

Semiotics and Visual Communication: Concepts and Practices

Semiotics and Visual Communication:
Concepts and Practices

Edited by

Evripides Zantides

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Semiotics and Visual Communication: Concepts and Practices,
Edited by Evripides Zantides

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2014 by Evripides Zantides and contributors

Book Cover design and copyrights by Theseas Mouzouropoulos

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5468-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5468-9

...to all the graphic warriors

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xii
Preface.....	xiii
Acknowledgements	xvii

Chapter One: Architectural and Spatial Design-Design for Three Dimensional Products

Embedded, Introspective and Poetic Narratives in 3-Dimensional Design Ralph Ball	2
How Type Can Move Us—Type in the Environment: France	11
Jeff Leak	
Double Writing in Architectural Design: A Phenomenological- Semiotic Approach	23
Theodora Papidou	

Chapter Two: Design for Print Applications

The Renaissance of Academic Publishing: The Deconstruction of the Journal into a Pragmatic Manifestation of a Postmodernist Set of Discourses	34
Artemis Alexiou	
Marketing Semiotics Applied to the Design of Integrated Graphic Communication Systems	45
Dora Ivonne Alvarez Tamayo	
(De)coding the Fabric of the European Years' Visual Representations	56
Camelia Cmeciu and Doina Cmeciu	

Intersemiotic Translation in Advertising Discourse: Plastic Visual Signs in Primary Function in Communication 72
Evangelos Kourdis

The Greek-Cypriot Dialect in Writing: Orthographic Conventions and Typographic Practices..... 86
Aspasia Papadima, Ioli Ayiomamitou and Stelios Kyriacou

Chapter Three: Design for Screen Based Media

Signs at the Interface: An Exploration of Semiotics and Interaction Design..... 100
Nikos Bubaris

Ludic and Social Media Interaction Design Principles in Smart City Development 110
Patrick J. Coppock

Typography and Language: A Semiotic Perspective..... 126
Jack Post

Film and New Art Media Semiotics: On the Figural..... 139
Irini Stathi

Kinetic Typography: A Semiotic Exploration 150
Theo van Leeuwen and Emilia Djonov

Chapter Four: Pedagogy of Visual Communication

100 Things: A Process for Foundation in Theory and Practice 164
Law Alsobrook

Visual Diasporas: Comics as Transcultural Phenomena 177
Holger Briel

The Development of a Visual Literacy Course in Higher Education 193
Anastasia Christodoulou and George Damaskinidis

“My First Experiment” “My First Ex”: A Multimodal Tool Proposed in the Didactics of Literature 207
Symeon Degermentzides

Developing Students' Visual Design Competence through Situated Literacy Practices: The Case of the Erasmus IP "P.S.BoWMa"	224
Catherine Dimitriadou and Androniki Gakoudi	
The Quest for "Visual Thinking" and the Double Bind of Education	239
Miltos Frangopoulos	
Project My City My Place: A Cross-Cultural Collaboration in Graphic Design.....	256
Maryam Hosseinnia	
The Receiver is the Message?	269
Peter C. Jones	
A Course in Visual Communication.....	284
Tony Pritchard	
Children Are Painting Inscriptions: Pedagogy of Visual Communication in Local History	295
Evangelia Svirou, Ifigeneia Vamvakidou and Paraskevi Golia	
Chapter Five: Visual Arts	
Marks, Signs and Images: The Sense of Belonging and Commitment which Pre-Dates History but has now become a Powerful Global Language	310
Paul Middleton	
Showing Saying: On Speech Balloons	322
Lizzie Ridout	
Contributors List.....	332

