. Events in history are multi-faceted constructions. As such, their representations are complex and often the simplification of concepts masks, rather than extends, understanding. The reduction of graphic design histories to treatises that focus on a single informational product, such as an individual or a style ignores the greater milieu from which we garner knowledge. By the same token, the belief in cause and effect as an infinite conversion to a more refined end, is also fallacious. The catalogued sequence of eras, products or

13
Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 8.

14
Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 8.

schools of thought conceptually submits design production
to the guise of progress. Dialectical progression, however, is
an idealist vision that anticipates a final reconciliation, a
"meeting of the minds," framed by the historicist tendencies
of the author.

Any notion of a defined framework runs the risk of lapsing
into canonical prescription. As an indictment to the structuralist
claim to a fixed, and thus true and observable meaning, post-
structuralism reveals the heroic, subjective nature concealed in
structuralist attempts to define and master historical signs.
Discursive interpretations champion the ephemeral. They are
merely descriptive "suspensions" within an infinitely kinetic
network. By delineating temporary boundaries around histori-
cal convergences, the discursive historian excerpts particular
moments for study that have no pretense to be absolute.
Instead of uncovering the exemplary, discursivity only suggests
possibilities, and in so doing, broadens our historical archive.
This extension reveals both the various forms of chronology
imposed on the writing of history as well as the outside forces
and intrinsic methods which make these forms manifest. In
addition, it exposes the multiple rates of transformation within
a determined discursive configuration. Through this method,
discursive analysis suspends the historical assumption that
temporal notions of the past are linear and sequential.[15]

This suspension allows us to examine our presuppositions about
historical movement in graphic design. It presents propositions
that vary according to types of articulation and levels of emer-
gence, and allows us to compare these momentary configurations
with others that have previously been articulated. It is here that
we discern the difference between questioning what change is
and accepting it a priori.[16] Issues to consider include not only
how individual elements of a historical system were tranformed,
but also how different relations within that system were altered.
To perform this analysis is to understand that alternative objects
of study, articulations, concepts, etc. do not emerge fully mani-
fest, but may represent particular hybrid forms.[17] Thus, discourse
is not static even though it is momentarily suspended. Outside
this pause, levels of discursive articulation are realized in an
infinitude of variation.

15
Foucault, 169.

16
Foucault, 173.

17
Foucault, 173.

As an area of observation, suspended historical moments are established by drawing temporary boundaries and/or delimiting the external forces surrounding a particular practice.[18] One of many examples, Marxist theory provides a well-known configuration that examines the limits imposed on cultural production by global capitalism. This process is both scorned and encouraged by conceptions of national identities and the effect of these conceptions on the products of visual communication. Hence, the field of study is established by comparing propositions and distinguishing them from others that are not necessarily part of the same time frame or acted upon by the same outside determinants. Through comparison, the historian searches for similarities and divergences of relations at the expense of the arbitrary Zeitgeist. Thus, discursive historiography is the search for theories of attribution, articulation and designation within a defined, historical network. What forces can be described as linked to the objects (artifact, act, value) of graphic design? How do they achieve their effects? In what ways are they identified (or ignored) by the graphic design profession? The goal of discursivity is not to present these border zones as an *absolute*, but to discuss them as one of many possible configurations.[19] This is particularly important for histories of graphic design because its articulation is by definition interdisciplinary. All visual communication is inextricably linked to economics, industrial production and consumptive value as well as to ideological biases.

The histories of graphic design are examinations of arguments. This study, however, is not always a duality, an "either/or." Discursive theories dictate that the object is multifaceted, and that it can be examined from several vantage points. Thus, historical propositions in graphic design can vary according to semantic categories imposed upon the object of study, as well as the different ways in which these classifications are formed.[20] These propositions can also differ according to various oppositional levels that pit part against whole, rigidity against freedom, the arbitrary against the concrete and inclusion against exclusion.[21] The value of these binary sets lies in the inevitability of debate, the recognition that alternative avenues of investigation are unavoidable and that they widen our view of the past.

18
Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon Books, 157-165.

19
Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge.* 158.

20
Foucault, 149-156.

21
Foucault, 154.

Thus, discursive contradictions in graphic design histories act both to combine and separate specific theses. This does not, however, neutralize them to a single whole or pluralism, but instead, maps intersections of thought – the relationships that both govern and exist between graphic design as an object, a value and an act.[22]

It is important not to confuse these temporal emergences with the concept of origin. As Foucault has pointed out, the traditional historiographic search for a definable source was substantiated by the attribution of historic events to either "old" or "new" rubrics. The "old" was used as the stabilizing mode, the way in which historical elements hold together by virtue of what they had in common.[23] Such designations provided history with a foundation, a method through which to compare and legitimize the historical propositions in question with those that went before. This method is evident in chronologically ordered graphic design histories in which sources are attributed to particular schools or "masters," technological developments and national origins. Opposing this nostalgic perspective is the legitimization of whatever the writer chooses to separate from this lineage. Thus, we have *die neue typographfie, New American Design, The New Discourse,* etc., ad infinitum. As such, history becomes an eternal love affair with "novelty," distinguishing the "better," or separating truth from fiction. The paradox in this type of historical positioning is the assumption that it is possible to divide the two. Concepts of reevaluation, reaction and discovery expose the fallacy of their separation. Thus, we understand their meaning *within* the shadow of the "other," their perpetual "difference."[24] This comprehension, however, does not imply a study of the old as the legitimizing precursor of the new, but as an evaluation of the relations that can be discerned at a definable moment. With this said, we can negate the temptation to make analogies based solely on lineage or resemblance on the one hand, and temporal improvement or progress on the other. Who or what defines the true order of events? For example, can it be claimed that *die neue typographfie* preceded the *International Typographic Style* when the later quoted its

22
Foucault, 155.

23
Foucault, 141.

24
For the roots of this discussion of "difference" or "différance" see Derrida, Jacques. 1976. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" from *Of Grammatology.* 1977. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Also see Derrida, Jacques. 1968. "Differance" an address to the Societé français de philosophie. Both are reprinted in Adams, Hazard and Searle, Leroy, eds. 1989. *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 83-136.

attributes, utilized its methods and modified its claims? Also, how do we *identify* likenesses between past and present? Surely, the Bauhaus does not hold exactly the same meaning for us today that it did for Pevsner.[25] Thus, we need to examine the conjuncture of meanings and implications, and not lapse into a false positioning relative to old or new configurations.

The Reflexive Gaze

Graphic designers possess particular affinities with the linear subjectivity of traditional historiography. During a large part of the twentieth century graphic designers willingly accepted the sequential, "transparent" qualities of the typographic message, the mandate of the "Crystal Goblet."[26] It is not surprising then that we would find it difficult to separate from a subject-centered and progressive historiography. Current examinations of industrial capitalism, however, have thrown this acceptance into question. The historian Donald Lowe notes:

> *Visual primacy and objective reason, supported by typographic culture, isolated certain perceived phenomena as cause and others as effect. The linear connection from cause to effect imposed a positive order on intersubjectivity...However this linearity broke down in corporate capitalism. By the early twentieth century, correlative to the concentration and control of the leading industries by trusts and cartels, three altered relations characterized the multi-level structure of corporate capitalism, namely those between production and consumption, between economy and the state and between economic structure and ideology.[27]*

The designed product as visual image or message, has no single referent. Instead, it is an organic structure, an alluvial connection relative to changing consumer positions, values and expectations. As such, the discipline of graphic design has become multiperspectival.

It is important not to confuse this diversity of vantage point with early modernist attempts to collapse time and space. Contrary to cubist or surrealist intentions to "disrupt" visual and conceptual "connections," our current point of view

25
See Pevsner, Nikolaus. 1960. *Pioneers of Modern Design*. New York. Penguin Books, 38-9.

26
The concept of the "Crystal Goblet" was taken from the book of the same name by Beatrice Warde, particularly the opening essay, "Printing Should Be Invisible". In this essay, she compares the printed page to a "flagon of wine," a "crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble and as transparent."

27
Lowe, David. 1982. *History of Bourgeois Perception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1.

concentrates on intersections, the places where events interrelate, transform and reposition our conventional interpretations. In historiography we are not just experimenting with juxtaposition or the destruction of traditional affinities, but rather the convergence and divergence of particular events, the actuality of their crossing and dispersal viewed from the present perspective.

In his book, *History of Bourgeois Perception*, Donald Lowe reaffirms Hegel's philosophical belief in the past as a present construction.[28] He proposes that our sense of this ongoing present is *prospective*, and reveals the relationship between the anticipatory vision that the past held for itself as a future construction and the ability of the historian to observe the actuality of that prospect. As such the representation of the past from a present perspective does not reduce to a pragmatic device for current ideological gains, but produces a reciprocal relationship between the prospective vision of a past reality and the historical representation of that vision by the historian.

> *Prospectivity within retrospection is the reflexivity of historical consciousness. Beyond the mere ascertaining of "facts" and "events," the historian will have to apprehend the prospective reality of a past, as well as locate it within an explanatory context undertaken from the vantage of the present. Not merely do we see the French Revolution from our present vantage point, but we need to show how the various groups of French people in 1789 saw their unfolding revolution, and in our explanation of it we should not reduce the significance of their experience.[29]*

It is within this reciprocity that we can understand the importance of shifting the unilateral viewpoint of subjective histories of graphic design to the reciprocity of discursive analysis. By suspending the temporal intersection of historical events, studying their multiple levels of convergences as well as their individual manifestations, and then re-presenting them from a present perspective, we divulge a plethora of observations and relationships, ones that reveal as much about ourselves as they do about the past. □

28
Lowe, David. 1982. *History of Bourgeois Perception.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press,174.

29
Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception*, 175.

1847 ...
Height and ...
Eyre, California ...
1848 Marx and Engels ...
Communist Manifesto ...
rights convention in ...
Pre-Raphaelite Movement ...
1849 Amelia Bloomer rights ...
women's clothes, her name ...
associated with undergarment ...
1850 Nathaniel Hawthorne writes The
Scarlet Letter, Crystal Palace erected
in London, Schooner America wins
first America's Cup
1851 Herman Melville's Moby Dick not
well received. Isaac Singer manufac-
tures first practical sewing machine
Verdi composes Rigoletto.
Uncle Tom's Cabin
1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe writes
1854 Thoreau writes Walden.
1855 Walt Whitman writes Leaves of
Grass
1856 Gustave Flaubert publishes
Madame Bovary
1857 Elisha Graves Otis installs first
...
... Charles Darwin publishes Origin
... oil well drilled in
... Charles Blondin crosses
... war begins U.S.
... Emancipation frees
... advertising agents

1884 ...
Right ...
Liberty ...
1887 Sir Ar...
Study in Sc...
made in Germ...
1888 Van Gogh ...
Chair, George E...
box camera J B...
pneumatic tire J...
London
1889 A. E. E. Eiffel
1890 William Jam...
ciples of Psycho...
1891 Judson inve...
1892 Oscar Wilde...
emere's Fan. Tou...
At the Moulin Rou...
1892 Tchaikovsky...
Nutcracker Rud...
engine Henry F...
1894 Alfred Drey...
for treason Rud...
Jungle Book
1895 Lumière...

Victor Margolin

Narrative Problems
of Graphic Design History

The problem of method in the construction of narratives
is particularly acute in the field of graphic design
history. Various publications have brought attention to
the subject of graphic design history, but have not
marked a course for the full explanation of how graphic
design developed as a practice. Three major texts by
Philip Meggs, Enric Satué and Richard Hollis address
the history of graphic design, but each raises questions
about what material to include, as well as how graphic
design is both related to and distinct from other visual
practices such as typography, art direction and illustra-
tion. The author calls for a narrative strategy that is
more attentive to these distinctions and probes more
deeply into the way that graphic design has evolved.

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Narrativity becomes a problem *only when we wish to give* real events the form *of a story.*[1]

Introduction

In recent years scholars have devoted considerable attention to the study of narrative structures in history and fiction.[2] Central to their concerns are several key issues: notably what constitutes a narrative as opposed to other forms of temporal sequencing of actions and events and how a narrative makes claims to being true or fictive. Regarding the first issue, Hayden White has identified three kinds of historical representation: the annals, the chronicle and history itself. Of these, he argues, only history has the potential to achieve narrative closure.[3] By organizing our accounts of the past into stories, we attempt to "have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary."[4] While some theorists like White regard history as a narrative that refers to events outside itself, others, particularly those who define themselves as postmodernists, refuse to make a distinction between fact and fiction and, in effect, treat all history as fiction.[5] That is not the position I will take in this essay, but I mention it to acknowledge a climate in which the idea of history as objective reality is heavily contested.

The distinction that White makes between the messiness of events and the order that historians seek to impose on them is important because it denaturalizes the narrative itself and obliges us to interpret the historian's strategy as a *particular* attempt to order events rather than recognize the historical work as an objective account of the past. This brings to the fore the necessity of including an analysis of the historian's method in the discussion of a work of history, whether or not that method has been made explicit.

