

HINDSIGHT: FIFTY YEARS OF THE YALE GRAPHIC DESIGN THESIS

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A graphic design thesis should be about design and be of use.
—Paul Rand



I spent 971 days in the Yale Graphic Design program. The majority of those days were centered around the pursuit of that ever-elusive Holy Grail, the Yale Graphic Design Thesis. The thesis at Yale was presented as this magnificent artifact of research and design activity that you poured all of your work into. Each student was encouraged to actively develop their own methodology, or “thesis lens,” to filter their projects through. It was indisputably the greatest source of anxiety, sleep-deprivation, and abject terror of everyone there. I spent many months in restless pursuit of methodology, and as I gazed into my thesis lens darkly, I was struck with the realization that I was not alone. For although I very much needed to escape the creative vacuum into which I had fallen in the dark hours of winter, I was inspired by the thought that others before me had once done the same, and that there might be something to learn from their solutions. Seeking the comfort of shared experience, I began, as so many others before me, looking backward into the past in an effort to light the way ahead.



The light that I found was a wealth of student thesis projects stretching back into the foundations of the Graphic Design Program at Yale. As the first program of its kind in the United States, the Yale Graphic Arts Program, as it was then called, was the center of a revolution in design education. The artifacts of this rich legacy are housed in a special library called The Arts of the Book Collection which was established in 1967 as a place to preserve Yale’s rich collections of printing books, materials and ephemera. The collection takes its name from a course taught from 1933 until 1948 by the famed typographer and book designer Carl P. Rollins. It was a warm and quiet sanctuary away from clatter of the design program’s new studio in the recently renovated Green Hall.



The Graphic Design Program's founder, Alvin Eisenman, recalls that in the Arts of the Book's inaugural year he had a box on the commencement platform in which to collect copies of the student thesis books as the graduates received their diplomas. Alvin began to populate this new collection with works from past classes. An effort that, while not entirely successful, has nonetheless resulted in securing many significant works by his dearest students. Over the ensuing fifty years of the program, the collection of student design theses grew in size to over 500 volumes.



In February 2001, I was granted permission to document this collection in its entirety and I spent several fascinating months poring over the diverse array of student artifacts. I measured, weighed, photographed them and made a preliminary attempt to classify them according to their content. The experience of browsing these artifacts was a trip into the past as the assumptions and sub-texts of successive trends and currents in graphic design were filtered through the rarefied lens of the Yale Design program – a program that has only had two directors in its fifty-four year history .

A Very Brief History of Yale Graphic Design



The Yale School of Art has a long and distinguished position in the history of art, design and architecture in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was at Yale University that graduate Graphic Design education in the United States was born and grew to maturity. The School of the Fine Arts at Yale was established in 1864 in the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* tradition as the country's first university art school, and by the 1930s it had developed a considerable reputation as a center of traditional egg tempera techniques. Although historically egg tempera painting is a fascinating art form, by the 1940s it was not exactly an avant garde activity. In the words of Dean Sawyer who oversaw Yale's Division of the Arts, "a rather moribund school needed a good shaking up." Sawyer needed someone to direct the visual arts area and eventually had to choose between Bauhaus master Josef Albers and the social realist illustrator Ben Shahn. This story might have been quite different had it not been for Sawyer's understanding and respect for the Bauhaus notion of integration in the Arts. Albers was hired in July of 1950.



The first thing Albers did upon accepting the post was to change the name of the School from the Victorian-sounding School of the Fine Arts into the Department of Design. This new design-oriented entity included Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts under one umbrella, much to the dismay of its disgruntled tenured faculty. Albers oversaw what can be summarized as a revolution of arts integration at Yale and began offering a Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Arts. Very shortly thereafter, New York book designer Alvin Eisenman, was hired for a split appointment between the Yale Press and the Department of Design. Eisenman subsequently directed the Graphic Design Program for 40 full, exciting, and ultimately historic years and was eventually succeeded by a former student Sheila Levrant De Bretteville (MFA '64) in 1990.