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1-1: Swan and Dolphin Hotels by Michael Graves/ Notch and Tilt
Best Supermarkets by SITE
- Figure 1-2: light and shade collection
- Figure 1-3: the complete history of shelf supports
- Figure 1-4: One Day I'll design the Perfect Paper Lampshade
- Figure 1-5: power tower
- Figure 1-6: Transparent
- Figure 1-7: The removal of the billboard has left this sign visible behind
the later poster frame
- Figure 1-8: This gable end shows four advertising messages all overlaid
and revealed by the passage of time
- Figure 1-9: These two signs for the alcohol brand Suze were photographed
in different parts of France and go some way to illustrating the visual
differences that painted signs wrought on brand marks
- Figure 1-10: Space of inscription: it is circumscribed by double
writing and geo-graphy.
- Figure 1-11: Architectural design as semiosis.
- Figure 2-1: Snapshot from *Talk to Her* by Pedro Almodovar
- Figure 2-2: Camera Obscura: feminism, culture and media studies
- Figure 2-3: Camera Obscura: feminism, culture and media studies
- Figure 2-4: Stages of the design process
- Figure 2-5: Logos of European Years
- Figure 2-6: Print advertising of Cyprus Bank
- Figure 2-7: Print advertising of the Greek mobile network operator
Cosmote
- Figure 2-8: Print advertising of Piraeus Bank
- Figure 2-9: Consonants-vowels representation in words with the same
meaning, both in GC and SMG.
- Figure 2-10: Motifs created by the counter-forms of characters in GC
- Figure 2-11: How young people write in GC
- Figure 3-1: The opening screen of the Ermou Street multimedia
application
- Figure 3-2: Activating interactive objects
- Figure 3-3: Smart City promotion images from three incidentally selected
web sites

- Figure 3-4: Connotative system
- Figure 3-5: Nameplate *Le Monde*
- Figure 3-6: Four different realisations of the letter d
- Figure 3-7: Triadic sign model
- Figure 3-8: Saussure
- Figure 3-9: A conceptual and a narrative image
- Figure 4-1: 100 Things
- Figure 4-2: An example of *word :: image :: image :: word*
- Figure 4-3: Student critiquing another student's work
- Figure 4-4: Final poster examples from *100 Things*
- Figure 4-5: Teaching scenario a comparison between Florina and Bitola
- Figure 4-6: The teaching scenario *Arcturos*
- Figure 4-7: The teaching scenario *Christian Orthodox Religious symbols in Prespes*
- Figure 4-8: Statement of the Eames Design Process by Charles Eames
- Figure 4-9: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Visual Representation of the novel *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce,
- Figure 4-10: Grammar as “memory image” and “object alphabet” from Johannes Romberch
- Figure 4-11: AUK. Male Kuwaiti student, age 29
- Figure 4-12: MSUM Male American student, age 22
- Figure 4-13: AUK. Female Kuwaiti student, age 19
- Figure 4-14: MSUM. Female American student, age 20
- Figure 4-15: The research proposition as an example of the eclectic and indeterminate nature of the Design process.
- Figure 4-16: Grouping
- Figure 4-17: Density
- Figure 4-18: The T-ness of T
- Figure 4-19: Typographic hierarchy exercise
- Figure 4-20: *A Byzantian sign*
- Figure 4-21: A children's sign-*The doctors*
- Figure 4-22: A children's sign-*VOLT, a sport shop*
- Figure 5-1: Tag created in The Graffiti Creator application
- Figure 5-2: Catherine Middleton's (Duchess of Cambridge) coat of arms
- Figure 5-3: Catherine Middleton's (Duchess of Cambridge) coat of arms
- Figure 5-4: This Nike advertisement is a clear reference to the nativity star
- Figure 5-5: Greenpeace's 'rebranded' BP symbol
- Figure 5-6: Soliloquy [After Bakhtin]
- Figure 5-7: Soliloquy [After Bakhtin]
- Figure 5-8: Compilation of pages from *Ways to talk and yet say nothing, or ways to not talk and yet say everything*

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1: The cognitive flow beyond the European Years' logos

Table 2-2: Type visual deontic modality

Table 2-3: Token visual deontic modality

Table 4-1: An overview of the structure of the course

Table 4-2: Multimodal factors

Table 4-3: The semiotic practices comprising the IP P.S. BoWMa within the concept of "design"

Table 4-4: Inventory of the resources used for the compilation of the teaching scenarios

PREFACE

This book is the result of selective research papers that were presented at the first international conference of Semiotics and Visual Communication at the Cyprus University of Technology in November 2011. The conference was built around the theme *from theory to practice* and brought together researchers and practitioners who study and evaluate the ways that semiotic theories can be analysed, perceived and applied in the context of various forms in visual communication. Within a Semiotic framework, the book explores research questions under five main thematic areas: *Architectural and Spatial Design-Design for Three-Dimensional Products, Design for Print Applications, Design for Screen-Based Media, Pedagogy of Visual Communication* and *Visual Arts*. It investigates Semiotics, not only from a theoretical and historical perspective, but also from an applied point of view, looking at how theory can be implemented into design and visual communication practice. A key feature of the book is the diversity of 25 essential contributions by 33 academics and practitioners that display their concepts and ideas on Semiotics within the interdisciplinary nature of Visual Communication. From Plato's *Cratylus* to structuralism and post-structuralism, the presence and aspects of Semiotics as defined by linguists, have always been strongly present and applied in non-verbal languages. The selected authors that follow are a proof of the fascinating research and design opportunities that constantly emerge and enrich, at the same time, visual communication.