The problem of method in the construction of narratives is particularly acute in the field of design history which, since Nikolaus Pevsner's proto-history of design, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* was first published in 1936, has been highly charged with moral judgments that have conditioned the

1
White, Hayden. 1980. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry*, 7:1 (Autumn), 8.

2
The study of narrative forms is a distinct field of research called narratology. A useful introduction is David Carrier's article "On Narratology," in *Philosophy and Literature*, 8:1, 32-42. For a full account of the subject, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Translated by Christine van Boheemen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

3
White. "The Value of Narrativity...," 9.

4
White. "The Value of Narrativity...," 27.

5
Linda Hutcheon provides an account of this position in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989. See particularly the chapter entitled "Re-presenting the past."

choices of subject matter and the narrative strategies historians have employed.[6] Adrian Forty, for example, in a response to an article I published on the relation of design history to design studies, claimed that the judgment of quality in design is central to the enterprise of design history.[7]

I do not believe that quality is the primary concern although it raises necessary questions about how different people give value to products. However, the question of what design history is about has never been thoroughly addressed or debated, which has resulted in considerable confusion in the field, a condition which the move to establish graphic design as a separate subject area of design history has been unable to escape.[8]

Issues in Graphic Design History

The first book on graphic design history to gain widespread recognition was Philip Meggs's *A History of Graphic Design*, first published by Van Nostrand Reinhold in 1983 and then in a revised and expanded edition in 1992. It has been extensively used as a text in design history courses and includes a wide range of material. In 1988, Enric Satué, a graphic designer in Barcelona, published *El Diseño Gráfico: Desde los Orígenes hasta Nuestros Días (Graphic Design: From Its Origins until Today)*, which appeared originally as a series of articles in the Spanish design magazine *On*. The most recent book on the topic is Richard Hollis's *Graphic Design: A Concise History*.[9] In addition, there have been supplementary works such as *Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design: An Illustrated Survey* by James Craig and Bruce Barton, which appeared in 1987, and *The Thames and Hudson Encyclopedia of Graphic Design + Designers* by Alan and Isabella Livingston, published in 1992.[10] We have as well various chronicles and histories of graphic design in particular countries such as *Visual Design: 50 Anni di Produzione in Italia*, by Giancarlo Iliprandi, Alberto Marangoni, Franco Origoni, and Anty Pansera; *The Graphic Spirit of Japan* by Richard S. Thornton; *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century*, by Scott Minick and Jiao Ping; and *Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History*, the catalog of the exhibition curated by Mildred Friedman at the Walker Art Center in 1989.[11]

6
Pevsner, Nikolaus. 1936. *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*. London: Faber & Faber. The book was subsequently republished in several revised editions as *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius*.

7
Forty, Adrian. 1993. "A Reply to Victor Margolin." *Journal of Design History* 6:2, 131-132. My article, "Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods" was published in *Design Studies* 13 :2, 104-116.

8
Arguments for a separate history of graphic design have been voiced for more than a decade. See Steven Heller, "Towards an Historical Perspective.' *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* 2:4, 5, the special issue of the Journal, entitled "The History of Graphic Design: Charting a Course." Steven Heller, editor. *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* 3:4 and Steven Heller, "Yes, Virginia, There is a Graphic Design History." *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* 10:1, 4.

9
Meggs, Philip B. 1992. *A History of Graphic Design*, 2nd ed. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold; Satué, Enric. 1988.

▶

While this plethora of publications is commendable for the attention it brings to the subject of graphic design, it has not led to any clarification of how graphic design has been constituted by the respective authors nor has it marked a satisfactory course for the fuller development of a narrative structure that can begin to explain graphic design as a practice. The term "graphic design," itself as it as it is applied in most books on the subject remains problematic. W.A. Dwiggins was the first to call himself a graphic designer, a title he used to characterize a practice that consisted primarily of typography and book design.[12] The term was subsequently adopted, beginning sometime after World War II, to replace such appellations as "commercial art" and "typographic art."

Some authors have used "graphic design" to account for all attempts to communicate with graphic devices since the beginning of human settlements. Writing in 1985 in a special issue of the *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* on the topic of graphic design history, Philip Meggs noted the disagreement among experts on the historical scope of the subject:

> *Some advocate the short-sighted view and believe that graphic design is a new activity, born of the industrial revolution. Others advocate a farsighted view, believing the essence of graphic design is giving visual form to human communications, an activity which has a distinguished ancestry dating to the medieval manuscript and early printers of the Renaissance.*[13]

When one considers Meggs's own book, it is clear that he has chosen the "farsighted view," in that he identifies the cave paintings of Lascaux as the beginning of a sequence that ultimately connects with the contemporary posters of April Greiman. Likewise, Craig and Barton argue in the introduction to their illustrated survey that:

> *Graphic design — or visual communication — began in prehistoric times and has been practiced over the centuries by artisans, scribes, printers, commercial artists, and even fine artists.*[14]

Enric Satué takes a similarly long view, beginning his own narrative with an account of "graphic design in antiquity."

El Diseño Gráfico: Desde los Orígenes hasta Nuestros Días. Madrid: Alianza Editorial; and Hollis, Richard. 1994. *Graphic Design: A Concise History*, London and New York: Thames and Hudson. The books by Meggs, Satué, and Hollis were preceded by several volumes that were essentially visual chronicles such as Karl Gerstner and Marcus Kutter, *die Neue Graphik*, Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1959, and Josef Müller-Brockmann, *A History of Visual Commuunication*, Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1971. A brief illustrated survey of contemporary graphic design is Keith Murgatroyd's, *Modern Graphics*, London and New York: Vista/Dutton, 1969.

10
Varying numbers of entries on graphic designers and firms have been included in other reference works such as *Contemporary Designers*, *The Conran Directory of Design*, and *The Thames and Hudson Encyclopedia of 20th Century Design and Designers*.

11
A shorter account of American graphic design history can be found in the 50th anniversary issue of *Print* magazine (November/December 1969), edited by Steven Heller with articles on each decade from the 1940s to the 1980s by different authors.

▶

The problem with the comprehensive accounts of graphic design history that Meggs, Craig and Barton, and Satué propose is that they assert a continuity among objects and actions that are in reality discontinuous. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the separate strands of visual communication practice and write a more complex account of the influence they have had on one another. To do so is to begin from a different position than those in the above mentioned texts. It means looking far more closely at the activity of designing as a way of understanding the specific moves by which designers expand the boundaries of practice. This strategy is addressed by Richard Hollis in the introduction to his history of graphic design:

> *Visual communication in its widest sense has a long history… As a profession, graphic design has existed only since the middle of the twentieth century; until then, advertisers and their agents used the services provided by "commercial artists."*[15]

Hollis begins his own narrative in the 1890s with a discussion of the illustrated poster. His distinction between graphic design and other practices that produce visual communication is helpful in that it makes possible the tracing of separate strands of practice that sometimes intertwine within a professional category but also have their own trajectories.[16] By maintaining the separation, we can then look more deeply at the distinctive discourses within each practice such as advertising, illustration or typography and understand better how they are contextualized and recontextualized into new narratives.[17]

For example, the graphic projects of the poets and artists of the early twentieth-century avant-garde are usually incorporated within the history of graphic design even though they were frequently produced outside the client–practitioner relationship that normally characterizes professional design activity. The innovations of syntax and mixtures of typefaces such as we see in the futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's book of visual poems *Parole in libertà* were integral components of specific poetic texts which he wrote, just as the visual forms of concrete poems written by others years later were to be.

12
Shaw, Paul. 1984. "Tradition and Innovation: The Design Work of William Addison Dwiggins." *Design Issues* 1:2, 26.

13
Meggs, Philip B. 1985. "Design History: Discipline or Anarchy?" *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, 3:4, 2.

14
Craig, James and Bruce Barton. 1987. *Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design: An Illustrated Survey*, New York: Watson-Guptill, 9.

15
Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History*, 7.

16
However, the problem with writing a progressive narrative that identifies illustrated posters as precursors for more conceptual design work is that it then makes the posters less accessible for other histories such as a history of illustration which does not have a similarly progressive character.

17
Howard Lethalin provides an excellent model for how separate strands of design practice might be researched in his article "The Archeology of the Art Director? Some Examples of Art Direction in Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Publishing." *Journal of Design History* 6:4, 229-246.

Similarly El Lissitzky's small book *Of Two Squares* originated as an argument for a new reading strategy which had implications in Lissitzky's thinking that went far beyond the formal order of the book page. When the book was assimilated into the discourse of the new typography by Jan Tschichold in 1925, it was recontextualized and its original meaning was altered from a new way to think about reading to an argument for a modern design formalism. These shifts of intention and context tend to be suppressed when diverse graphic products are drawn together within an assimilationist narrative based on a theme such as modernity or innovation.

Meggs, looking farther into the past than the moment of the modernist avant-garde, writes about graphic design of the Renaissance and of the rococo era, thus blurring the various specialized strands of professional practice that, when delineated separately, form a constellation of distinct activities rather than a single generic one. In his article previously cited, Meggs identified several factors that have contributed to an interest in graphic design history. Among them is "the graphic design discipline's quest for professional status and recognition as an important activity requiring specialized knowledge, skill, and even a measure of wisdom."[18] While tracing graphic design's roots back to the printers and typographers of the Renaissance is an attempt to provide greater cultural legitimacy for the practice of graphic design, it also obscures the cultural and technical distinctions between the different practices such as printing, typography and advertising.

Another problem is the conflation of graphic design and visual communication as we see in the introduction by Craig and Barton. Graphic design is a specific professional practice, while visual communication denotes a fundamental activity of visual representation (I would include here coded body language and gestures as well as artifacts) in which everyone engages. Visual communication is a larger category than graphic design, which it includes. A history of visual communication also suggests a completely different narrative strategy from a history of graphic design. The former rightly begins with the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira and continues up to the present

development of home multimedia systems. The emphasis in a history of visual communication is inherently sociological and does not exclude anyone on professional grounds. While such a history may focus as well on the semantic issues of how things transmit communicative intentions, its principal subject matter is the act of communicating itself.[19]

Conversely, if we are to adhere more strictly to the meaning of "graphic design" as a description of professional practice, we are obliged to consider the way such practice has been institutionalized in order to include some people and exclude others. This would certainly establish subject matter boundaries that leave out vernacular material done by non-professionals whose talents are considered inferior to those of professionals.[20] We would also have to address the ways that different forms of practice have been professionalized. Are typographers, calligraphers, art directors and illustrators to be considered graphic designers, even when they have their own societies, exhibitions, publications and the like?[21] Unless a history of graphic design honors the distinctions among these practices, there is no way of delineating how the profession has developed socially. Ironically, the cultural identity of the graphic designer will be strengthened more through such an approach than by conflating graphic design with all the other activities that produce visual communication.

Following the latter strategy, the texts by Meggs and Craig and Barton, in particular, result neither in a history of graphic design as a professional activity nor in a history of visual communication as an explanation of human communicative acts. Instead, they mystify the differences between the two, and suppress the distinctions among the images they incorporate, which range from Egyptian hieroglyphs to Ohrbach's advertisements.

Narrative Strategies of Graphic Design History Texts

We can now turn to the three major texts by Meggs, Satué and Hollis to better understand how they tell the story of graphic design. We should first note the different emphases that the authors give to the pre-industrial, industrial and

19
An excellent example of a sociological approach to the history of communication is J. L. Aranguren, *Human Communication*, New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1967, (World University Library). Aranguren discusses both linguistic and visual communication as well as transmission instruments.

20
This does not preclude work that adheres to institutional standards of quality being considered within the canon even if its makers are not trained professionals. But it does exclude work that can be easily defined as vernacular because of its difference from work by professionals. In fact, graphic design is not a profession with a body of technical knowledge that can easily exclude non-professionals. If anything, the proliferation of desktop software makes it more and more possible for non-professionals to approximate, or at least appear to approximate, professional standards.

21
Specialized histories of these practices were among the building blocks that preceded Meggs's own more comprehensive history. Books by those engaged with typography such as Frederic Goudy's *Typologia*, Daniel Berkeley Updike's *Printing Types: Their History, Forms, and*

▶

post-industrial periods. Meggs makes the strongest argument for a continuity between these, giving the lengthiest account of the pre-industrial era. He establishes analogies between works in earlier and later periods on the basis of such characteristics as formal arrangement, and unifies communicative activities in different periods by attributing to them such common qualities as "genius" and "expressivity."[22] Satué moves in three brief chapters to the beginning of the nineteenth century while Hollis, as mentioned earlier, begins his history with the 1890s.[23] Regarding the material included for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the three authors have much in common, particularly in the sections that begin with the Arts and Crafts Movement and then continue through the European avant-gardes, the new typography in Germany, wartime propaganda, the émigré designers in America and the subsequent emergence of an American mass communications style, corporate identity, Swiss typography and its revisions, European pictorial posters and protest design of the 1960s.

It is worth noting here that all the authors were trained as graphic designers and share similar values about the canon of their profession. This canon has neither developed randomly nor was it institutionalized the way a literary canon was in academia. Rather it resulted from a selection process that has celebrated noteworthy designs in professional magazines such as *Gebrauschgrafik, Graphis* and *Print* as well as in numerous picture books and occasional museum exhibitions.[24] An important factor in the canonization of graphic design pieces is the visual satisfaction they give to the trained graphic designer. As the three books under discussion show, there is a considerable consensus among the authors regarding the visual quality of the work they include. What is generally missing, however, are accounts of work by lesser known designers who played important roles in the development of the profession. I think here of Fritz Ehmke in Germany or Oswald Cooper in the United States. Ehmke was important because he wanted to preserve design traditions at a moment when Jan Tschichold and others were promoting the new typography. In Chicago, Cooper was the best of the lettering and layout men who preceded the emergence of graphic design as we have come to know it.