Over the course of more than 50 years, students of the Design program have been working closely with a dazzling array of practicing designers as part of a vigorous program of visiting critics including Herbert Matter, Alvin Lustig, Bradbury Thompson and Paul Rand and many, many more. Students attended courses in typography, printing and the book arts taught by this illustrious constellation of national and international faculty. The new program was rigorous, demanding and exceptionally effective and in the decades following its inception the program flourished.

The Early Books

Our survey of collection begins in 1951 with Asher Tunis Applegate's *Aspects of Printing*. As a treatise on letterpress printing, Applegate's thesis is a well-crafted example of its own highest ideals. It is an exceptional first thesis and it is a representative artifact of graphic design at Yale in 1950 and beyond: dignified, understated and well-designed.



From the very beginning, students in the program were required to write a research paper on a design-related topic, and in addition, they were also required to write, print and bind an edition of fifty books. At times the research paper and book were one in the same, but many chose to make children's books such as Gillette Griffin's 1951 *A Mouse's Tale* which is a wonderful story that he wrote, illustrated, designed and printed. The story follows the adventure of a curious mouse named Claude who disobeys his mother and gets his tail caught in a trap (thus the title). *A Mouse's Tale* was eventually honored as one of the 50 Best Books of the Year in 1951 and served as potent model of success for the new program.



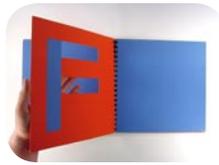
Another delightful book with beautifully silk-screened illustrations and wood type is Karla Seidman's 1956 *Roar and More*. Several years earlier, Alvin had purchased some wonderful wood type from the celebrated French type house Derbigny and Peignot and made them available to his students who immediately put them to good use.

The Alphabet Book

The alphabet book is a popular form in graphic design curricula. As a design problem it offers a natural balance of freedom and constraint as well as the benefits of consistent content, predictable sequence and endless possibilities. In 1955, the seeds of design history were being sown as a young graduate student Tom Geismar was forming a fast friendship with undergraduate Ivan Chermayeff. The two eventually moved to New York to make design history in their legendary design firm Chermayeff & Giesmar. While at Yale, Geismar produced a precious little alphabet book called *26 Tales of Woe*. The story follows the cleverly-written mishaps of each letter of the alphabet. The book features playful yellow end papers and a robust variety of wood type.



It took the inventive mind of the young Tom Ockerse to innovate and unlock the constants of the alphabet book. In his 1965 *The A to Z Book*, Ockerse has cut the letterforms from the selectively screen-printed pages to create and



transform the letters as the page is turned. Alternating blue and red, the parts of the letters are either printed or cut to produce a remarkably experiential journey through the alphabet. The formal properties of the letters are defined by their transitions and effectively re-order the alphabet through the specific constraints of the design concept.

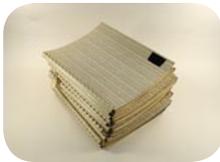


Continuing in the tradition of reinvention, Nicki Klein's 1971 book *Shapes* allows the viewer to combine the letters of the alphabet to make new forms in the tradition of the exquisite corpse. The split pages of the book invite a playful rearrangement of familiar typeface Cooper Black in an endless variety of strange and wonderful ways.



Pedagogical Perspectives

The focus on design education of those early years of the Yale design program manifested themselves in a tradition of theses on pedagogical concerns. John McCrillis researched and wrote a helpful and informative survey of design education in his 1952 thesis *The Graphic Arts in the Colleges*. Three years later, Norman Gorbaty produced his voluminous thesis, *Examples of Printmaking in 12 Books*. The books are functional manuals on various printmaking techniques including *Printmaking With a Spoon* that no doubt have served their purpose well. Another interesting artifact of this educational trend can be found in the slide presentation designed by Guy Fleming called *Teaching Column Addition*. The sincerity imparted by these early theses are the beginning of a consistent thread of service which infused the program for decades to come.