Ralph Ball is concerned with the generation of artefacts, which deconstruct and reconstruct design axioms and ideologies. He presents an evolving series of conceptual artefacts, which act as visual reflections on Modern, Postmodern and Contemporary design culture, as well as re-examines typologies and generic forms with reference to the rhetorical themes and axioms specific to Modernism. **Jeff Leak** successfully juxtaposes parallels between the caves of Lascaux and the old painted roadside advertising that decorates the roadside in France. He suggests that the simplicity of their temporally altered messages implies a different kind of social interaction; a more civilised societal code and explores their Frenchness from a semiotic perspective. **Theodora Papidou** investigates the moment of first retaining an intention in lines and words during the process of architectural design as ushers in the activation of a mechanism,

fixing architectural thought in iconic and verbal signs. She looks at the traces of this first instance of retaining up to the emergence of form and concept, as well as the text of the special design writing to be regarded as a unit of signification. **Artemis Alexiou** re-examines the design and layout of academic print journals in order to reflect the nature of contemporary academic discourse more, as well as introduce a concentrated design conceptualisation and production into the sphere of academic journals to improve their visibility and promote academic ideas to a wider audience beyond the academic communities. **Dora Ivonne Alvarez Tamayo** focuses on the production of discursive systems aimed at promoting the brand positioning through the articulation of visual messages that are issued in different media, by which an organisation, company or product uses to contact their users. **Camelia Cmeciu** and **Doina Cmeciu** collaborate on the deep structure of unity with the EU communication campaigns for promoting European Years, common to all the member states, and look at their diversity with the implementation of the issues of each European Year within public communication campaigns of different member states' organisations. **Evangelos Kourdis** presents selected cases of intersemiotic translation in advertisements adopting *Groupe μ.'s* (1992) approach and he examines Greek examples whose intersemiosis is based primarily on the interpretation of the verbal system by plastic visual systems that co-exist with iconic visual signs. **Aspasia Papadima, Ioli Ayiomamitou** and **Stelios Kyriacou** investigate issues related to the interplay of typography and orthography design for a non-codified dialect. They engage in researching the orthographic representation of the non-standard Greek-Cypriot dialect spoken by the Greek-Cypriots in Cyprus. **Nikos Bubaris** explores Semiotics and Interaction Design by proposing a synthetic model of four communicative functions of user-interface signs: modes of remediation, action-oriented representations, nodes in information maps and computational effects by reference to a multimedia application that a team of students produced as an assignment. **Patrick J. Coppock** focuses on how "ludic and social media interaction design principles" may be useful for mapping, planning, designing and realising people-friendly *urban spaces* in *Smart(er) Cities*. **Jack Post** proposes that typography can be considered as a poetical or aesthetic language that subverts the primary functions of the alphabet and written language. He recommends that a semiotics of typography is possible, and can be approached as a secondary poetic organisation of the planar written surface. **Irini Stathi** indicates that the heterogeneity and complexity of multimodal coded texts probably require new semiotic concepts and likely new methods of research in order to delineate the role of the figural in the