Use, or Stanley Morison's *A Tally of Types* provide coherent accounts of how typographic design developed and also assert standards of quality. Frank Presbry's pioneering work *The History and Development of Advertising* is an account of professional advertising practice that describes the changes which led from selling space to comprehensive campaigns.

22
Thus Meggs applies the term "Spanish pictorial expressionism" to Spanish manuscripts of the 10th century which features letterforms as pictorial objects, while "American typographic expressionism" refers to New York graphic design of the 1950s and 1960s.

23
For a discussion of Hollis's thoughts on graphic design and how they affected the writing of his book, see Robin Kinross's "Conversation with Richard Hollis on Graphic Design History." *Journal of Design History*, 5:1, 73-90.

24
Martha Scotford discusses the problems of canonization in graphic design history in her article "Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History?" in *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, 9 :2, 3-5, 13. Among the points she makes is that women are noticeably lacking in the canon. This subject sorely needs more attention.

One significant difference among Meggs, Satué and Hollis is the varying amount of attention they give to geographic areas outside the European and American mainstream.[25] Satué is considerably more aware than either of the other two authors of how graphic design developed in the Spanish-speaking countries as well as in Brazil. He devotes almost one hundred pages to this material while Meggs dedicates four pages to "The Third World Poster", a section that mainly refers to Cuban posters of the 1960s with a brief mention of posters in Nicaragua, South Africa and the Middle East. Hollis, by contrast, devotes a little less than two pages to Cuban posters in a section entitled "Psychedelia, Protest and New Techniques of the Late 1960s." In the texts of Meggs and Hollis, Japanese graphic design is discussed briefly, but the authors refer only to postwar activity. Satué does not talk about Japan at all. None of the authors make any reference to China or other Asian countries nor do they mention graphic design or vernacular visual communication in Africa.[26]

Although Meggs presents typographers such as Baskerville, Fournier and Bodoni, who worked in the eighteenth century, as geniuses, typography as a practice becomes merged with other design activities once he reaches the twentieth century, where he neglects, as do the other two authors, some of the most prominent modern typographers such as Victor Hammer, Jan van Krimpen, Giovanni Mardersteig and Robert Hunter Middleton.[27]

The authors' relation to other visual practices such as advertising vary somewhat. According to Hollis:

> However effective, such work [Hollis refers here to the early 20th-century German posters of Bernhard, Erdt, Gipkins, and Hohlwein] belongs to a history of advertising. Only when advertising has a single visual concept, as it developed in the United States in the 1950s…does it have a significant place in the history of graphic design.[28]

Meggs, by contrast, does not even identify these posters as advertising artifacts. He accounts for them in terms of a formal style which he calls "pictorial modernism." Satué too treats this work as exemplary of a modern visual style.

25
I refer specifically to American rather than North American work. Although Canada has a rich history of graphic design, including some outstanding designers in the postwar era, none of the authors mention it as a distinct site of graphic design practice. An excellent presentation on the history of graphic design in Canada was made by Peter Bartl at the ICOGRADA (International Council of Graphic Design Associations) Congress in Dublin in 1983.

26
See *Dialogue on Graphic Design Problems in Africa*, edited by Haig David-West, London: ICOGRADA, 1983. This publication reports on a 1982 conference held in Port Harcourt, Nigeria under the sponsorship of ICOGRADA.

27
This obscuring of the typographic tradition and the lack of sufficient recognition for twentieth-century typographers has been rectified to a large degree by the recent publication of Robin Kinross's *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*, London: Hyphen Press, 1992.

28
Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History*, 31.

Of the three authors, Hollis is most attentive to the differences among visual practices, making reference, for example, to the calligraphic training of Edward Johnston, who designed an alphabet for the London Underground. He also mentions the contribution art directors in America made to the emergence of graphic design as a profession. At the same time he removes noteworthy practitioners, firms and work from the discourses in which their practice was embedded — such as the discourse of advertising — and inserts them into a different narrative. Hence, we encounter the "new advertising," not as a response to the limits of the old advertising, but as a contribution to the development of a sophisticated visual sensibility within the graphic design profession.

While none of the authors writes an exclusively connoisseurist history, each is particularly attentive to visual quality. This plays an important role in the construction of their stories, which are propelled along by changes in the look and form of designs as well as by other factors. I make this observation not to espouse a social history of graphic design that subordinates discussions of form to arguments about social meaning, but to stress that describing how artifacts look does not sufficiently address the question of why they look as they do. This can only be answered by extracting them from narratives that draw them together for the purpose of creating a tradition of innovation that never existed. The artifacts must be reinserted in the various discourses within which they originated — whether those be related to art, advertising, typography or printing — and then related in new ways.

Conclusion

What then might a history of graphic design that respected the varied discursive locations of visual design activity be like? It would preserve many elements of the narrative sequences established by Meggs, Satué and Hollis, but it would be more attentive to a close reading of professional practices in order to discriminate between the different types of work. As a result, we would understand better how graphic design practice has

been shaped by borrowings and appropriations from other discourses instead of seeing it as a single strand of activity that embraces a multiplicity of things. By recognizing the many routes into graphic design from other fields and practices, we can learn to see it as more differentiated than we have previously acknowledged it to be. This will enable us to better relate emerging fields of endeavor such as information design, interface design and environmental graphics to what has come before.[29]

Clearly, the history of graphic design does not follow a neat linear path that can be characterized by a unifying theme such as innovation, excellence or modernity. Because there have been no shared standards that define professional development, nor has there been a common knowledge base to ground a definition of what graphic design is, its development has been largely intuitive and does not conform to a singular set of principles shared by all designers. While the scope of what we today call graphic design has considerably expanded from what it once was, it has not done so in any singular way.[30] Frequently individual designers have simply moved into new areas of practice and are then followed by others.

Not all graphic designers work on the same kinds of projects. Some specialize in posters and function like artists. Others are involved with strategic planning and draw more on management skills. And some designers specialize in information graphics which requires a strong knowledge of social science.[31] What a history of graphic design should explain is how the various activities that fall within the construct of graphic design practice are differentiated. It should acknowledge the tension that arises from the attempt to hold these activities together through a discourse of professional unity while designers continue to move in new directions. A recognition of this tension will ultimately teach us much more about graphic design and its development than the attempt to create a falsely concordant narrative of graphic design history.

29.
Gui Bonsiepe has recently proposed that a new designation, *information designer*, would more appropriately characterize the designer's ability to work in the emerging information environment. See his article "A Step Toward the Reinvention of Graphic Design," in *Design Issues*, 10:1, 47-52.

30
Some designers and design educators now prefer the term "communication design."

31
For a critique of graphic design as an art-based profession, see Jorge Frascara, "Graphic Design: Fine Art or Social Science?" in *Design Issues*, 5:1, 18-29. In this article, Frascara proposes to shift the definition of quality from the way things look to their effect on the intended audience.
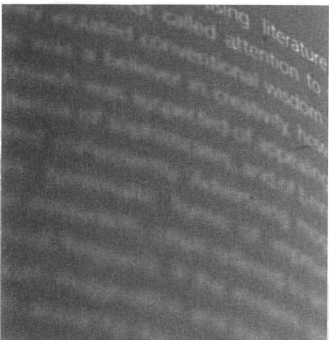
Steve Baker

A Poetics of Graphic Design?

There is a continuing dissonance between the history and practice of graphic design. In particular, the stylistic experimentation and political engagement which has characterized some of the most influential developments in twentieth-century graphic design practice has not found an equivalent in the ways in which the subject's history has been written. Even when the restrictiveness and bogus neutrality of design history's conventional linear narratives have been recognized and criticized, little has been done to develop a more "spatial" writing, a writing which moves — at least at a poetic or metaphorical level — closer to the image. This article proposes that the work of the French feminist writers Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray could serve as the basis for devising a more imaginative form of critical writing which might help to draw the history and practice of graphic design into a closer and more purposeful relation.

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I am only interested in the texts that escape.

Hélène Cixous [1]

I notice that my characters, my animals, my insects, my fish, look as if they are escaping from the paper.

Hokusai [2]

It would be quite wrong to assume at the outset that graphic design history — any graphic design history — should necessarily have a close structural relation to the broader (and itself much disputed) field of design history. Nevertheless, some of the complaints against contemporary design history may be equally applicable to graphic design history as it is currently conceived. This is certainly the case, I would suggest, when it comes to considering how questions of gender are to be addressed in design writing. The significance of feminist design history's exploration of such questions is now not only acknowledged but also emphasized by some male writers. Victor Margolin, for instance, has recently proposed that "feminism is the most powerful critique of design history thus far," and John Walker has argued that "if men were to take the lessons of feminism seriously, then the predominantly masculine discourse of design history would be transformed."[3] What neither these writers nor the feminist historians they praise have addressed in any sustained manner, however, are the *ways* in which the discourses of design history might be transformed by attending more closely to gender's implication in and for history. What, in other words, might an alternative and more gender-conscious design writing look like? What form might its visible language take? The argument of the present essay is that this question is particularly pertinent in relation to graphic design's possible histories. Let there be no doubt: a graphic design history is above all *a way of writing*, and the question here is the form that writing is to take — is able to take, inclined to take or even imaginable to take.

It is certainly not simply a matter of heeding calls, such as that made by Cheryl Buckley in *Design Issues* some years ago, for a

1
Cixous, Hélène. 1993. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing.* Translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers. New York: Columbia University Press, 98.

2
Quoted in Hélène Cixous, *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays,* 1991. Edited by Deborah Jenson, translated by Sarah Cornell et al. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 117.

3
Margolin, Victor. 1992. "Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods," *Design Studies,* 13:2, 113. Walker, John A. 1989. *Design History and the History of Design.* London: Pluto Press, 199.

design history which would "acknowledge the governance of patriarchy and its operation historically."[4] The problem may be with history itself as a mode of writing. This idea is presented with particular force in the work of the French feminist writers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, where each of them addresses — at a rhetorical rather than a simplistic biological level — the gendered character of power relations in the discourses of history.

Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* explores Western culture's hierarchical association of men with time, and of women with space or place. She writes that "man has been the subject of discourse, whether in theory, morality, or politics." Philosophy's historical privileging of time over space, she proposes, puts the masculine subject in a position in which it comes to be understood that "time becomes the *interiority* of the subject itself," and in which "the subject, the master of time, becomes the axis of the world's ordering." She observes that "this leads, on the social and cultural level, to important empirical and transcendental effects: with *discourse* and *thought* being the privileges of a *male* producer."[5] This positing of the operation of a gendered division of time (as masculine) and space (as feminine) in Western philosophy might suggest that the writing of any "history" will itself be structurally oriented to the masculine.

Cixous's earlier classic text, "Sorties," is more forthright on this matter. Writing in the mid-1970s, Cixous sites received notions of history firmly in *l'empire du propre* (usually translated as the realm of the proper), a Hegelian realm defined by its concern to mark and to defend the boundaries of established power, privilege and self-certainty. Of this rhetorically masculine conception of history, she remarks:

> *A commonplace gesture of History: there have to be two races — the masters and the slaves.... The same masters dominate history from the beginning, inscribing on it the marks of their appropriating economy: history, as a story of phallocentrism, hasn't moved except to repeat itself.... History, history of phallocentrism, history of propriation: a single history.... History has never produced or recorded anything else... And it is time to change. To invent the other history.*[6]

4
Buckley, Cheryl. 1986. "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design." *Design Issues*, 3:2, 6.

5
Irigaray, Luce. 1993. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. London: Athlone Press, 6, 7, 87.

6
Cixous, Hélène. 1986. "Sorties," in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 70, 79, 83.

The space in which this "other history" is to be invented is for the most part that of the *écriture féminine* which Cixous has continued to explore across the range of her writings, and which she makes clear is not, in principle, restricted to women's writing. She has stated plainly in an interview that "I do not equate *feminine* with woman and *masculine* with man." The challenge to "the masculine future," she suggests in "Sorties," will come (regardless of their sex) from "thinkers, artists, those who create new values, 'philosophers' in the mad Nietzschean manner, inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms, those who change life."[7] In their feminine manifestation, at least, Cixous calls them *les désordonnantes*.[8]

In terms of the possibility of a new attitude to writing history, including graphic design history, there are good reasons to focus on Cixous and Irigaray, who are generally taken to represent the "deconstructive-psychoanalytic" wing of French feminist theory. One reason, to which I will return, is their underlying "political optimism," their insistence on the possibility of change.[9] Another is the light their work might cast on the current status of deconstruction and related aspects of French theory in debates on graphic design's history and practice.