Typography, Typography, Typography

From the very beginning, typography has been the bedrock of Yale Graphic Design. Every student was required to purchase Daniel Updike's two volume *Printing Types: Their history, Form and Use* when they entered the program. Proper understanding of typographic history and its application was reinforced at all levels of study. Alvin imparted his passion for type to his students through his extensive and encyclopedic knowledge and in 1954, Richard Denatale's *Historical Survey of Type Founding* was the first broad overview of typography undertaken. In contrast, Martin Gustavson's 1957 *Caslon "Display" Letters* focuses on a specific family of one typeface. Many students designed their own type such as Carl C. Slaughter's 1965 typeface *Slaughter Four* and in later years every student in the program was required to design a typeface to pique their interest in the finer points of typographic form.



Interests of Industry

In the early years of the program many theses were practical treatises on specific issues pertinent to the developing field of graphic design. Theoretical concerns the type of which graduate design students wrestle with today were absent as these first students grappled with more practical concerns. In 1958, famed British designer Alan Fletcher designed a beautifully hand-written book on *Food Packaging for the Supermarket*. Silk-screened crisply in black and red the book features delightful illustrations and crisp, insightful text.

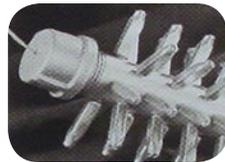
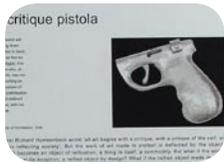




The notions of packaging as a design problem were further developed by Paul Rand through his famous assignment to redesign the packaging for Duz soap powder. The reduction of the cheap, vernacular packaging into the formal vocabulary of high modernity at once beautiful and startlingly ironic. The Duz project, and other like it, became a rite of passage for students in the program for many years.

Questions of Identity

Graphic identity was a consistent theme in Yale design work as can be seen in John Hough's 1957 *An Investigation into a Method of Design*. Hough's confident, if not terribly original, explication of Herbert Matter's famed logotype is indeed a treasure of the collection. Matter's New Haven Railroad logo, with its elongated serifs and simple geometric gestalt, is fondly recollected as an example of simple effective form. Hough created a signage system for use within the train station and wrote his research paper about the process. The tattered state of Hough's thesis is a testament to its utility over the years as a pedagogical device.

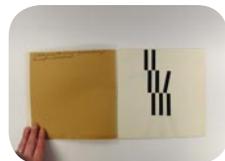


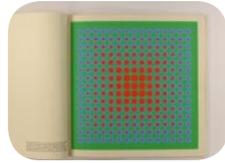
The interest in identity systems flourished in the years following Rand's appointment. Sidney Herman's 1961 *A Symbol for the A&P Stores* reveals the earnestness of the academic climate of the times. This now classic undergraduate assignment to redesign an existing company logo and applications is very much at home in the Yale MFA program of this period.

Fast forward to the end of the millennium. In sharp contrast to the idealism of the early sixties is Daniel Jasper's 1999 *Daddy: Here Now Nowhere*. Jasper's satirical branding project boasts a logotype stolen from a French sugar packet and put to use as the herald of a paternalistic product line for revolutionaries. "Daddy's" products include the *Critique of the Brick* which is a custom cast brick complete with the "Daddy" logo that can be "thrown through any shop window that is currently imprisoning your desires." To complement the brick there is, among other outlandish objects, the solid sterling silver *Auto Critique Pistola*, a handgun that fires a .22 caliber bullet backward into whomever has fired the gun. Also available is the *Extremist Surrealist Type Bomb* which is a solid silver type-encrusted pipe bomb that when detonated will write "your own extremist surrealist poetry that will never experience the degradations of recuperation". This is definitely not your father's thesis project.