screen-based arts' signification. **Theo van Leeuwen** and **Emilia Djonov** explore kinetic typography as a fundamental change in the semiotic landscape and investigate the potential meaning of this new semiotic mode, what we can 'say' with it and how, as well as how this potential meaning comes about. **Law Alsobrook** unpacks some of the methods and means by which teaching sophomores the language of design is taking place, while they explore the design process. **Holger Briel** looks at comics as transcultural phenomena and analyzes how graphic novels can become effective teaching tools by investigating common challenges that come from students themselves. **Anastasia Christodoulou** and **George Damaskinidis** examine how literacy can be practised when analysing video as a new form of multimodal text. By employing this new concept of pedagogy, they aim to introduce a framework to describe the activities of individuals as they identify, read and create new texts using various semiotic codes. **Symeon Degermentzides** proposes an educational software that aims to register information about the choices a student makes concerning meaning-making resources, while surfing on the Internet. **Catherine Dimitriadou** and **Androniki Gakoudi** explore the ways that situated literacy practices can contribute to the development of student teachers' semiotic awareness and their competence as educational agents. **Miltos Frangopoulos** negotiates the quest for "visual thinking" and the double bind of Education so as to assist students to move beyond mere transmission or 'communication production', towards invention, confronting the more significant issues related to the authorship of meaningful proposals. **Maryam Hosseinnia** looks at cross-cultural collaboration in design learning and she uses the semiotic approach to analyse, process and interpret messages/signs to understand their meaning and their influence on people's interpretation in different parts of the world. **Peter C. Jones** outlines the early stages of a practice-based PhD into the effect on communication design methodologies and outputs, by substituting established types of market segmentation with theories and categories used by teachers to identify the styles or models by which people learn. **Tony Pritchard** presents a Visual Communication course from the London College of Communication that its postgraduate design sets out to demystify the theories and practices of visual communication. Through the presentation of a case study, he aims to show how semiotics and related theories are applied in a practical learning and teaching context. **Evangelia Svirou**, **Ifigeneia Vamvakidou** and **Paraskevi Golia** outline the outcome of a didactic proposal for children who learn about local history. Their theory and analysis are based on "reading" students' products using social semiotics within the scope of visual communication.

Paul Middleton explores the emergence of primitive marks as signs which identified people long before a verbal language emerged. He builds on them as marks that followed a different evolutionary path, suggesting that they communicate with simplicity and economy; conveying far more through simple juxtaposed images than a complex series of words. **Lizzie Ridout** brings together theoretical, historical and practice-based research to examine the semiotic aspects of speech balloon. In part, she outlines a collection of ruminations, preoccupations, truths and tales examining the speech balloon and its dear, yet distinct relative, the thought balloon.

Taking this publication as a starting point for action, combined with the constitution of Cyprus Semiotics Association in 2013 and the support of the Hellenic Semiotic Society, Cyprus begins to have a place on the international Semiotic map. I hope you enjoy this book and find it stimulating and useful in providing some answers on putting semiotic theory into visual communication practice.

Evipides Zantides
Lemosos
www.svclab.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, as a result of the first International Conference on Semiotics and Visual Communication that was held in Cyprus in November 2011, would not have been possible without the contribution and help of its scientific and organising committees, reviewers, speakers and volunteers who were involved throughout its process and accomplishment.

Special thanks must go to Savvas Christodoulides, Anastasia Christodoulou, Antonis Danos, Miltos Frangopoulos, Matthew Hobson, Marianna Kafaridou, Evangelos Kourdis, Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, Jeff Leak, Theo van Leeuwen, Paul Middleton, Arafat Al Naim, Grigoris Paschalidis, Marios Phocas, Ifigeneia Vamvakidou and Lia Yoka. Many thanks also to Monika Herodotou, Eleftheria Iasonos, Christina Koutalis, Theseas Mouzouropoulos, Christina Nicolaou, Angelos Panayides, Aspasia Papadima, Ioanna Tymbiotou, Panayiotis Zaphiris for all their support, as well as to the Department of Multimedia and Graphic Arts at the Cyprus University of Technology, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, +design magazine, the vcdc-visual communication designer's club, the Hellenic Semiotics Society, the Semiotics and Visual Communication Lab at Cyprus University of Technology, the Cyprus Semiotic Association, Cambridge Scholars Publishing and all my colleagues, friends and students who respond positively in the struggle for contribution to semiotic knowledge, visual communication and graphic design practice.

CHAPTER ONE:

**ARCHITECTURAL AND SPATIAL DESIGN—
DESIGN FOR THREE DIMENSIONAL
PRODUCTS**

EMBEDDED, INTROSPECTIVE AND POETIC NARRATIVES IN 3-DIMENSIONAL DESIGN

RALPH BALL

My research is concerned with the generation of artefacts, which deconstruct and reconstruct design axioms and ideologies. The studies presented in this paper form part of an evolving series of conceptual artefacts, which act as visual reflections on Modern, Postmodern and Contemporary design culture. Typologies and generic forms characteristic of modern furniture and lighting are re-examined with reference to the rhetorical themes and axioms specific to Modernism.

Axiom examples typical of the modernist canon include the following: Form follows Function (L Sullivan), Less is More (L. Mies van de Rohe), Decoration and Crime (A. Loos) often misquoted and interpreted as Decoration is a Crime; Starting from Zero and Continuous Revolution (W.Gropius) and Truth to Materials (C. Brancusi). Themes considered and examined include Transparency, Minimalism and Multifunctionality. The aim of the visual re-examinations is to simultaneously challenge and accommodate the above axioms in search of new, authentic forms of visual expression.