When Cixous's work came up for consideration in a previous issue of *Visible Language* — the much discussed 1978 special issue, "French currents of the letter" — the article's layout, like that of the others in that issue, was given a self-consciously "deconstructive" treatment by graduate students of the Cranbrook Academy of Art.[10] Katherine McCoy, co-chair of the Design Department there, has described Cranbrook graphic design of the late 1970s and 1980s as consciously drawing on French post-structuralist theory, and a recent review of this work named Cranbrook "the academy of deconstructed design" and its *Visible Language* layout as "still the academy's most uncompromising assault on typographic convention as a transmitter of meaning."[11] But at a time when the adoption of this post-structuralist "attitude" is widely seen as a progressive move in discussions of design practice, it is precisely the focus of criticism for those with a more conservative concern for the history of that practice. Adrian Forty's

7
Cixous, Hélène. "Sorties," 84. The interview with Cixous is in Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, 1991. Expanded edition. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 129-61.

8
Cixous's phrase, "nous, les désordonnantes," has been translated both as "we women, the derangers" and as "we, the sowers of disorder." Neither version really conveys the full resonance of the term in her work. For a fuller discussion, see Baker, Steve. 1995. "Flying, Stealing: The Gift in the View of Cixous," in Pat Kirkham, editor, *The Gendered Object*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.

9
Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Introduction," in Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky, editors, *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 5, 12.

10
Andermatt, Verena. 1978. "Writing the Letter: The Lower-case of *hélène cixous*," *Visible Language*, 12:3, 305-18.

11
Lupton, Ellen. 1991. "The Academy of Deconstructed Design." *Eye*, 1:3, 44.

response to Victor Margolin's comments on the shortcomings of much contemporary design history argued that the discipline had in fact been "over-willing" to embrace "new lines of thought," and what Forty considered specifically "unhelpful to design is the post-structuralist view that all judgments are as good, or as bad as each other." He cited Robin Kinross's *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History* as a good example of the defense of traditional values in current graphic design history, and it is perhaps significant that a few years earlier Kinross had himself proposed that "post-structuralism promises no benefits for design theory."[12]

My concern is not, for the moment, the extent to which any of these writers may or may not be thought to misrepresent post-structuralism, and I certainly want to work towards a view of graphic design history-writing which could draw back from the unproductively polarized positions implied in the previous paragraph. It is clear, however, that in the Anglo-American debate on graphic design's histories, much still hinges on various aspects of French theory. Rather surprisingly, and notwithstanding the *Visible Language* article on Cixous, that debate continues to focus overwhelmingly on writers such as Barthes and Derrida and not at all on *écriture féminine* and the critique of the "masculinization of thought" which is found in the work of Cixous and Irigaray. Once I have briefly enlarged on a specific problem concerning the methods adopted in writing graphic design history, I shall suggest that Cixous and Irigaray offer some especially productive ways forward.

Against a "Masculine" Linearity

One of the principal complaints of feminist historians concerning the "masculine" orientation of design history has been a very simple one, and is at least superficially similar to one which is also frequently found both in male and female historians' critiques of conventional histories of design. It is the complaint that these histories are unduly linear and Pevsnerian in their accounts of a "pioneers"-based sequence of stylistic developments. Two such examples will suffice. Cheryl Buckley,

12
Forty, Adrian. 1993. "A Reply to Victor Margolin."" *Journal of Design History*, 6:2, 131. Kinross, Robin. 1986. "Semiotics and Designing." *Information Design Journal*, 4:3, 196.

reviewing a history of women in design (written by a female historian), objects to its reproduction of a model of history "which is linear, progressive and peopled by female 'pioneers,'" since it fails to see that the method itself perpetuates the legitimization of a particular view of design which results in "much of women's design," which is "often anonymous, traditional and made in a domestic sphere," continuing to be "left out of the history books." More recently Bridget Wilkins, writing about graphic design history (though not specifically from a feminist perspective), has argued that its overriding concern with the "look" of things is "modelled on the earliest approaches to art history" and emphasizes either the linear career development of the individual "hero" or a linear progression of styles. In either case, she suggests, "these linear concepts of history are ignoring some of the central issues in graphic design," as they tend to distort the ephemeral nature of much graphic design and to ignore the question of how these communications were received and understood by the largely non–professional audience they addressed.[13] In the present context my concern will be to address not how design history in general might deal with the avoidance of linearity, but specifically to speculate on how a way of writing about graphic design might do so.

13
Buckley, Cheryl. 1986.
"Designed by Women."
Art History, 9:3, 403.
Wilkins, Bridget. 1992.
"No More Heroes."
Eye, 2:6, 4.

The Gendering of Word and Image

One of the most obvious characteristics to distinguish graphic design from other fields of design is its concern with the conjunction of word and image. I shall propose here (and it may be viewed either as a rhetorical conceit or as a move with entirely practical implications) that the form of a writing appropriate to the study of graphic design might itself attempt to bring the visual and the verbal into a closer relation.

The challenge facing graphic design writing, to put it in terms of Irigaray's gendered distiction, might thus be said to be the production of a move from the linear history-writing of the masculine word to the spatial inscription of the feminine image. Such a project corresponds in certain specific respects to matters alluded to all too briefly in J. Hillis Miller's recent

book, *Illustration*. In seeking to isolate a possible "mode of meaning specific to the graphic image," Miller includes a glancing reference to a "traditional gendering of acts" in which the process of writing's linearity, "engraving a furrow, the art of scratch, is seen as male," while drawing's conceptual proximity to the embroidering of a surface, the weaving of a cover, "is seen as female." He suggests that in a sense the "double act of engraving and embroidering" is already present in all forms of graphic activity, since both word and image have their origin in "the primordial act of scratching a surface to make it a sign."[14]

My suggestion here is that it may nevertheless be instructive to *reopen* this sign, the better to examine and understand it, and to take more seriously the possibility that words, somehow, continue to be regarded as having a masculine orientation, and images a feminine one. What would such a distinction say about the relative power of word and image? Would it be a reflection of, or at any rate seem to run parallel to, the wide-spread cultural privileging of the verbal over the visual (even in much of the graphic design literature)?[15] By what means might it be challenged and undone? Might a form of graphic design history-writing be imagined which was consonant with the practice of graphic design, and which would challenge this sign's gendered priorities by weaving a way of writing from (or around) one of the particular characteristics of its subject: the endlessly changing and infinitely complex relation of word and image? This would be writing of a heightened visibility, an imagistic writing, a writing which, by whatever means, sought to minimize the "remoteness" of academic writing by replenishing it with those things, such as dreams, of which Cixous complains that one finds less and less in contemporary narratives and histories:

> *less and less poetry*
>
> *less and less angels*
>
> *less and less birds*
>
> *less and less women*
>
> *less and less courage*[16]

14
Miller, J. Hillis. 1992. *Illustration*. London: Reaktion Books, 66, 78, 75.

15
See for example Baker, Steve. 1989. "Re-reading The Corporate Personality." *Journal of Design History*, 2:4, 275-92, in which I suggest that the work of Wally Olins, the foremost British writer on corporate identity design, betrays a thoroughgoing "mistrust of the visual."

16
Cixous, Hélène. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 108.

Hardly Recognizable as History

It goes without saying that such a writing may be hardly recognizable as history. Its concern is primarily with what's going on *in the writing* of graphic design's histories (and where power lies in that writing), and rather less with the historical matters which are being written about. In this respect its focus on questions of gender will be distinct from that of Michael Rock and Susan Sellers, for instance, who argue that "while most design history and criticism claims to be non-ideological and value neutral, it is a fact that design has been controlled and produced by men." It is not a case simply of attending to historical circumstances overlooked by conventional histories, important as those matters may undoubtedly be, but of grasping Irigaray's point (which might apply equally to graphic design's history and to its practice) that "the generation of messages is not neutral, but sexuate."[17]

When Irigaray asserts that "sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through," the point is not to assume from this that questions of gender will *themselves* always be central, but to see their acknowledgement as at present constituting a most effective way of *rhetorically opening up history* to a more inquiring attitude. Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference is not only a matter of sexual politics. It extends to contesting "religiosity, slogans, publicity, terror, etc. All forms of passively experienced passions in which the subject is enclosed, constrained."[18] Like Cixous's call for the invention of another history, Irigaray wants "the creation of a new *poetics*." One of the things such a poetics would make manifest is what she calls "the sexuation of discourse," even at the level of syntax. "To say that discourse has a sex, especially in its syntax, is to question the last bastion of semantic order"— an order which grimly and blindly clings to the presumption of its own "neuter, universal, unchanging" validity and transparency.[19]

What Irigaray imagines, in other words, is a poetics which would render history, history's procedures, history's "syntax," history's effects, opaque. A thick and treacly stuff. Like reading

17
Rock, Michael and Susan Sellers. 1993. "This is Not a Cigar," *Eye*, 2:8, 45. Irigaray, Luce. 1991. "The Three *Genres*," in Margaret Whitford, editor, *The Irigaray Reader*. Oxford & Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 143.

18
Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 5, 72.

19
Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 5, 112, 124.

one's way through Velcro™ — the words conscious of their pull on each other. Graphic design history (like much of design history, as it happens) isn't yet sufficiently historically self-conscious, opaque to itself, and is often still deluded into thinking that the writing of a history is essentially straightforward and unproblematic and needs simply to be done "well."[20] What is needed, on the contrary, and what can only hesitantly be worked towards, is an appropriate *form* of self-consciousness and unfamiliarity. The historian here might aspire to something like the condition of the unfamiliar philosopher of Irigaray's new poetics:

> *Philosophy is not a formal learning, fixed and rigid, abstracted from all feeling. It is a quest for love, love of beauty, love of wisdom, which is one of the most beautiful things....the philosopher would be someone poor, dirty, rather down-and-out, always unhoused, sleeping beneath the stars, but very curious, skilled in ruses and tricks of all kinds, constantly reflecting, a sorcerer, a sophist, sometimes exuberant, sometimes close to death. This is nothing like the way we usually represent the philosopher: a learned person who is well dressed, has good manners, knows everything, and pedantically instructs us in the corpus of things already coded. The philosopher is nothing like that.*[21]

Cixous, in a comparatively recent essay on painting, similarly characterizes that activity as an ongoing quest and argues that "the painter, the true painter, doesn't know how to paint."[22] It might equally be true that the kind of historian envisaged here would not know "how" to write history.

Finding the Right Metaphors

In Cixous's earlier and more obviously feminist theoretical writings, which stress the imperative of women's taking up writing for themselves ("why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you"),[23] the *écriture féminine* she has in mind is itself seen as part of the "work to be done" against the fixed, coded, institutionalized and in many respects masculine hold on meaning, on discourse, on history: "There's work to be done

20
Forty, Adrian. "A Reply to Victor Margolin," 132, instructs that "the aims of design history should be to write good history."

21
Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 24.

22
Cixous, Hélène. 1991. "The Last Painting or the Portrait of God," in *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, 110.

23
Cixous, Hélène. 1976. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs*, 1:4, 876.

against *class*, against categorization, against classification
...against the pervasive masculine urge to judge, diagnose,
digest, name...."[24] In certain of her recent writings, however,
and especially in an extraordinary essay entitled "Without
End/no/State of Drawingness/no, rather:/ The Executioner's
Taking off," she suggests that visual imagery, and drawing in
particular, might in a certain sense better allow us to get
"between the lines" of the artificially complete, "finished" and
orderly discourse of the *propre*.[25]

In the present context the particular interest of this work is
that the metaphors with which it is packed are essentially the
same as those she now uses to characterize the forms of writ-
ing she most admires. Writing and drawing, word and image,
are presented as undertaking similar work and having a similar
sense of purpose. The principal metaphor is that of the cut or
the blow, *le coup*, which can also be the word for the stroke
both of the brush and of the pen, as well as the one describing
the more violent effects of the axe or the dagger. In *Three
Steps on the Ladder of Writing* Cixous quotes Kafka: "If the
book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the
head, what are we reading it for?...A book must be the axe for
the frozen sea inside us." The writers Cixous admires, she
claims, have all written "*by the light of the axe*: they all dared to
write the worst" — the urgency of their writing metaphori-
cally illuminated by the glint of the executioner's axe at the
instant before it falls.[26]

In the "State of Drawingness" essay the drawing's blow is
inflicted both on us and by us — no distinction is drawn
between producer and consumer of the image. "This morning
in the museum, I was passing in front of the drawings, in the
slight alarm of the reading which doesn't know from where
the blow will come...." A moment earlier she was writing of
drawing as though it were indistinguishable from our active
involvement in writing: "*What do we want to draw*? What are
we trying to grasp between the lines, in between the strokes,
in the net that we're weaving, that we throw, and the dagger
blows *[les coups de stylet]*?"[27]

24
Cixous, Hélène. 1981.
"Castration or
Decapitation?" Translated
by Annette Kuhn. *Signs,*
7:1, 51.

25
Cixous, Hélène. 1993.
"Without End/no/State of
Drawingness/no, rather:/
The Executioner's Taking
off." Translated by
Catherine A.F. MacGillivray.
New Literary History, 24:1,
96, 93. The essay was origi-
nally published as "Sans
Arrêt, non, État de
Dessination, non, plutôt: Le
Décollage du Bourreau," in
the Louvre exhibition cata-
logue *Repentirs*, 1991.
Paris: Éditions de la
Réunion des musées
nationaux, 55-64. In notes
27 and 39 below, page
numbers refer first to the
translation, then (in paren-
thesis) to the original.