Extreme Formalism

Returning to the sixties, we find a potent strain of extreme formalism at work. There are several versions of this classic assignment within the collection as evidenced in *Variations on Eight Bars in a Square* in 1963 by Ronald Arnholm. This particular problem is one of many such exercises of this type which form a staple of many programs today. Experiments of pure form were the signature of the strong foundation laid by Josef Albers. Students such as Carol Lipper were experimenting with formal languages as can be seen in her *Study of the Reversible Figure Ground* which features permutations of divided circles and squares that generate a variety of patterns. Compare this to the beautiful and





intensely-constrained color experiment by Tom Strong, *Exploiting the Medium*, which in sixties in the Yale Design Program is perhaps the closest you will get to the psychedelic.



A Classic Yale Design Thesis

The codification the Yale design thesis was well underway by the time Aaron Marcus undertook *Early Forms of Numerals* in 1968 which is a rigorous research project effectively rendered in the international style. By this time a certain mainstreaming has occurred and the restlessness of earlier (and more contemporary) periods in the program have settled down. Another fine example of a classic thesis is found in Lorraine Wilde's *Trends in American Graphic Design: 1930-1955*. Conservatively set on a typewriter, the efficient prose and crisp black and white images march through the years. The works of many the program's teachers grace its pages, an affirmation and reflection of the program's preeminence.



Technologies of Design

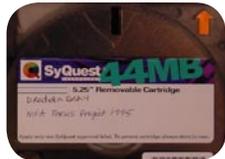
Alvin Eisenman was known for his keen interest in the changing technologies of the design field. As early as 1955, he consulted with the Medical School on computerizing their card catalogs and he was a consistent champion of technology within the curriculum. While theses relating directly to the computer are relatively few, they are worthy of note.

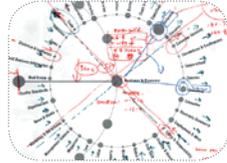


In 1973 we find Stephen B. Byers thesis *Designing a Set of Special Symbols*. The symbols were designed for use in with the programming language APL. Later in 1975, Christopher Keith's *Computer Manipulated Letterforms* was a technologically challenging exploration of computational form. He labored for months with what we would consider primitive technology to produce an intriguing and advanced body of work. Work that today, that any twelve year old can do in minutes using the animation software Flash.



The issue of technology and its attendant forms can be also be seen in the range of reproduction media types in the collection. There are slides, 4 x 5 transparencies and everything from 8 mm film to microfiche. The Macintosh brought the floppy disk and in 1990, Carol Simard's clever and appropriate design *Designing The Defaults: Graphic Design Defaults for Users And Programmers of Desktop Publishing Systems* used the visual language of the early Mac to communicate her ideas. The package includes a floppy disk with a Hypercard presentation outlining her perspective on the power of defaults in relation to design. Five years later, Dina Radeka submitted a Syquest cartridge as part of her 1995 thesis *Text and Dialogue: Orality in the Electronic Environment*. Throughout the mid- to later nineties and beyond there are, numerous CD-ROMs tucked into many books. At some point a concerted effort will need be made to preserve these files. Fortunately, the majority of the theses in the collection are books which have no such compatibility issues.





Not surprisingly there is also a thesis dedicated to the World Wide Web. Colin Campbell's *Virtual Topographies* in 2000 is a valiant attempt to map the information space of the Web using cognitive cartographic techniques. Campbell compares the topography of Chicago to the Web in an explication the actual versus the virtual. Rigorously researched and thoroughly executed Campbell's thesis book takes the form of a folding map; a nod and wink to the formats of travel.



Thesis as Nazi Fiction

A curious highlight in the Yale design story involves a strange offering by one of America's more celebrated and cerebral syndicated cartoonists. While an undergraduate student at Yale, Garretson Beekman Trudeau was penning *Bull Tales*, the precursor to his wildly popular *Doonesbury* strip. The first strip was approved for publication in the Yale Daily News on September 30, 1968 when the executive editor Reed Hundt, told him "They're all right. We publish pretty much anything." Trudeau stayed at Yale in the Graphic Design Program and produced what is arguably one of the more arresting thesis books in the collection. In *Erich Becker: a biography*, Trudeau explores the life of a fictional Nazi Luftwaffe pilot in World War II. The eerily surrealistic collages of black and white images and letter forms are in disconcerting juxtaposition with the Nazi flag which bleeds from the box lining. Trudeau later collaborated with classmate David Levinthal on the 1977 *Hitler Moves East: A Graphic Chronicle, 1941-43* using Levinthal's toy figure photography in relationship to Trudeau's writing.