Postmodernism, as understood with reference to design, challenged modernism's formal purity claiming that modernism's rational abstraction limits subjective and narrative expression. In 'Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture' (1), architect Robert Venturi famously paraphrased Mies van de Rohe's modernist mantra of "Less is More" with "Less is a Bore".

Venturi's historical architectural analysis called for a replacement of modernism's reductive abstraction with an intelligent, richly diverse, symbolic form in a contemporary context. He called for inclusiveness and ambiguity using terms like both-and rather than either-or. Whilst Venturi advocated complexity and contradiction, he was opposed to the incoherent and the arbitrary in architectural expression. However, his intensions were very often misinterpreted and corrupted and gave rise to much arbitrary and whimsical architecture: many so-called postmodern buildings employed an eclectic mix of architectural styles but often lacked any coherent, conceptual underpinning.



Fig. 1-1 Swan and Dolphin Hotels by Michael Graves (top of this image) Below are Notch and Tilt Best Supermarkets by SITE

For example, the arbitrary and decorative theatricality of the Swan and Dolphin Hotels by Michael Graves (2) (at the top of this image) is, I suggest, typical of postmodern architecture. Contrast this with the more unusual, ‘conceptual theatricality’ of architecture by SITE for Best Supermarkets. (3) These buildings present the supermarket authentically as a commercially pragmatic, big, simple box. Acknowledging the legitimacy of the big box allows entrances to be dramatically signified. Entrances are conceived and visually announced as inventive ways of ‘opening’ the box.

My research similarly intends to filter the rationality of the modern through the contradictions and complexities of the postmodern without loss of conceptual authenticity. In these studies, modernism’s rational and reductive axioms are reframed or pushed to logical extremes in order to endorse the paradox and legitimise the invention of formal incongruities, rational irrationalities or poetic transgressions. Ironic iconics: the pieces are self-consciously introspective and are intended to reflect upon themselves and their inherent culture.

The research studies presented use a method analogous to archaeology. The intention is to uncover ‘embedded’ visual potential. The aim is to expand or reinforce meaning in products by introducing or revealing latent narratives. Plausible forms are extrapolated in this manner by examining, and drawing from, a product’s formal, visual parameters and implicit contexts. This process introduces the concept of ‘design poetics’. Designs are materialised in ways that go beyond their function or even their symbolism, and playfully or critically reflect on a cultural meaning.

This ‘archaeological’ method is used to reinvest appreciation of that which becomes undervalued through familiarity. It intends to visually articulate areas, which are unregarded, celebrating the generic rather than the specific: it intends to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, re-seeing objects and functions as if for the first time: it intends to envision fresh possibilities in commonalities, to start with the given and find new ways of expressing this *within and through* the objects studied. The studies, therefore, involve the reconfiguration of familiar, archetypical products. These product types we have called ‘mature typologies’ and defined as objects, which generally have an agreed consensus on basic form and application. With this definition as a point of base reference, we now illustrate a series of visual studies together with their various rationales.

Light and Shade

The ‘Light and Shade’ series explores the formal relationship between generic light bulb and lampshade. A reconfiguring of this relationship transforms the reading of the geometrically abstract form of the modernist lampshade, (a truncated cone) into a series of more specific concrete objects and meanings. The truncated cone, a formally abstract container of light, is turned into other, familiar container types. By reconfiguring the relationship of bulb to shade, the ‘light-shade’ can be variously read as fruit bowl, plant-pot, skirt or bucket. Each of these formal changes, in turn, explores further modernist reference.



Fig. 1- 2 ‘light and shade collection’
steel, stone, aluminium, glass, fabric various sizes © 1997Ralph Ball

Golden Delicious

The inverted truncated cone becomes a container. This generic container is then more specifically identified by the choice of content. In the first object many light bulbs are piled into the container, over one single lit bulb, turning the bulbs into metaphorical fruit and, by association, the

container into a fruit bowl. The bulb, originally only the source of light, when used here 'en masse', also becomes the diffuser or shade element. The original shade becomes a frame to hold the new diffuser in place.