26
Cixous, Hélène. *Three Steps
on the Ladder of Writing*,
17, 63. Cixous explained the
metaphor in terms of the
glint of the executioner's
axe during a conversation
with Nicole Ward Jouve
entitled "Writing for the
Theatre and Other Stages,"
Institute of Contemporary
Arts, London, 7 July 1993.

27
Cixous, Hélène. "State of
Drawingness," 96 (59).

The proposal that *le coup* may also be a productive metaphor for characterizing a possible graphic design history — that such a history may be thought of (though clearly not too literally) as being written by the light of Cixous's axe, or under the aegis of this axe — will not necessarily take us as far from familiar territory as it might seem. Her active and purposeful conception of the bonding of word and image — "the to-be-in-the-process of writing or drawing" — finds echoes both in Victor Margolin's emphasis not on design but on "designing" as "an activity that is constantly changing," and also in Robin Kinross's proposal that design should be "understood not as a noun but as a verb: an activity and a process."[28] What is more, if the metaphor of *le coup* serves as a means of proposing a *reading* of graphic design history, such a reading may be regarded as part of the "work to be done against" less critical histories, since as Cixous herself suggests, "reading is a wonderful metaphor for all kinds of joy that are called vicious." Miller's *Illustration* offers a similar account of the work of reading: "Even in the case of visual...signs, the word *read*, in its emphasis on an interventionist and productive activity of interpretation that takes nothing for granted, is still the best word available." He argues that "only an active and interventionist reading...will *work*, that is, effect changes in the real institutional and social worlds."[29]

Voice

The question remains as to how to get the work of that reading into writing, into a non-linear and more visual form of history-writing, which we should perhaps not balk at calling a poetics of graphic design.[30] Ironically, the apparently more verbal notion of *giving voice* may be of particular importance here. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, the head of graphic design at Yale, defines her own conception of a feminist graphic design practice in terms of establishing "the equality of all voices," and looking for "graphic strategies that will enable us to listen to people who have not been heard before." Anne Burdick, similarly, argues that the much needed shift in perspective which would enable graphic designers to "consider

28
Cixous, Hélène. "State of Drawingness," 91. Margolin, Victor. "Design History or Design Studies," 110. Kinross, Robin. 1992. *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*. London: Hyphen Press, 12.

29
Cixous, Hélène. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 119. Miller, J. Hillis. *Illustration*, 58, 17, 18.

30
For a comparable use of the term *poetics* in relation to the conjunction of word and image, see, for example, the 1988 special issue of *Style*, 22:2, on "Visual Poetics."

themselves authors, not facilitators" is one which "implies responsibility, voice, action."[31] From the historical perspective, while the discourse of history is seen both by Cixous and Irigaray as being ordered by and oriented to the "masculine," Irigaray observes that it paradoxically ensures "the extinction of voice in discourse." "The text of the law, the codes, no longer has a voice." It "holds sway in silence." It may therefore be supposed that this authoritative discourse will be positively fearful of the "feminine" or of the unauthorized gaining access to speech and to history, "access to sharing, exchanging, or coining symbols," access to the production of meaning — or to the means of disrupting meaning.[32] This is the basis of the urgency of Cixous's *écriture féminine*; it gives access, it gives voice, it allows "work to be done."

Interruption, Ekphrasis and the Axe

There are obvious problems with any attempt to be prescriptive about effective strategies for a modified form of history-writing, but here at least is one modest proposal. It stems, among other things, from Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's account of the gendered experience of designing:

> There is a prevalent notion in the professional world that only if you have eight or more uninterrupted hours per day can you do significant work. But if you respond to other human beings…you never really have eight uninterrupted hours in a row. Relational existence is only attached to gender by history — not by genes, not by biology, not by some essential "femaleness."… A relational person allows notions about other people to interrupt the trajectory of thinking or designing…[33]

Might the linear trajectory of a graphic design history similarly find the form of its writing somehow *marked* by interruption, struck through with interruptions, in recognition of the complexity and fragmentation of its project (to say nothing of that of the lives of its writers)?

The form of this interruptive marking will need to be something more substantial than a typographic effect such as the

31
Levrant de Bretteville, Sheila. 1993. "Feminist Design is Caring, Inclusive, Relational." Interview by Ellen Lupton. *Eye*, 2:8, 13. Burdick, Anne. 1992. "Parameters and Perimeters," *Emigré*, 21: unpaginated.

32
Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 140, 169, 141, 114.

33
Levrant de Bretteville, Sheila. "Feminist Design is Caring, Inclusive, Relational," 14.

famous "fault line" running through the McCoys' essay "The New Discourse" — an essay which one reviewer described as "maddening to read, because of the application of their ideas to the page layout, in which two columns of text are purposely and dramatically out of alignment."[34] Applying a deconstructive "look" to ordinary historico-critical writing is missing the point. If this writing is to be hard to read on occasion, it should be because of the unfamiliarity or outlandishness of the ideas and not just the novelty of the typography.

The poetic device of *ekphrasis* will be more useful in elaborating the idea of a strategic and, in certain respects, gendered form of interruption. Ekphrasis, defined by W.J.T. Mitchell as "the verbal representation of a visual representation," is more fully explored in an invaluable article by Grant Scott. In literature the ekphrastic description, Scott explains, might be a "featured inset" which "digresses from the primary narrative line." Although generally intended as "a sidelight," "it often threatens to upstage the dominant narrative. Ekphrasis frustrates linear progression and offers an alternative poetics of space and plenitude."[35] In this connection the device has been characterized by some commentators as representing a "florid effeminacy" of style. Scott suggests that for such writers:

> *The mistrust of finery and ornament at least in part...stems from a fear of its origins in the feminine unconscious.*
> *To embellish is to do women's work; to declare plainly and straightforwardly to further the "manly" cause. This dichotomy derives from a debate between clarity and sophistry deeply embedded in Western thought. It belongs to a long tradition of suspicion toward artists...[36]*

— toward exactly those who Cixous defines as threatening "the masculine future," that is.

This is not to suggest, of course, that in graphic design history-writing the ekphrastic description would necessarily stick out like a sore thumb, or like a dazzling and elaborate subversion of the text. Its effect may be more discreet, but just as purposeful. A clear example is given in a discussion between Robin Kinross and the designer Richard Hollis concerning

34
McCoy, Katherine and Michael. 1991. "The New Discourse," in *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*. New York: Rizzoli, 14-19. Hull, Judith S. 1993. Book review, *Design Issues*, 9:2, 86. See also McCoy, Katherine. 1991. "Book Format Design Concept," *Emigré*, 19: unpaginated.

35
Scott, Grant F. 1991. "The Rhetoric of Dilation: Ekphrasis and Ideology." *Word & Image*, 7:4, 301, 302.

36
Scott, Grant F. "The Rhetoric of Dilation," 303, 305.

Hollis's book *Graphic Design: A Concise History*,[37] prior to its publication. Hollis complains to Kinross that too many historians fail to draw back from the flow of their narratives in order to "look at what they're talking about." It is not enough, he proposes, simply to reproduce a piece of graphic design as an illustration in order to get the reader to understand it. Hollis quotes from his own lengthy description of a Jan Tschichold poster, *Der Berufsphotograph*, in order to make the point that it is often the writer's carefully crafted description of the thing itself, rather than of its historical context or circumstances, which creates understanding. He goes on:

> So my editor is going to say "what are you doing describing something which you're illustrating?", but I'm going to insist. Unless you describe it, people will not read *this image*, they will just see an image, and won't understand the terrific concentrated intelligence that has produced the image.[38]

The *work* of the reading, the reading of the image, occurs outside of the history's linearity, in the more "spatial" plenitude of the ekphrastic description. In the space, in other words, of an alternative and interruptive poetics.

Cixous's own extraordinary ekphrases in the "State of Drawingness" essay do something similar, structurally if not stylistically. Openly ahistorical, they are imaginative attempts to enter *into the time*, into the instant, of the drawings they describe. They want to explore what happens "*during* the drawing," in the interiority of our experience (or of our imaginative reconstruction) of the drawing. As viewers we are once again also the image-producers, and our concern is with "what escapes: we want to draw the instant. That instant which strikes between two instants, that instant which flies into bits under its own blow [*sous son propre coup*]." We want "to see everything in a flash, and at least once shatter the spine of time with only one pencil stroke [*d'un seul coup de crayon*]."[39] *Le coup* is, here, the all-purpose figure of this multivalent interior turmoil. Its violence is very different from that of an externally imposed "History, which is always a History of borders" — these borders being defined by Cixous as "invisible lines that stir up war."[40]

37
Hollis, Richard. 1994. *Graphic Design: A Concise History*. London & New York: Thames and Hudson.

38
Kinross, Robin. 1992. "Conversation with Richard Hollis on Graphic Design History," *Journal of Design History*, 5:1, 83, 84.

39
Cixous, Hélène. "State of Drawingness," 97, 101 (63), 102-103 (64).

40
Cixous, Hélène. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 131.

The poetics of graphic design, which has been very provision-
ally gestured towards here, takes its lead from Cixous's
demonstration that the visual and the verbal need not always
be kept strictly apart, but can escape into each other's territories
and beyond. The glint of her metaphorical axe might fanci-
fully be thought of as lighting the way towards a critical writ-
ing on graphic design which could itself be distinctive, but
without borders; characteristic of (and enacting) its own
concerns without ever troubling with anything so banal as the
"boundaries" of the discipline. Heedless of received ideas of its
"proper" limits or "proper" concerns, it would always be
exceeding its own body, multiplying its instants, its instances,
proliferating, profligate, fecund. This would be a forward-
looking critical writing which took the form of a pushing
out towards, a working for, rather than a backward-looking
gathering up of its significant moments. As Cixous rather
enigmatically puts it, "you will recognize the true drawing,
the live one: it's still running." [41] □

41
Cixous, Hélène.
"State of Drawingness," 93.

Gérard Mermoz

Masks on Hire: In Search of Typographic Histories

In the wake of recent polemics around the "new" typography, and in an attempt to avert the epistemological limitations of typographic histories informed by technological determinisms and ideological dogmas (neoclassicist or neomodernist), this paper argues that, given the functional relation between typography and language, histories of typography must be informed by those disciplines which bear upon language and its manifestations, namely: linguistics, semiotics, literary theory, art history, bibliography, philosophy, etc. Failing this, chronicles of "natural," untheorized objects will continue to assume the role and claim the status of history-writing.

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Aims and Objectives

The aim of this paper is not to take graphic design studies one step closer towards a definitive history of typography but, more realistically, to offer some preliminary remarks and guidelines for a critical examination of existing histories and for writing alternative typographic histories, on an renewed theoretical basis.

By opening up the field of typographic history beyond its traditional boundaries — displacing its focus from a dominant concern with technological factors to one concerned with design and related issues — I hope to extend the scope of historical and theoretical research about typography.

Although this paper is critical of recent attempts at dealing with the history of typography, the suggestions that follow do not claim to make previous histories obsolete. The fact that, for centuries, typographic histories have legitimized a restricted range of typographic values and practices should not be over-looked nor dismissed as ideological. Since historical writings cannot transcend the historical conditions and ideological preoccupations through which they come into being, the forms of history-writing I envisage will need to acknowledge the effects of these contingencies on its own claims to truth and face the epistemological implications.

Finally, the challenge, for contemporary historians of typography, is to write histories capable of *presenting typographic pluralism with appropriate theoretical tools*. A direct consequence of this methodological shift will be the opening up of the *typographic scene*—to accomodate a wider range of works and preccupa-tions—and the redefinition of key terms through which it is to be rearticulated: *text, legibility, reading, typographic reference, interpretation.*

Dualism 1: (Mis)representing Typographic Differences

The present essay was written out of a personal dissatisfaction with the way typographic differences are (mis)represented in typographic histories, and how they have been obscured in the

recent debate around the "new" typography.[1] As a survey of twentieth-century typographical literature testifies, experimental deviations from typographic forms have often been dismissed for an alleged *lack* or *failure* to comply with rational, objective or universal criteria (the "fundamental principles of typography" invoked by Stanley Morison). Ironically, classic typefaces such as Baskerville and Bodoni have, at various times, been the target of dogmatic criticism, impervious to the argument that the legibility of letterforms and graphic layouts is relative and culture-bound. Karl Gerstner put it succinctly when he remarked: "even with the best of methods, it is not possible to determine which is the most legible face of all, and for one simple reason: the function of reading is based on subjective habits rather than on objective conditions."[2] The new bibliography reinforces this point when it states: "there is no inherent physical display of text and apparatus that is more natural to a specific work than any other."[3]

The reluctance, or incapacity of historians, to evaluate typographic differences in term of their cultural, aesthetic and semiological *specificity*, across the full range of typographic practice (from continuous text to display typography, from modernism to post-modernism) continues to be a major obstacle towards writing typographic histories. Regretfully, this incapacity is not the prerogative of a few polemicists, but is characteristic of the *typographic* scene which — from Stanley Morison to Paul Rand, Ken Garland, Steven Heller and others — has displayed a singular dogmatism when confronted with works conceived outside its ideological frame of reference. Unable to acknowledge these ideological differences as productive and significant — constitutive of a legitimate cultural pluralism — these authors too readily take up the role of defenders of Typography against the threat of corruption from the outside. In this, they echo early critiques of modernism which deplored that "many of its early exponents violated both traditional customs and good taste," and that "there was for a time a danger that the more simple and beautiful forms of typography would become submerged beneath a flood of freak type-faces arranged in most bewildering and

1
1991. "Massimo Vignelli vs Ed Benguiat," *Print* XLV:V, 88-95,142-144 and 148. Garland, Ken. 1992. "Stop footling around," *Design*, 527, 11-13.