Come In, Take off Your Pants

Poised at roughly the halfway point between the origin of the program and the present, one can find a refreshing interruption of feminist exuberance. Nestled between Charles Gibson's sleepy *Exterior Identity Program for the Yale University Collection* and Manyee Koo-Tjang's thoughtful *The Physical Design and Adornment of Chinese Books* sits an altogether too-brief exhalation of feminist assertion. Jo Lauria's *Behind it All* takes an uncensored look at the deep-seated motivations of everyone with a collection of stimulating and irreverent collages.



Matters of Size

The largest thesis book in the Arts of the Book collection is John D. Noneman's 1965 *The Experimentation and Application of a Design System*. It is a colossal hard-bound folio containing a range of silk screened experiments. Yale's heaviest thesis weighs 24.3 pounds and is curiously titled *Design in Miniature*. Created in 1990 by Kenneth Scaglia this thesis is an entire exhibition, complete with glass, in a strong wooden box. The exhibition covers 150 years of engraved postage stamps. It is beautifully designed and perfectly preserved with instructions for hanging.

The Longest Essay

Jessica Helfand's 1989 *License to Risk: The Square Revisited, an Exploration of Its Eternal Commitment to Freedom and Structure* is easily the longest Yale



graphic design essay ever written. This verbose and (by her own admission) hastily-designed thesis is a 194 page tome on the history of the square. Helfand writes, “..I produced a long, somewhat densely written thesis, yet one which was directly connected to my angst in the studio..” The strict formal assignments of the program were stifling to Helfand’s independent spirit. She claims to have hidden herself from the ruling pens and plaka for days in the stacks of Sterling Library doing research for her epic monster-piece. Helfand is convinced that only two people have read it – herself and Paul Rand. I feel a sense of urgency to become the third, both out of respect for her effort, and perhaps in some small way, to share the burden of its existence.

Conspicuous Absences



In the course of reviewing the collection I naturally gravitated to those whom I knew and I was alarmed to discover that the theses of my instructors were conspicuously absent. At Yale, where many of the core faculty are recruited from the ranks, one would expect to find at least one professorial thesis, but instead I found nothing for Chris Pullman, Doug Scott, John Gambell or Sheila De Bretteville. Sheila had simply taken hers home. It seemed that her photo-essay *Once* was falling apart and she had intended to repair it but had never found the time. At my insistence she brought it to the studio and on it was this type-written note (see slide). Upon further investigation, they all had good reasons for their missing work, but I would very much like to bring these lost sheep back into the fold.



Changing of the Garde



In 1990, Alvin Eisenman turned the program over to the public artist and designer Sheila De Bretteville. Sheila’s arrival coincided with the explosion of both new ideas and technologies for design and her program has produced some extremely interesting and progressive work over its 14 year history. The addition of Michael Rock, Paul Elliman and many others to the faculty further confirmed both the strength of the program and Sheila’s role at the helm. It was a sea change for the program’s curriculum which was transformed by new ideas and approaches. The thesis expanded from a discrete semester long project into a comprehensive body of work that included a catalog of each student’s projects undertaken throughout the program. Paul Rand left the faculty soon after Sheila arrived, and the program entered into a new era.

Issue-Oriented Graphic Design



A discussion of the Yale theses would be remiss to overlook the groundswell of issue-oriented graphic design which accompanied Sheila’s arrival. Given the focus of Sheila’s work, it was not unexpected, and the program exploded with thesis projects attacking various social and urban issues. It was in the early years of this new period that the activist design group Class Action was formed in relation to a course of the same name taught by Marlene McCarty and Donald Moffett in 1991. Class Action has continued to exist outside of the classroom, although over the years, Sheila has mellowed in her encouragement of social agendas in student work.