The configuration produces an elegant paradox with reference to the modernist axioms of Brancusi's 'truth to materials', Mies van de Rohe's 'less is more' and Adolph Loos's 'decoration and crime'. Here is the apparent conundrum. This artefact uses 'pure' form and material: the light bulbs are generic (truth to materials). The elements are functional and used efficiently: the bulb acts as both light source and light shade (conceptually less is more). Yet conversely, the result is excessive and decorative in the quantity of bulbs used and in their playful distribution. In effect, this construct breaks the rule of Loos's 'decoration and crime' whilst simultaneously adhering to the 'less is more' and 'truth to materials' values of Mies van de Rohe and Brancusi.

Generations

In the second example called "Generations", the container is, again, more specifically identified by content. The truncated cone here contains a vertical tube from the end of which sprout two dichroic reflectors. The configuration turns these reflectors into metaphorical flowers and, by association, the container into a plant pot. Dichroic reflector bulbs are clearly a more recent generation of light source than the classic and generic 'Edison' bulb. The original term 'light bulb' was clearly coined with reference to its shape, resembling that of organic bulbs and tubers.

In this construct, an upside down light-shade implies the containment of the classic Edison bulb within the cone. From this 'now potted' Edison bulb, newer generations emerge and flower. Here, again, Loos's *Decoration and Crime* (variously misquoted but commonly interpreted as 'decoration is a crime') is subverted despite using only the essential, unadorned elements of light making. The configuration is essentially figurative rather than abstract.

Task Light (Wall-washer)

In this third example, the truncated cone is inverted again and hung onto a ladder structure. This ladder frame, by association, turns the reading of the cone metaphorically into a window cleaner's bucket. The aluminium ladder enables low voltage current to be conducted through the frame. This, in turn, allows the cone, now a 'bucket of light', to be lifted from rung to rung and to relight on contact with each of the rungs.

The modernist preoccupation under examination here is ‘adjustability’. However, instead of the sophisticated adjustability of the angle poise, dimmer switch or multi-track lighting, adjustability is expressed here in one of the most fundamental forms. The light source can only be height adjusted by the simple process of lifting it from rung to rung: a simple, visibly accessible, analogue process supported by a sophisticated and invisible low voltage application.

Switch

The relationship of formal position is explored in the fourth object. The conventional relationship in a freestanding standard lamp is clearly that the shade covers the bulb at the top of a supporting column. In this study, the shade is dropped to the ground, leaving the bulb unshielded. An unshielded bulb is often referred to as a ‘naked’ light. The cone in this ground level position may now be perceived as a dropped or slipped skirt. The on/off positional relationship of skirt to bulb also acts as a switch for the electrical on/off. The skirt may be moved from the ground back to covering the bulb. The physical and electrical ‘switch’ acts in opposition to each other, doubling the ‘switch’ concept. Putting the skirt on (covering the bulb) switches the light off, and taking the skirt off switches the light on.

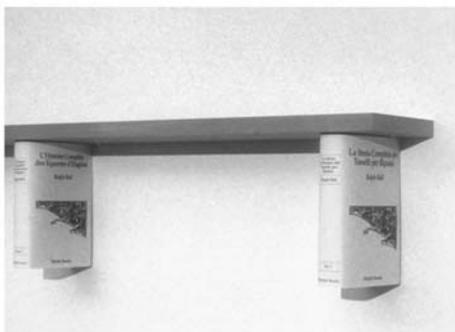


Fig. 1-3 ‘the complete history of shelf supports’
timber paper card 200x250x900mm ©1998 Ralph Ball

“The Book of Sand” is a short story by the Argentinean writer Georges Luis Borges (4). In this story, Borges describes the existence of an infinite book: a book in which any page, once seen, can never be found again on the book’s re-opening. A book in which front and back pages can never be reached. Further pages always intervene no matter how hard the fingers try

to get between the pages and the covers.

“The Complete History of Shelf Supports”, illustrated above, represents a similar work of infinite fiction. It is made up of two volumes, which perform the function that the title describes. This is an inversion in which the books support the shelf instead of the other way round. In this work of fiction, volume one catalogues all of the shelf supports that have ever been designed. Volume two contains all of the possible shelf supports, which will be designed in the future.

Walter Gropius, director of the Bauhaus, called for ‘Starting from Zero’ and ‘Continuous Revolution’. The purist rhetoric of modernism’s agenda was a quest for ideal forms. Its aim, for any given functional artifact, was to optimise form and material and to distil functional and formal essentials. “The Complete History of Shelf Supports” represents an ironic realisation of that elusive ideal. Being an infinite catalogue of shelf supports, it must, by definition, contain the quintessential support! The irony of that irony is that, as with Borges Book of Sand, when we consult our infinite catalogue, this ideal form is still predestined to remain elusive.



