

'WHY DON'T YOU STRETCH THE HEADING AND LETTER-
SPACE ALL THE TEXT, AND GIVE IT ABOUT 64 POINT LEADING?'

'NOW I HAVE ADOBE PHOTOSHOP I CAN DO THAT
"LAYERED LOOK". I'D REALLY LIKE TO MAKE MY LAYOUTS RICH AND DENSE
AND TEXTURED.'

'LET'S SCAN LOTS OF PICS AND HAVE
THEM SCATTERED ALL OVER THE PAGE. THAT WILL LOOK GREAT!'

deconstruction

The *shifting*
paradigm in
communications

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Regardless of the problems created for bureaux and repro houses, deconstruction sounds like a lot of fun for designers, who seldom want to be left behind where new movements and trends are concerned. Especially now, when they are at last in a position to explore the frontiers of communication. Something they could never do before, because the technology was far too expensive and they were dependent on a few repro houses to achieve desired effects. Which they did, sometimes.

A venture into this new trend brings other problems as well. Presenting to clients can prove risky, especially when the novel appearance of the design has been achieved by a process barely understood by the designer himself. Less successful designs evoke responses from clients which range from outrage to questions and comments like: 'What the hell is all this stuff? What have all these elements got to do with our new package? There is no single, clear message. Half the stuff I can't read because it is too busy. You call this deconstruction. What's that? I don't care about your theories! All I want you to do is promote my product!'

towards demystification

Explanations to the client about deconstruction and its purpose are often appallingly vague. 'It's about the new trend. You know, the veiled and textured look.' Or 'It's different.' These lines seldom get designers very far.

Yet graphic designers were among the first people to depart from Modernism into the New Edge, despite being ill-informed or not informed at all about its theoretical foundations.

Contrary to popular opinion, deconstruction in design does not focus on the designer. It is not centred on self-expression or an egocentric trip. Rather it is about interaction, which nevertheless leaves the designer with ample room for intuitive expression.

The essential tenets and concepts of this approach are the exploration of multiple interpretations and levels of meaning, the rejection of rigid and prescribed design standards and the acceptance of subjective criteria for judging aesthetic merit.

CRANBROOK, DUNBAR STUDIO, HARD WERKEN, WHY NOT ASSOCIATES, THE THUNDER JOCKEYS and some brave individuals including WOLFGANG WEINGART from the Basle School, EDWARD FELLA, RUDY VANDERLANS from Emigre Graphics, APRIL GREIMAN and CARLOS SAGURA amongst others, forefronted the exploration of the dense complex layering of elements that is one of the most salient (and frequently criticised) characteristics of the new typographic design.

Unlike the earlier work of the New Wave designers, deconstruction in design is not simply a formal exercise in collage-making or a resurrection of Dadaism. It is a method that arises directly from an engagement with content. The Cranbrook theorists' aim, derived from French philosophy, linguistics and critical theory, is to deconstruct, or break apart and expose, manipulative visual language to reveal different levels of meaning embodied in a design. Demystify in the same way that a literary critic might deconstruct and demystify the verbal language in a passage or text of a novel.

Deconstruction, originally a technique initiated by philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida in 1967, **destroyed the assumption that a text has 'a' meaning**, which attention and application would eventually tease out. Derrida showed that a text could say many different things. This technique dominated literary criticism in the 1970s, but is now in a fallow period, often leading to a questioning of its relevance to design. However, a number of design theorists, for instance Lorraine Wild (1990), maintain its empowering relevance to design and argue that whether it is still *chic* with literary critics is beside the point.

The approach has found wide application in design and has been the subject of ongoing experimentation and debate in an attempt to define and understand its impact. **Deconstruction in design rejects the idea that neither designer nor audience are important, but draws on the concepts of both reception theory and Poststructuralism. Visual communication is viewed as an interactive process where the designer may have numerous intentions and where alternative interpretations and meanings are evoked from an audience. The reader is not a passive recipient of the message. The aim is rather to provoke the reader into becoming an active participant and to engage him in a dialogue. Contrary to the Modernist ideal of objectivity in communication, the designer is allowed intuitive responsiveness.**

He becomes a participant in the delivery of the message and his role extends beyond that of just translator. As a designer, I feel that deconstruction is a natural and necessary departure from the deadly boredom of 'Helvetica-on-a-grid' as the universal solution. What is more, as a designer, I need to actualise my role in three different directions. I need to use:

DESIGN AS ART • BOTH EXPERIMENTAL AND PERSONAL

DESIGN AS SCIENCE • LOGICAL, INFORMATIONAL, SYSTEMATIC

DESIGN AS LANGUAGE • THROUGH SEMANTICS AND SEMIOTICS

standards

I was delighted when I came across a physiologically based theory for a form of communication which disclaims the necessity for set or prescribed standards. In her book, *THE QUANTUM*

SELF, Danah Zohar, who is a physicist and philosopher, says:

'... many people in the modern era have argued that there are no objective standards for judging aesthetic merit, no clear way to say that one bowl is more beautiful than another or one house more satisfying to live in than another. Such things are said to be a matter of taste, and "there's no accounting for people's taste".