In 1991 Janet Fairbairn undertook *The gendered self in graphic design: interviews with 15 women*. Fairbairn proceeded to interview a variety of female designers including Lorraine Wilde, Jacqueline Casey, Inge Druckery and Sheila herself. She asked them questions and set their responses in 15 tastefully understated hand-sewn books. Fairbairn's thesis is superbly executed with craft and flair. It is an intriguing and stimulating read as well as a service to the legacy of female leadership in graphic design.



That following year in 1992 Kathleen M. Smith's thesis *Print Media and the Adolescent Girl* explored issues of adolescent body image. Smith showed advertisements with overt sexual and sexist content to groups of adolescent boys and recording their honest and candid responses which were then set in juxtaposition to the advertising images within the book. Compare Smith's cool and calculated approach to the rage of Peter Hamilton's darkly cynical thesis on the AIDS, *Keep in Touch*. A series of seemingly innocuous greeting cards deftly slash into the veils of civility and decorum. The words DIE and HATE are spelled out in party letters, an unsettling reversal of their usually festive intent and context.



The Self-Reflexive Thesis

The overt recognition of thesis as a codified form can be seen in the mid-eighties. The prescription for the thesis as a format with consistent constraints and predictable results is seen on the cover of William Anton's 1985 *Mask: A Design Process* where the inside is turned outside and the standard inscription "Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts..." is displayed self-consciously on the cover. Those words have graced the inside pages of every thesis ever made at Yale since Applegate. It is at once a recognition of that legacy and a form of commentary upon it.



The torch of reflexivity, once lit, can be imagined to have been passed to Laurie Szujewska in her 1987 thesis titled *Thesis*. Szujewska's book reveals the process of its own unfolding within the intimacy of an internal monologue. The thesis essay is the self-referential rumination in three distinct typographic voices – plain, italic and bold – that dance across the page. As the text is read the viewer is implicated in the act of creation as *Thesis* is authored in the mind of the reader. The inside back cover of *Thesis* is a mirrored surface – a nod to its reflexive nature – which confronts the viewer-turned-author with their own image.



Subjective Universe

In relation to this reflexivity, the preference of the self as a subject for the thesis reaches critical mass in the late nineties. The rejection of objectivity and the embracing of the subjective both within the design community and the larger culture fueled an explosion of self-absorbed theses. Dmitry Charny's 1997 *Design Space: Conversations Around a Graphic Fire* epitomizes the this trend. He writes, "my purpose is not, could never be, an exhaustive or objective study but only a selective, personal – and therefore biased exploration of the peripheral..." While a personal approach to student projects is healthy and



encouraged, Chamy's deliberate decision to deny all but the subjective is indicative of a larger trend within and outside the program.



The subjective reaches deliberately absurd heights in Darren Kuhnau's *Yale's Best Thesis*. Kuhnau's exploration of incongruity, false authority and dark humor find their manifestation in the outlandish self-aggrandizing. This hilarious thesis exemplifies, and in its own way abnegates, the outrageous expressions of self-reference found within other less humorous undertakings.

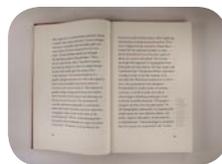
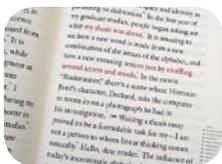


The forms of self-reference do not always wax absurd. Alicia Cheng's 1999 Tuftesque *Eating the Recipe: Choreography of the Everyday* is a marvel of information design. Cheng's beautiful abstract representations of the activities and thesis interests of her classmates is a delightful expression of imagination. Printed on overlaid vellum sheets she maps such phenomenon as the objects within each classmates spaces, their meetings with visiting critics and her classmates relationships to each other. These diagrams are then overlaid in a variety of permutations which yield interesting insights into the otherwise unquantifiable aspects of the studio experience.