Fig. 1- 4 ‘One Day I’ll design the Perfect Paper Lampshade’ chrome plated steel heat-proof paper and ink, 400 x 250mm dia. ©2000 Ralph Ball

This piece is called “One Day I’ll design the Perfect Paper Lampshade”. It represents, rhetorically, a similar quest for functional and formal perfection. In this piece, a wire frame ‘wastepaper basket’ contains a light bulb set in the centre. Crumpled sheets of paper surround the light source, each sheet containing discarded sketch ideas for paper lights. The rejected sketch sheets function as the diffuser or shade. Process and product are intermingled; the process becomes the product and the outcome is both a product and a narrative about the trial and error of idea generation. The object represents a kind of perpetually renewed, conceptual ideal. The quest for the perfect paper light shade becomes, in itself, an icon for perfection. Legitimate, rational protocols conspire to produce an informal and incidentally constructed form. This study, following the advocacy of Gropius, ends in playful irony.

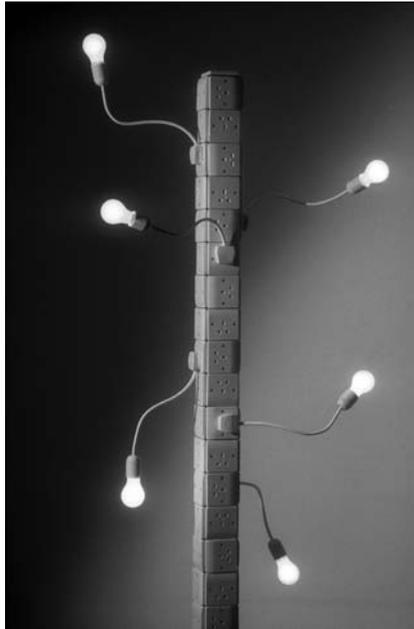


Fig. 1- 5 ‘power tower’generic plastic electric power sockets, plugs, bulbs and flexes 2000x400x400mm © Ralph Ball 1998

The study illustrated above is called “Power Tower”. “Power Tower” is a work of earnest rationality and, in consequence, also a work of complete, pedantic madness. It takes the banal and generic components

associated with lighting (plugs, sockets and bulbs) and reconfigures them in a more 'poetic light'. The tower makes play with the modernist ideals of 'adjustability' using a mechanistic rather than electronic idiom. An invented, historical possibility (something which could have existed before track lighting), the piece is an absurd extrapolation into the past. The result is a kind of retrospective track lighting system understandable in analogue, pre-electronic format. In order to achieve this level of analogue adjustability, more than 100 sockets are used. The sockets are set in four different directions on each level of the tower. This enables the lights to be plugged in with different orientations on any given level. This kind of excessive effort turns the tower into a rationally irrational artefact. Stripped down to rudimentary, pragmatic elements with no intrinsic artifice, it is nevertheless a highly elaborate confection, both ordinary and extravagantly decadent.

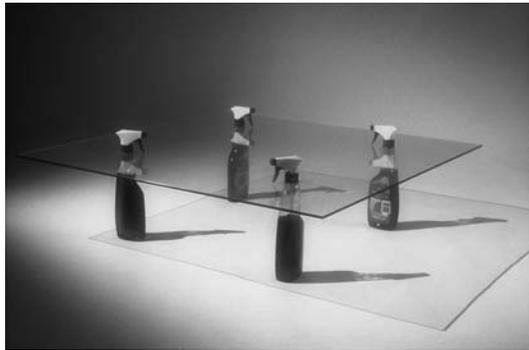


Fig. 1-6 'Transparent' glass, glass cleaning bottles with fluid.
750x750x300mm © 1997 Ralph Ball

This is called "transparent" and is clearly a play on one of modernism's thematic preoccupations—transparency. Taking the axioms 'form follows function' and 'less is more' to absurdly logical extremes, the meaning and function of this table is as explicitly 'clear' as can be. In the modernist canon, transparency represents both unadorned form and the elimination of visual weight. The legs (glass cleaning bottles) support and maintain the glass top. Glass tops are often a pretext for the display of legs. Here, the legs not only support the glass, but also ensure their own visibility.