Heller, Steven. 1993. "Changing of the guard," *Eye*, 2:8, 4-5, and "Cult of the ugly," *Eye*, 3:9, 52-59.

Various. 1993. "Letters," *Eye*, 3:10, 3-5.

Bierut, Michael. 1993. "Playing the game by Rand's rules," *Eye*, 3:10, 77-79.Various. 1993. "Letters," *Eye*, 3:11, 3.

Stiff, Paul. 1993. "Stop sitting around and start reading," *Eye*, 3:11, 4-5.

Keedy, Jeffery. 1993. "The rules of typography according to crackpots experts," *Eye*, 3:11, 48-55.

2
Gerstner, Karl. 1974. *Compendium for Literates.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press,132.

3
Greetham, DC. 1993. "Editorial and Critical Theory: From Modernism to Postmodernism," in: George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams. *Palimpsest.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press,14.

unorthodox styles."[4] These remarks, combined with the assertion that "the new typography in England has infused no vitalizing spirit into current typography" sadly represent the main strand of typographic thinking in eccentric Britain between the wars.[5]

From the margins came a different voice which acknowledged the relation of typography to painting and architecture, and regretted that the new typography "has been almost unknown in this country, and has found here not more than one or two disciples."[6] In Britain, the anti–modernist view prevailed, amidst a display of telling metaphors:

> *There is a possibility, noted Atkins, of some of these freak types finding a temporary lodgment in this country, but the inherent good taste of British typographers, allied to their instinctive love for the practical and the beautiful, will enable them to weed out any "alien undesirable" and "nationalize" only those forms of letters which can conform to our national sense of fitness.[7]*

By 1938, the "danger that the new functional materials, the mechanistic typefaces that originated in Germany, would be used with a ruthless logic" seemed averted, as John Gloag looked forward to "a glorious restoration of fun and games with shapes and colours, and an end to the nervous trifling with 'off-white', and 'off-pink', and angles and straight lines and vast, unrelieved surfaces."[8] The Festival of Britain was on its way…

> *From 1949 to 1967, under the editorialship of Herbert Spencer,* Typographica *published a extensive range of articles about "major typographic experiments of this century" which, together with his* Pioneers of Modern Typography *(1969) and John Lewis's* Typography: Basic Principles *(1963) contributed to expand the typographic horizon of designers. John Lewis's* Anatomy of Printing *(1970) and Müller-Brockmann's* A History of Visual Communication *(1971) followed on, confirming the relevance of modernism to contemporary typographic practice.[9]*

4
Atkins, W., editor. 1932. *The Art and Practice of Printing*, (vol. 1-6), London: Pitman and Sons, vol.1, chapter XIV: "Typographic Display," 198-246.

5
Tarr, John C. 1936. "What are the fruits of the new typography," reprinted in *Printing in the twentieth century: a Penrose Anthology.* London: Northwood Publishers,151, 1974.

6
Evans, Bertram. 1934. "Typography in England, 1933: Frustration or Function." *Penrose Annual*, 58.

7
Atkins, W. *The Art and Practice of Printing*, I.

8
Gloag, John. 1938. "Design Marches On." *Penrose Annual*: 19-20.

9
Burns Aaron.1987. Foreword to *The Liberated Page.* Herbert Spencer, editor. London: Lund Humphries, 7.

Although pitched at a general, introductory level, the works of
John Lewis (1963, 1970, 1978) are significant in their attempt
to present typographic differences in terms of their respective
concerns and overall significance in typographic history. In
contrast with Walter Tracy, who excluded Whistler and other
artists from the *Typographic Scene* — for reasons which could be
described as corporate and technical[10] —Lewis's acceptance of
"Whistler as a typographer" denotes a willingness to extend the
field of typography to accomodate significant contributions from
outside the profession.[11] Tracy's insistance, in Morisonian tone,
that, "typography is a professional activity directed towards a
practical, and usually commercial, result," warrants his exclusion
of major experimental works and closes the field to outside
influences and precludes major transformations.[12] It is regrettable
and somewhat surprising that, in 1988, one should retain such a
restrictive view of the subject; a view which, against the efforts
of Spencer, Lewis, Müller-Brockmann and others, insists so cate-
gorically in excluding the contributions of artists to typography.

The widespread dogmatism found in writings on typography
may be imputed to their authors' lack of knowledge about
those disciplines which bear upon the theory and practice of
communication, namely: linguistics, semiotics, cultural theory,
bibliography, anthropology, psychoanalysis, etc. It may also be
a direct consequence of a restrictive interpretation of informa-
tion design, and of a tendency to use criticism as a platform
for the illustration and defense of corporate views and personal
opinions.[13] This is most apparent in the recent polemic around
the "new" typography, where lack of insights have been
volunteered by designers as serious, responsible criticism and
typographic truth.

It could be argued that academic historians do not proceed
very differently; however, it is a requisite of academic criticism
to address different objects and positions in terms of their own
specificity, to consider the interaction and the effect of differ-
ent factors on any given situation, and, finally, to reach a
conclusion on the basis of a reasoned argument. This is not
so in typographic writings, where — whether in manuals,
manifestos or design journalism — ideas are often presented in

10
Tracy, Walter. 1988.
The Typographic Scene.
London: Gordon Fraser, 11.

11
Lewis, John. 1978.
*Typography: Design and
Practice.* London: Barrie and
Jenkins,16-19.

12
Tracy, Walter. *The
Typographic Scene*, 11.

13
Kinross, Robin. 1989.
"The Rhetoric of Neutrality."
Design Discourse. Victor
Margolin, editor. Chicago:
Chicago University
Press,131-143.

normative forms, usually set up *against* existing positions and prac-
tices, past or present. Furthermore, the low level of theorizing
found in writings about typography is manifest in oversimplified
views about the functional relation between typography and
language, the role of typography as a public service and the
place and function of style in graphic communication. Let's
note, finally, that one chief obstacle towards accomodating
typographic diversity springs from the insistance, among writers,
to view the typographic scene through a stifling dualism.

Dualism 2: Assessing Typographic Literature

In addition to classic surveys such as Updike's *Printing Types*,
the most useful texts currently available are those which set
out to document specific aspects of typographic history.[14]
Allan Stevenson's *The Problem of the Missale Speciale* (1967),
for instance, typifies a genre of applied research which brings
together, in a scholarly way, a considerable body of documen-
tary evidence concerning technical aspects of print production,
for the purpose of dating and making attributions. This form
of scholarship is extremely valuable, as it provides an essential
basis for history-writing.

Extending this methodology into the field of social and cultural
history, Robert Darnton's studies of the production and distrib-
ution of books in eighteenth-century France, not only extends
the scope of typographic histories, but also dispells a few myths
about the role of authors, publishers, printers and book sellers
in the dissemination of knowledge.[15] In *The Coming of the Book*,
first published in 1958, Lucien Febvre had begun to redirect
the aims of typographic history, from its previous focus on the
history of techniques to a critical examination of their social,
political and cultural implications:

> ...*the story is about something other than the history of a tech-
> nique. It has to do with the effect on European culture of a
> new means of communicating ideas within a society that was
> essentially aristocratic, a society that accepted and was long to
> accept a culture and a tradition of learning which was restricted
> to certain social groups.*[16]

14
Updike, D.B. 1922
(2nd ed:1937). *Printing
Types: Their History, Forms
and Use*. Cambridge, Mass:
Harvard University Press.

15
Darnton, Robert. 1992.
*Gens de Lettres, Gens du
Livre*. Paris: Editions Odile
Jacob.

Measured against Febvre's methodological concerns, recent histories of typography and graphic design display a marked theoretical naiveté in their assumption that the facts of typographic history can speak for themselves, when allowed to unfold along a chronological path, unhindered by theory or ideology.

The least theoretically developed aspect of typographic histories is that of typographic analyses, where the methodology remains disappointingly pedestrian. This is a direct consequence of the insufficient theorizing of typography as a discursive practice; for, in spite of Gérard Blanchard's attempt in *Pour une Sémiologie de la Typographie*, the project of a semiology of typography still awaits theoretical formulation: as a discrete field of enquiry, characterized by a specific object (typographic design), its conditions of possibility/existence, structural determinants, the modes and contexts of its production, distribution and uses.[17] In the absence of a developed critical methodology and language, writings on the subject remain superficially descriptive and bound by a *problématique* centered around technical factors and parameters.

Among recent histories, Robin Kinross's *Modern Typography*, subtitled "an essay in critical history," announced itself as a critique of "the existing model of the genre." Kinross's objections concerning "books about 'the pioneers of modern typography' or 'Bauhaus typography' [that] situate their subjects in a vacuum, without historical precedent and without relation to the unmentioned but implied contemporary traditional norm," are justified and welcome; as is his intention to focus "away from products…towards the ideas that inform production."[18]

However, the omission of futurism and dada from his account of modern typography, the dismissal of the "new" typography and of the problems it poses, seriously undermine its claims. The exclusion of two of the most radical typographic experiments of the twentieth century, directed simultaneously at language and its typographic presentation, is somewhat problematic in a book (cl)aiming to be "an essay in critical history."

16
Febvre, Lucien. 1993
(1st ed: *L'Apparition du Livre*, Paris: Albin Michel,1958).
The Coming of the Book.
London: Verso,12.

17
Blanchard, Gérard. 1979.
Pour une Sémiologie de la Typographie. Andenne: Remy Magermans.

18
Kinross, Robin. 1992.
Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History.
London: Hyphen Press, 11-12.

It is symptomatic, however, of the closure which prevents historians of typography and graphic design to address design issues outside the binary structures which set up established values (whether classicist, functionalist or modernist) against alternative new styles. This can be verified by charting the negative response to *die neue typographie* in Britain during the twenties and thirties and, today, to the new trends associated with Neville Brody, the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Emigré graphics and, more generally, all forms of experimental typography. Kinross's omission of two key moments in the history of typographic design could also be read as demonstrating, by default, the enduring challenge raised by those two movements — from their museum grave — to the impoverished ("one size only") view of modernism perduring in official circles.

What I hope to make clear in the ensuing pages is that reference to universal typographic criteria is not likely to produce *critical* histories of typography, but, more likely, to consolidate typographic *orthodoxies*. One central argument running through this paper is that the writing of critical histories of typography requires a higher level of *theorizing* than is currently brought to bear on the subject. Failing this, typographic histories will continue legitimating entrenched dogmas, tracing their genealogy from a mythical origin, along a Vasarian path — oscillating between grandeur and decadence — towards an ever-deferred promise of perfection.

Definitions

Since ontologies and teleologies crystallize in definitions, I shall begin with a critical examination of the concepts of "typography" and "typographer," their definitions and semantic transformations, pointing out structural correlations between definitions and typographic theories and practices. The plural form used in the title signals the intention to avert essentialism by acknowledging that, whatever our aspirations and claims to truth, typographic histories are primarily *discursive objects*, functionally linked with material and ideological preoccupations, and that their references to historical events,

problematic as they stand, need to be subjected to a rigorous epistemological critique. The outcome is not likely to be an objective account, free from ideological constraints, but a narrative which acknowledges the effect of interests and ideologies without attempting to clothe them in a veil of universality.

The Object/s of Typographic Histories

The 1986 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* acknowledges that "some confusion and 'some lack of uniformity'" is "involved in talking about typographers and typography." This view is echoed in Alan Marshall's remark that typography is characterized by "conflicting schools of thought" and, "despite its conviviality…has never been free of dissension," but "thrived on it."[19] This is to be expected for, as Georges Gusdorf remarked, in his *Introduction aux Sciences Humaines*: "the meaning of words is established in relation to time and events; meaning changes with the times, in such a way that the same word may be used to pose and resolve essentially different problems."[20]

Modes of production, distribution and consumption, combined with a concern to establish functional relations between the form and function of printed matter, have informed definitions of typography, from the time of the second invention of printing from movable types in Europe. It should be noted, however, that the nature of the Chinese script, the higher cultural status of calligraphy over printing and other historical and cultural factors, prevented the first invention of printing from movable types, by Pi Shêng in China, to achieve the worldwide impact the second invention by Gutenberg et al. had; a reminder that the historical impact of a technological "break through" is determined, above all, by its socio-economic, political and ideological relevance, at the time and in the context(s) in which it occurs. In this instance, linguistic factors played a decisive part in shelving a potentially revolutionary invention; revolutionary, that is, for those societies which had adopted alphabetic writing.[21]

19
Marshall, Alan. 1993. "Typereview" (Review of Kinross's *Modern Typography*). *Bulletin of the Printing Historical Society*, 35:16.