Instead, it is better that we concentrate on the mechanical and the functional, where there are clear standards' (1991:189)

The Modernists, especially the Bauhaus theorists, stressed the importance of materials and function, ignoring the subtleties of human interaction. Legibility was mistaken for communication and theories were rid of anything remotely humanistic or natural.

'Yet each of us as a conscious being does carry the natural within himself, whatever our lifestyle or circumstances. We carry it within the physics of our consciousness, which is the same physics as that of life itself. If we relate the aesthetic dimension of the objects we use in our daily lives to the aesthetic needs of this consciousness, then we may find again within its physics certain natural criteria for a value like "beauty", just as there were found to be natural criteria for what is "good" in the realm of the moral. However, it is important to remind ourselves that there may be many quite different expressions of beauty which meet these criteria, just as there were many possible forms of behaviour that might meet the criteria for "good" behaviour'.

(Zohar 1991:190)

Zohar contends that a 'quantum aesthetics' would by definition allow for the possibility of many equally valid aesthetic styles. She thinks that it is possible that there is a 'constraint of the Natural' which underpins all aesthetic needs and which gives us an objective foundation for judging whether a given style or object meets these needs.

a fine balance

The most important dynamic feature of any Prigogine 'open system', quantum or otherwise, is that it is poised delicately on a very critical dividing line between the static and the chaotic. Nobel Laureate in quantum physics, Ilya Prigogine, describes this as 'far from equilibrium conditions' in his book *ORDER OUT OF CHAOS*. If the system had less energy going through it, it would run down and the matter caught up within it would become inert, without order or meaning. If it had more energy, it would veer off into too much turbulence and become mere 'noise'.

(Zohar 1991:190)

A layout that is dry and too static, often fails to convey a distinct message and runs the risk of merging with the rest of the print communication. A layout which becomes too chaotic through personal explorations tends to minimise relevance to the contents of the message and '**comes apart at the seams**', resulting in the loss of the reader.

This same fine balance is maintained in any conscious system, and in psychological terms represents the dividing line between boredom on the one hand

and confusion on the other. - An artifact which bores us does so because there is insufficient

"movement" either in its design or in the materials of which it is made. This is very obvious in paintings which have no "life", but can also be true of houses or bowls.

A functionalist building designed according to strict mechanical principles and so called objective standards will have no "eccentric" edges. All the corners will be square, all the ceilings just the right height to clear the head of the tallest person, all the windows and doors absolutely symmetrical. There will be no surprises, nothing to catch the eye and thus to stimulate the mind.' (Zohar 1991:190)

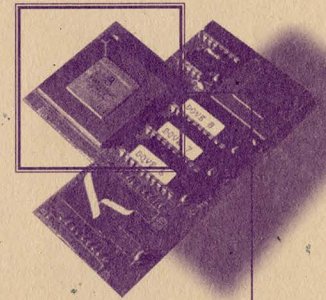
It is no accident that the deconstruction movement should break away from the

Modernists, whose emphasis was on structural expression.

Such emphasis often resulted in a kind of dry neatness, devoid of the essential messiness and ambiguity of the human condition. **The obvious challenge to the designer is to explore and freely express content and meaning, without totally abandoning the framework which ensures the unity of the design.**

micro electronics

The reaction to structural expressionism has been strongly supported and underpinned by the use of personal computers in design studios. The desktop computer has even made it possible for designers to explore the frontiers from home. Most semantic design explorations are undertaken on personal computers, often in combination with a variety of input devices.



As a designer, the Mac and its software have given me a flexibility of arrangement that permits unusual freedom of design ... exactly what I need to explore new and unknown avenues. I also take great care not to discard what is natural to me ... the hand gesture ... **The computer has no intuitive, creative, or hand-gesture ability.** After all, in future, the autographic mark could become a scarce resource ... very highly priced.

Well then, let's see what comes out of our Motorola and Intel chips when we mix micro with quantum aesthetics.