Meta-Thesis

While there are many wonderful paths to explore through the collection, this path leads inevitably to my own thesis offering – *Meta-Thesis* – completed in 2001. *Meta-Thesis* is the natural extension of my journey through these historic works, a small sampling of which you have just seen. The book's conservative design is meant to foreground the integrity of the collection it embodies. The exaggerated size and overall expression of its materiality is an homage to the exquisitely-crafted hard-bound volumes of the programs formative years. The book for me, is an imperfect manifestation of the program's spirit: purposeful, ambitious, and dignified.



Inside the covers of *Meta-Thesis*, my "essay" is a compilation of the first sentences of every thesis in chronological order. It is a literal *cadavre exquis* which when read is a schizophrenic monologue; a breathless narrative thread which connects every thesis preceding it into one continuous text. The red words light across the surface of the page and, in the tradition of British book artist Tom Philips, connect to reveal my personal commentary about the thesis and the larger program. They begin on the first page with: *This is, for the most part, fragmental remains of specific reference materials*. They form aphorisms such as *One picture is worth ten thousand class assignments* or they reveal themselves in the form of a koan: *My thesis began by ending*.



The meat of *Meta-Thesis*, and the purpose of this paper, is to present in one experience, the breadth and range of the Yale Graphic Design program. The 200-page bibliography contains an image of the cover and inside spread of each and every thesis in the collection. As a thesis within this collection, *Meta-Thesis* must necessarily embrace its own image. This final reflexive gesture completes the circle much like the ancient Egyptian serpent which the Greeks

called the Ouroboros or tail-biter. As a symbolic form, the Ouroboros appears independently in the various mythologies of the world. It represents the regenerative cycles of life and death; beginning and completion.



What Goes Around, Comes Around

After three long years in design school and three short ones teaching in one, I have to say that teaching design is as much (and at times more) difficult than doing it. I am deeply indebted to the teachers I had at Yale and before for enduring my spontaneous challenges to their collective authority. After encountering a younger, smarter version of myself, blithely sabotaging my first design course, I feel I have come full circle. I have learned more by making mistakes than I ever have by avoiding them. I have learned more by teaching design than I ever did by studying it. Which brings us back to our friend the Ouroboros, forever consuming itself in a continuous feast of renewal – an act symbolic of the inseparable processes of teaching and learning. Although I am fairly certain that the Ouroboros never stood naked before a class, desperately searching for the right words to light the fires of student’s mind, I must admit, that after those first painful teaching experiences which gnawed upon the memory of my days as a student, I chewed my tail quite a bit too.

Now, no one actually believes that the Ouroboros can really eat itself, but this paradox resonates as a metaphor for me. Somewhere along the trip from 1951 to the present, my thesis project stopped being about me and the circles of theory spinning in my head. It had eaten its way to the center, past the flesh and through the bone. I believe that this change occurred because I was working on something useful, not only to me and my immediate goal of surviving my thesis, but useful to other living, breathing people, from my fellow classmates, to the former students in the program, to anyone interested in the history of graphic design as it evolved in this country – all of which reminded me why I pursued graphic design in the first place. Because design has the potential to transcend the subjective universe we all log into from the isolation of our internal screens. I had rediscovered a sense of purpose in those early works, that for whatever reasons, I did not feel in the program as I had experienced it. While it would be easy to blame this vacuum of purpose on the environment, the Ouroboros knows otherwise. It is certainly possible to dismiss my point of view as nostalgia, but you cannot deny that the true “power of design,” however you choose to define it, resides in the fusion of intention, purpose and responsibility which brought so many brilliant, committed and passionate people to the Yale Design Program fifty years ago and continues to do so today. In hindsight I have found, that the ever-elusive Holy Grail that is the Yale Graphic Design Thesis is not a book or a magical cup, but a looking glass – a literal and metaphorical “thesis lens” – through which to view not only what is within the collection, but everything outside of it as well.

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