20
Gusdorf, Georges. 1960. *Introduction aux Sciences Humaines*. Strasbourg: Publications de la Faculté de Lettres.

21
Carter, T.F. 1955 (rev. by Carrington Goodrich, L). *The Invention of Printing in China*. New York: The Ronald Press. See also: Tsuen-Hsuin, Tsien. 1985. "Paper and Printing," in *Science and Civilisation in China*, ed. John Needham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol.5, part 1.

In English, the interchangeability between the terms "typography" and "printing," on the one hand, and "typographer" and "printer," on the other, dates back to the beginnings of printing. Today, in spite of the considerable changes which have affected modes and relations of print production, this semantic overlap continues to prevail in modern dictionaries: not only in sections dealing with the history of the terms, but also in those which list their current usage.

After pointing out its derivation from the Latin "typographia" (1493), via the French form "typographie" (1577), the *OED* defines typography as: "*1*. the art or practice of printing," and by extension: "a printing establishment, a press," "*2*. the action or process of printing; esp. the setting and arrangement of types and printing from them; typographical execution; hence, the arrangement and appearance of printed matter." From a contemporary perspective, the formulation is somewhat problematic, as what we would call today typographic *design* (the *semiological* dimension of printing), is subsumed and appears conditioned by technological factors. Put differently, this emphasis on the material aspects of typography marks the acceptance of technological determinism over design, not only in the "setting and arrangement of type" and in the corresponding "arrangement and appearance of printed matter," but also in the historical accounts which ensued.

Anchored in the technological constraints inherent to the modes of print production in the early printing office, and reinforced by the adoption of a restricted range of (typo)graphic conventions from manuscript books, this determinism retained its validity throughout the history of printing and lasted well into the twentieth century, when new historical conditions brought about the rise of the *designer* and, with it, the possibility of free individual interventions and radical transgressions.

Two early examples given by the *OED*: one from an eighteenth-century advertisement stating: "The typography of both editions does honour to the press" (1793), another from 1900, stating: "The typography is clear," suggest that, before

the rise of the designer, typography — defined as a specific set of rules — could only be good or bad. In that context discourses on typography could either lay out typographic norms — to be followed and emulated — or issue warnings against negligence or failure to comply with the rules. These texts, from Hornschuch's *Orthotypographia* (1608) to John Southward's *Modern Printing* (1912: 3rd ed) — subtitled: *a handbook of the principles and practice of typography and the auxiliary arts* — emphasize, by their names and in their content, the prescriptive nature of typographic literature. Characteristically, Fertel's *Science Practique* (1723), Smith's and Stower's *Grammars* (1755 and 1808), Momoro's and Pierre Fournier's *Traités* (1793 and 1825) and Timperley's *Manual* (1838) follow a didactic rather than a reflexive approach to their subject.

Typographer ancillus Typographiae

With characteristic symmetry, the *OED* defines "typographer" as "one skilled in typography; a printer." By the time Moxon wrote his *Mechanick Exercises* (1683-4), the division of labor between letter cutter, caster and dresser, compositor, corrector, press-man, ink-maker, smith and joiner (for the making and repairs of the presses), was already well established: "For the more easie managing of Typographie, the Operators have found it necessary to devide it into several Trades, each of which (in the strictest sence) stand no nearer related to Typographie, than Carpentry and Masonry, & are to Architecture," noted Moxon. The effects of this fragmentation, deplored by Moxon and others before him, called for a central figure capable of coordinating work in and around the printing office. It is from this context that Moxon's definition of the Typographer acquires its full significance. For Moxon, the Typographer was the unifying agent who could "either perform, or direct others to perform…all the handy-works and physical operations relating to typographie."[22]

In retrospect, it should not come as a surprise that Moxon linked the quality of printed matter with the technical and material aspects of print production. Since the Middle Ages,

22
Moxon, Joseph, 1683-4. *Mechanick Exercises on the whole art of Printing* (reprinted: Davies, H. and Carter H., editors. London, Oxford University Press) 1962,11-12.

the scholastic theory of the *artes mechanicae* had defined "art" as a fixed set of rules for the correct execution of any given task. In the words of Thomas Aquinas: art is nothing but the correct deduction of things to be done (*ars nihil aliud est, quam ratio recta aliquorum operum faciendorum* or, more concisely, *recta ratio factibilium*).[23] According to this view, the correct application of the principles of the "art" of printing could only produce good typography; imperfection arising not from the rules of the art, but from a failure by the artisan to implement them. Conversely, individual interventions in the mechanical arts did not affect the rules of the art, but merely removed the obstacles which prevented their implementation: "art does not add to what is, but remove the obstacles towards it manifestation" ("*non generat novam artem*," noted John of Saint Thomas, "*sed tollit impedimentum exercitii ejus*").[24] In this context, the modern concept of the designer as initiator of new practices was absolutely irrelevant.

Although the notion of the "designer" as a free, autonomous agent, capable of initiating change was incompatible with this episteme, the division and organization of labor within the printing office called for an individual capable of ensuring that the *rules* and the *fundamental principles* were followed scrupulously, at all stages of the process. Moxon's allegorical representation of the "Master Printer" as "the soul of Printing" and of "all the Work-men" as "members of the body governed by that Soul, subservient to him," who "would not carry out their art...but by Orders from the Master-Printer,"[25] emphasizes the importance of coordination. The picture of a printing office *(figure 1)* illustrating "the Master's duties, the correctors' chores, the work of readers and compositors" as well as the harder labor of press-men and apprentice (present in the image, but absent from the caption), highlights the managerial role alongside the craftsmen's diligence and application. What the picture does not show, however, is the system of rules, prohibitions and fines which ensured order in the *chapel*.[26] Contrasting with this emphasis on the material aspects of printing, a contemporary allegory *(figure 2)* reminds us that the aspiring typographer was expected to acquire mastery over

23
Quoted from:
Maritain, Jacques.
Art et Scholastique. 1920.
Paris: Librairie de l'Art
Catholique, 10, 28.

24
Maritain,
Art et Scholastique,
17 and 122 n.15.

25
Moxon, Joseph,
Mechanick Exercises..., 12.

26
On the the organization of
printing workshops or
"chapels:" Avis, FC. 1971.
*The Early Printers' Chapel in
England.* London: FC Avis.

OFFICINÆ TYPOGRA-
PHICÆ DELINEATIO.

E N Thymii ſculptoris opus, quo prodidit unâ
   Singula chalcographi munera rite gregis.
Et correctorum curas, operasq́; regentum,
   Quasq́; gerit lector, compoſitorq́; vices.
Ut vulgus ſileam. tu qui légis iſta, libello
   Fac iteratâ animi ſedulitate ſatis.
Sic meritæ cumulans hinc fertilitatis honores,
   Ceu pictura oculos, intima mentis ages.

L. I. L. F.

Figure 1
Picture of a printing office.

This cut, the work of Thymius' accurate hand
Shows all at once how printing shops are manned:
The masters' duties, the correctors' chores,
The work of readers and compositors.
To this small book then you'll apply your mind
Good reader, if you're not the vulgar kind,
So that a picture in your mind may rise
To match this picture that's before your eyes.

Figure 2
"Typograpia:" allegory of Typography,
from Gessner's Buchdrukerkunst
(Leipzig, 1743).

six aspects of language — represented by six concentric levels:
from reading, writing, understanding to grammar, before he
was deemed worthy of serving typography *(sic dignus es intrare)*.
The allegory implied that competence was to be acquired
through a guided ascent, at the term of which the typographer
could *serve, but in no way substitute himself for Typography*.

27
Hornschuch, Hieronimus.
1608. *Orthotypographia.*
Leipzig: M.Lantzenberge, 5.
Reprinted with an English
translation by Cambridge
University Library, 1972.

Design-led and Profit-led Typographies in the Eighteenth Century

In 1608, in a text described by its modern editor as "the first
in a long line of technical manual written for members of the
printing trade," the German corrector Hornschuch urged
master printers to take greater care over all aspects of their
work. After deploring that too many printers "do everything
solely for the sake of money and whatever is given to them to
be printed they send back ever worse, with types often so
worn down and blunt that their feable impression on almost
crumbling, dirt coloured paper can scarcely be detected by
the keenest eye," he concluded: "they debase their material
whatever it is with so many shameful mistakes, with the
result that one cannot find ever one page completely free
of errors."[27] Departing from idealized textbook stereotypes,
Hornschuch's account is valuable as it highlights, in very
specific ways, the negative consequences of commercialism
in the early seventeenth century.

In the light of these examples, it should be clear that the
distinction we draw today between typographic design and
printing, as two discrete branches of graphic communication,
was incompatible with a system of knowledge in which causality
operated through the *system* rather than through the individuals
working within it. In that context, the "art" of printing stood
out as the determining factor in the production of good typog-
raphy, individual merit measuring the ability to excel *through*
the parameters and *within* the boundaries of the art.

expressing them came together explosively," that "futurist typographers scream with large black type waving in all directions" and that consequently "the world of typography was blown on to a new course," shows an unfortunate vulnerability to the power of the most predictable futurist metaphor. The author's lack of ease and familiarity with the subject may explain the cursory treatment of futurism with respect to other movements. Let's note how, in this form of external characterization, futurism is construed as an excentric form of deviance, and the reader *confronted* with a collection of images rather than *engaged* in a productive dialogue with futurist principles and their implications for the *production of texts* and their *typographic presentation*.

Meggs's characterization follows a similar line, encapsulated by his remark that "Marinetti and his followers produced an explosive and emotionally charged poetry that defied correct syntax and grammar." Although Meggs is more specific in his account of futurist achievements, he never discusses the implications of futurism on typographic history.

It may come as a surprise to find two classic texts attempting to deal with futurist typography without referring *specifically* to those manifestos which spell out futurist intentions in detail. In Meggs's case, it is somewhat paradoxical as his bibliography lists the very source in which they were reprinted, in translation.[30] The consequences of this oversight are serious, for not only do these authors fail to provide an adequate description of futurist intentions and achievements, but also, more importantly in a historical account, their treatment of futurism precludes any assessment by the reader of its *historical significance* and *contemporary relevance*.

Several things are lost in these accounts: the fact that behind and through the aggressive rhetoric of futurist typography (its most easily spotted "noisy" side), comes a specific, extensive and coherent critique of typographic orthodoxy, and the realization that addressing the *problématique* opened up by futurism is important for a contemporary practice, especially in the wake of the debate around post-modernism. Put differently, address-

30
Apollonio, Umbro. 1973.
Futurist Manifestos.
London: Thames and
Hudsons, 95-106.

ing futurism at its face value — rather than at the level of its theoretical preoccupations — has generated different forms of *estrangement* leading either to marginalization or dismissal, or to superficial admiration, inspiring stylistic "rip-offs" and fashionable pastiches.

Against typophilia and "belle-lettrisme" Marinetti argued that "the so-called typographical harmony of the page" is "contrary to the flux and reflux, the leaps and burst of style that run through the page." This observation, printed in a section entitled "typographical revolution," was followed by a set of recommendations which situates Marinetti in the tradition of expressive typography traced by Massin, in *Letter and Image*, from Rabelais to Apollinaire.[31] Let's note, however, that Marinetti's personal contribution to typography extended beyond its literary precedents, in that it advocated a radical intervention on language, at the level of seven grammatical parameters: noun, adjective, verb, onomatopoeia, syntax, modes of reference and orthography.

The theorising of the "semaphoric adjective," for instance, provides some useful insights into the relation between typography and language. After remarking that: "one should treat adjectives like railway signals of style, employ them to mark tempo, the retards and pauses along the way," Marinetti notes: "What I call a semaphoric adjective, lighthouse-adjective, or atmosphere-adjective is the adjective apart from nouns, isolated in parentheses. This makes it a kind of absolute noun, broader and more powerful than the noun proper." Marinetti's concern to liberate images and analogies and to express them with "unhampered words and with no connecting strings of syntax and with no punctuation," aimed to produce more than a few burst of energy onto the page, as current characterizations tend to imply. Marinetti summarized his objectives in a manifesto published in *Lacerba* on 15 June 1913:

> With words-in-freedom we will have: CONDENSED METAPHORS. TELEGRAPHIC IMAGES. MAXIMUM VARIATIONS. NODES OF THOUGHT. CLOSED OR OPEN FANS OF MOVEMENT. COMPRESSED ANALOGIES. COLOUR

31
Massin. 1970. *Letter and Image*. London: Studio Vista,155-244.

The Author as Typographer

Before *design issues* could emerge in typographic literature, technological determinism first had to be *relativized* and the design process conceptualized as an activity capable of challenging — as Marinetti did — technological norms and their design implications. Conversely, not before a functional distinction and a relative autonomy between the material and design aspects of printing were granted, could the figure of the typographer emerge as the person capable of *redefining* typographic practice on the basis of innovation.