A contradiction or conflict with the term 'clear' is engendered. Whilst the view through the surface is 'clear', the physical surface is not 'clear', it is interrupted by the added, functional presence of the cleaning nozzle

heads. Here, multifunctionality gets in its own way. Integrating a secondary function partially compromises the full use of the surface. Nevertheless, the table has an explicit sense of self. Self-supporting, self-cleaning, self-sustaining, self-promoting and self-evident... a visual narrative entirely transparent!

This paper has focused primarily on lighting concepts together with two examples from furniture studies in table and shelf typology. Further studies in table and chair typologies have also been developed and form an evolving series of experiments in visual narrative, rhetoric and polemic design.

These form the material for further papers exploring the subject. Initial indicative samples of further and ongoing studies using table and seating typologies can be found in Form follows Idea (5).

1
Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture
Robert Venturi
Publisher Museum of Modern Art 1966

2
Swan and Dolphin Hotels 1990
Disney World Florida
Architect Michael Graves

3
Tilt Towson MD 1978
Notch Sacramento CA 1977
BEST Supermarkets USA
SITE James Wines

4
The Book of Sand
Jorges Luis Borges
1975 Spanish 1977 English Translated by Norman Thomas di
Giovanni
Original publisher EP Dutton and Penguin Books

5
Form Follows Idea
Ralph Ball and Maxine Naylor
Publisher Black Dog 2005

HOW TYPE CAN MOVE US— TYPE IN THE ENVIRONMENT: FRANCE

JEFF LEAK

As a private person, I have a passion for landscape, and I have never seen one improved by a billboard. Where every prospect pleases, man is at his vilest when he erects a billboard. When I retire from Madison Avenue, I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel around the world on silent motor bicycles, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon. How many juries will convict us when we are caught in these acts of beneficent citizenship? David Ogilvy, *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (2011).

Signs used as a means of communication within the environment today are almost omnipresent. We mostly pass by them without taking the time to notice, to read or to perceive them—something that many advertisers are aware of these days.

As designers, we should try to *make* the time to *see* these signs. Mankind has been using signs since ancient times to convey messages before language developed into what we know today; for example, the capitalised letter A is derived from an early depiction of a horned animal's head facing the viewer, that has simply been rotated by 180°.

Today's painted signs exist thanks to a happy accident; their makers unaware of the longevity of the message implied. French painted roadside advertisements, like cave paintings, survive in part, due to a number of factors: a lack of light, so that the pigments are not faded nor bleached; an obscure or difficult to reach location that ensures that visitors and those who might damage or develop the location have been deterred; a kind, atmospheric environment that has not corroded or washed the signs away, and perhaps lastly; that these images have ceased to be relevant to their audience and simply been forgotten.

Perhaps parallels can be drawn between the caves of Lascaux and the old painted roadside advertising that decorates the roadside in France, and which this paper seeks to consider and discuss.

France

France is a flourishing hub of creative design and advertising, with designers such as Grapus and Philippe Apeloig being notable and well-known exponents of contemporary French poster design.

French posters initially developed a reputation for being the byword for understated and powerful advertising.

Although the United States is still perceived as the mecca of advertising innovation, French advertising has clearly developed its own unique style. (*Angelini and Federico, 1998*)

Poster design, with the earliest and most notable being the work by Toulouse Lautrec and Jules Chéret in the 1800s, was inherently French. This birthright was developed and built upon with avant-garde posters by Cassandre and Savignac continuing this tradition of innovation, wit and clarity mixed with contemporary art influences. More often than not, one did not need to speak French to understand the inherent semiology evident in the striking imagery produced. The character of Bibendum – the archetype for Michelin – is typical of this Gallic flair for visual communication shorthand.

Today, France is also home to the JCDecaux Group, one of, if not *the* world's largest outdoor advertising company. It is this link, between the need to communicate, creative design and site or environment, that is the trinity of French poster advertising.

However, it is also perhaps this forward moving innovation that is overlaying part of the discarded and forgotten heritage of the French poster. This disappearing history is real and can still be found on the sides of buildings up and down the country's roads.

The fact that they have been neglected, if not forgotten, is part of their allure and charm. "Every painting tells something about past times. It shows us how society has changed", (*Bartolomeo, 2007*).

This patina of age adds something to our contemporary understanding of the visual message that is additional to that which was intended when the sign was newly made. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 p.35) state that it is difficult to understand the 'true' meaning of such visual communication without the benefit of cultural and chronological signifiers.

Particular features and modes of communication should be seen in the history of their development, and in the environment of all the other modes of communication which surround them. The use of the visual mode is not the same now as it was even fifty years ago in western societies; it is not