Given the corporate organization of printing as a trade, and the tight regulations used to preserve order in the *chapels,* it is not surprising that, in the area of book design, deviations from typographic norms were first instigated by authors seeking more appropriate typographic forms for the presentation of their texts. From the historical precedents of Laurence Sterne in *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy* (1759-1767) and Restif de la Bretonne's setting of *Monsieur Nicolas* (1796-97) to Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1876), Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dé* (1897), Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1917) and Marinetti's *Mots en Liberté Futuriste* (1919), the expressive use of type and deviations from typographical norms were motivated by authorial decisions. What was new in these and other experiments was the deliberate exploration of the relation between typography and language. Instead of accepting the standard typographic conventions set by the industry, these authors — in collaboration with sympathetic printers — took up the initiative to experiment with new typographic forms.

The significance of these experiments should not be regarded as marginal or peripheral — as Walter Tracy intimated — but as an essential part of the typographic scene, like the long neglected mass of Victorian display typography, now available for study, thanks to the pioneering work of Nicolette Gray (1939), Michael Twyman (1966; 1970), and John Lewis (1962; 1976).[28] The object of these experiments was not, as often imputed, to engage in gratuitous games (form/decoration for its own sake) or shout louder than their neighbor in the frenzy

28
Gray, Nicolette. 1938 (2nd rev ed: 1976). *Nineteenth Century Ornamented Types and Title Pages.* London: Faber and Faber.

Lewis, John.1962 (2nd rev ed: 1990). "Printed Ephemera: The Changing Uses of Type and Letterform," *English and American Printing.* London: Antique Collector's Club.

Lewis, John. 1976. *Collecting Printed Ephemera,* London: Studio Vista.Twyman, Michael. 1970. *Printing* 1770-1970. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

of self-expression or economic competition, but to consider how the limits of typographic conventions may be extended *purposefully*.

Today, the insertion of these experiments in a *general* history of typography, calls for an examination of the issue of *typographic reference*; that is to say of the referential function of typography in relation to the texts it presents. Too long obscured by claims and counter-claims about legibility, the transparency or invisibility of the text, and other related issues, the question of typographic reference has been effaced from typographic writings. This needs to be remedied if typographic differences are to become intelligible, within an enlarged typographic scene; enriched by more sophisticated theoretical tools.

29
Gottschall, Edward M. 1989. *Typographic Communications Today.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2, 18.

Meggs, Philip B. 1992. *A History of Graphic Design.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 241, 485.

On Futurism's Birthday

"Writers like James Joyce were giving new form to the English Language, but our typographers were not doing much about it."

J. Lewis (1978:50)

In spite of the growing concensus around the historical significance of modernism, historians of graphic design and typography tend to signal the existence of such experiments with a surprising brevity and lack of attention to typographic language. Although both Gottschall's *Typographic Communication Today* (1989) and Meggs's *A History of Graphic Design* (1992) acknowledge the historical significance of futurism, both, in my view, fail to provide an adequate account of futurist typography and an assessment of its contemporary relevance.[29]

Gottschall starts with a predictable quotation from Spencer's *Pioneers of Modern Typography*: "The heroic period of modern typography may be said to have begun with Marinetti's *Figaro* manifesto of 1909," and follows by reiterating the usual art historical clichés about the beauty of speed. His observation that, "In futurism, social protest, new ideas, and new ways of

BALANCES. DIMENSIONS, WEIGHTS, MEASURES, AND THE SPEED OF SENSATIONS. THE PLUNGE OF THE ESSENTIAL WORD INTO THE WATER OF SENSIBILITY, MINUS THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES THAT THE WORD PRODUCES. RESTFUL MOMENTS OF INTUITION. MOVEMENTS IN TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE DIFFERENT RHYTHMS. THE ANALYTIC, EXPLORATORY POLES THAT SUSTAIN THE BUNDLE OF INTUITIVE STRINGS.

To an attentive reader informed about linguistic and literary theory, Marinetti's experiments deserve more than the cursory mention or stereotypical treatment they receive in typographic and graphic design histories. A preliminary line of research could involve a comparative study of the tools and modalities of *reference* in typography, starting with a definition of typographic reference and a discussion of typograhic *denotation* and *connotation* in relation to theories of writing, editing and reading. This would have the advantage of extending the scope of typographic writing beyond closed dualisms (between tradition-alisms and avant-gardes) and superficial formalist descriptions.

Since Lewis mapped out "the influence of art and history" on typographic design, in his *Anatomy of Printing* (1970), typo-graphic histories have reiterated, with minor variations, the same themes and motifs, without substantially extending the analytical tools necessary for a better description of typographic texts. Unfolding from a mythical origin (the controversial context of the invention of printing and the laying out of its foundations by its founding *fathers*), along a Vasarian path, typographic histories do not question the assumptions upon which they rest. Paradoxically, the systematic *taming* of the literary text brought about by the invention of printing, and its consequences on typographic design, have never been examined as a subject in its own right. Twenty four years after its first publication, the impressive body of visual material anthologized by Massin in *Letter and Image* is still awaiting *adequate* theoretical and historical contextualization. Thus, the impoverishment and closure (through standardization) brought about by the invention of printing from movable types — with respect to the variety of approaches found in the manuscript

presentations of text in the pre-Gutenberg age — has been obscured by the more optimistic themes of the advancement of learning and democratization of knowledge arising from the diffusion of books. In conclusion, I would like to suggest that attention to Marinetti's critique of language and its conventional typographic presentations could, if related to *other* areas of typographic history, renew the *problématique* of typographic histories by inducing a closer examination of the effects of typography on the presentation and interpretation of texts. This would extend the debate on legibility beyond the retinal/optical dimension stressed by traditionalists to the much neglected *cultural and semiological implications of typographic structures*.

One conclusion I shall draw from this discussion is that, *in the 1990s, one should not attempt to write typographic histories without a sound knowledge of those disciplines which bear upon typography and language, namely linguistics, semiotics, literary theory, art history, bibliography, philosophy, etc. Failing this, chronicles will continue to assume the role and claim the status of history-writing.*

The Function of Typographic Histories

A close examination of the historiography of printing shows that the writing of typographic histories has always been functionally related to typographic practice. James Watson's stated objectives in translating and printing La Caille's *History of the Art of Printing*, in 1713 — "to know to whom we are oblig'd for so fine an Art, and how it began," — reminds us that one important function of typographic history was to anchor typographic practice in an exemplary past which provided models for those training in the "typographic art." Experiencing typographic history in narrative form became a significant part of the *rite de passage* through which the apprentice was admitted into the trade.

The relevance of typographic history to practice was acknowledged by Fertel who, in his *Science Pratique de l'Imprimerie* (1723) refers his readers to two "traités d'histoires de l'Imprimerie:" La Caille's, from 1689, and an anonymous *De Germaniae…*, published in Leipzig. For a functional

integration of history and practice, we need to turn to John Smith's plan to follow his *Printer's Grammar* of 1755 with a separate volume on *The History and Present State of Printing* and to Luckombe's *History and Art of Printing* (1771), which offers a "Historical Account," outlining "a concise history of the art from its invention to the present time," and an "Instructive and Practical Part," dealing with technical aspects of printing: materials, presses, paper, composition, corrections, casting off copy, alphabets and warehouse management, followed by a glossary of technical terms used in printing.

Although Momoro's *Traité Elémentaire de l'Imprimerie* (1793) only included a brief sketch of "the birth of printing and the propagation of this art," Stower's *Printer's Grammar* (1808), Johnson's *Typographia or the Printer's Instructor* (1824) and Hansard's *Typographia* (1825) provided substantial accounts of typographic history, which, in Johnson's and Hansard's case, represented one half of the entire treatise. The first Dutch manual published by van Cleff in 1844 contains a brief survey as does Henri Fournier's *Traité de la Typographie* (1825).

The absence of any historical account from Charles H. Timperley's *The Printer's Manual* (1838) was explained by the author's intention to "concentrate all that is useful and requisite to the inexperienced apprentice or journeyman." Similarly, Savage's *Dictionary of the Art of Printing (1841)* and Frey's *Nouveau Manuel Complet de Typographie* (1857) both focus on technical aspects of printing without delving into its history. Timperley's *Dictionary of Printers and Printing* (1839), reissued in two volumes, in 1842, under the title of *Encyclopedia of Literary and Typographical Anecdotes,* provided a "Chronological Digest of the Most Interesting Fact Illustrative of the History of Literature and Printing from the Earliest Period to the Present Time," a clear indication of the persisting relevance of typographic history. Timperley's publication of technical and historical material in separate form, however, signals a functional differentiation in the readership of books on typography, and an acknowledgment, by the author, that the appeal of typographic histories extended to a wider public of nonprofessionals, incorporating those Momoro called *"les curieux de l'historique."*

A close look at the ways early typographic manuals dealt with historical information reveal significant differences in conceptions and attitudes. As Harry Carter noted, Pierre Fournier "was determined to be the historian as well as the practitioner of his art" and many of "his notes on the old letter-cutter were often simply reprinted in biographical dictionaries until the middle of the nineteenth century. By contrast, Momoro's reasons for not dwelling on typographic history were determined by considerations about his intended readership, "the inexperienced apprentice, or journeyman," whose preoccupations he distinguished from those he termed "*les curieux de l'historique*." Furthermore, we know from his Avertissement that the lack of comprehensive and up-to-date books on the subject — since Fertel's *Science Pratique* (1723) — combined with the extent of technological progress, informed his decision to focus on technical and practical aspects (*ce qui a rapport absolument à son but*).

Hansard's intended readership, however, was broader; it embraced two categories: "the young practitioner" and "the amateur." This may explain the balance between the sections dealing with the history and the practice of typography. Momoro's decision to provide an update on recent technolog-ical developments — rather than to reiterate the well estab-lished facts of typographic history — was understandable; for one feature of history-writing was the incestuous practice among authors to liberally borrow their material from each other. Thus, Hansard remarked that "upon a close comparison much of Luckombe will be found to be plagiarized from Smith, altered a little in arrangement and phraseology and that in his turn Stower copied from Luckombe." Luckombe, however, had acknowledged that the historical part of his book was derived from Ames, Moxon and others. It is some-what paradoxical, therefore, to see Hansard praise Luckombe's account of *The Introduction of the Art into England,* as "the most satisfactory of any to be met with; in proof of which, it may be seen that every subsequent writer on the subject has either copied his work, or quoted, by his means, the same authorities which he had consulted," when Luckombe had clearly stated

that his account was "extracted" from "a curious dissertation concerning the Origin of Printing in England" written by "Dr. Congers Middleton, Principal Librarian of Cambridge," and "printed in 1735." In 1841, Savage summarized the situation rather well when he noted: "There has…hitherto been but little said on the History or Practice of Printing, the numerous books on the subject being chiefly copies from one or two of the earliest writers."

Envoi

To this day, educators have reasserted the relevance of typographic history to typographic practice: whereas for John Lewis it represents a useful set of references for finding one's own style,[32] Ruari McLean emphasises the role of history in ensuring quality by providing a basis for the reinterpretation of tradition.[33] Today, however, the desire to preserve *continuity* bweeen past and present is less of an issue among the exponents of the new typography. Free from the rules and technical constraints of letterpress, designers who developed an interest in typography through the Macintosh™, in a do-it-yourself art school environment — "on a crash course to typo-hell," as a student put it recently — many exponents of the new typography experiment with a blissful disrespect of rules they never learnt.[34] It is not surprising, therefore, that a longstanding way of inducing conformism within typographic practice has come to be regarded with suspicion by the new vanguard.

It is interesting to note that, in Britain during the late seventies and throughout the eighties, the formalist account presented by Herbert Spencer in *Pioneers of Modern Typography* inspired young designers, dissatisfied with the conservatism of art school training. As Jon Savage pointed out at the time, this led to a shameless plunder of modernist forms;[35] on a more positive level, however, it gave a new impetus to typographic design which, through the work of Neville Brody for *The Face*, Peter Saville and Malcolm Garrett in record sleeve design, and that of many others, contributed to draw typography out of the rarefied atmosphere of the workshop, to a new, younger audience, eager to consume it without any preconceptions.

32
Lewis, John. 1978.
Typography: Design and Practice. London: Barrie and Jenkins,13.

33
McLean, Ruari. 1980.
Manual of Typography. London: Thames and Hudson,12.

34
Manchipp, Simon. 1993.
"Typo mystique."
Typographic News, 68, 13.

35
Savage, John. 1983.
"The Age of Plunder."
The Face, January, 44-49.

Whatever we may think about the results, they are undoubt-
edly significant and, like the explosion of display typography
which occured in the Victorian age, are an integral part
of typographic history. To insert these developments into
a comprehensive history of typography is no easy task, as
it requires a number of epistemological and ideological
decenterings which are not easily achieved by a single person.

Another difficulty about writing typographic histories in the
1990s is the unilinear format of the academic paper. This
unilinearity encourages authors to oversimplify and cut
corners. In the light of recent developments in multimedia
technology, and given the longstanding claims of "hypertexts"
to deliver more than traditional printed texts, it may be oppor-
tune that typographic histories should consider the possibilities
of developing multilinear accounts of typographic pluralism.
Combined with the epistemological and ideological decenter-
ings such moves would imply, the histories I have in mind
would delete the ambition of restoring the past to its pristine
glory, and settle for an exploration of the possibilities opened
up by the dimension of the work. At that point, typographic
histories and criticism would assume the role of a hermeneutic
of interpretation, in collaboration with other disciplines,
generating meanings without intimation of transcendence. □

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