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and to suggest or speculate about a time after his fall from grace.

Postmodernity turns on what Fredric Jameson identified as a "fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion" of the subject. Decentered text — a text that is skewed from the direct line of communication from sender to receiver, severed from the authority of its origin, a free — floating element in a field of possible significations — figures heavily in constructions of a design based in reading and readers. But Katherine McCoy's prescient image of designers moving beyond problem solving and by "authoring additional content and a self-conscious critique of the message, adopting roles associated with art and literature," is often misconstrued. Rather than working to incorporate theory into their methods of production, many selfproclaimed deconstructivist designers literally illustrated Barthes' image of a reader-based text — a "tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture" — by scattering fragments of quotations across the surface of their "authored" posters and book covers. (This technique went something like: "Theory is complicated, so my design is complicated.") The rather dark implications of Barthes' theory, note Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, were refashioned into a "romantic theory of self-expression."

After years in the somewhat thankless position of the faceless facilitator, many designers were ready to speak out. Some designers may be eager to discard the internal affairs of formalism — to borrow Paul de Man's metaphor — and branch out to the foreign affairs of external politics and content. By the '70s,

"I'm rocking on your dime," says the panda bear. The bear is sitting at a bar, a beer and a cigarette in front of him. His flat silhouette appears on a t-shirt by Geoff McFetridge, a young designer based in Los Angeles. McFetridge and his slouchy, working-class panda convey the attitude of an increasingly influential set of designers who want to shape the content and conditions of the work they do. "I'm rocking on your dime," says the designer who sees the client as a source of capital for creating inventive work equipped with a cultural life.

Graphic design is, among the design professions, the area most at blame for visual waste and overload in modern society. Graphic design often serves as a lubricant for other disciplines (product design, architecture, fashion) and as the gloss and glitter of the media industries (publishing, film, television, the Internet). Typically, graphic designers provide the spit and polish but not the shoe.

Not so for some of the most interesting designers working today. They are writing books as well as designing them. They are creating products, furniture, garments, textiles, typefaces, databases, magazines, novels, music, critical essays, films, and videos. They have become producers, working to initiate ideas and make them happen.

The phrase “designer as author” appeared in the 1990s to describe new aspirations for the practice of graphic design. The word author suggests agency and creation, as opposed to the more passive functions of consulting, styling, and formatting. As an author, the designer could create books, exhibitions, posters, or publications whose outcome was not dictated by a client. Furthermore, a designer could develop a “signature style,” a uniquely recognizable

DESIGNER AS AUTHOR

Authorship, in one form or another, has been a popular term in graphic design circles, especially those at the edge of the profession, the design academies and the murky territories that exist between design and art. The word authorship has a ring of importance: it connotes seductive ideas of origination and agency. But the question of how designers become authors is a difficult one, and exactly who the designer/authors are and what authored design looks like depends entirely on how you define the term and the criteria you choose to grant entrance into the pantheon.

While the author may be a solitary originator of content, the producer is part of a system of making.

In the business of film, a producer brings together a broad range of skills—*

Authorship may suggest new approaches to understanding design process in a profession traditionally associated more with the communication than the origination of messages. But theories of authorship may also serve as legitimizing strategies, and authorial aspirations may actually end up reinforcing certain conservative notions of design production and subjectivity—ideas that run counter to recent critical attempts to overthrow the perception of design based on individual brilliance. The implications deserve careful evaluation. What does it really mean to call for a graphic designer to be an author?

What is an author? That question has been an area of intense scrutiny over the last forty years. The meaning of the word itself has shifted significantly over time. The earliest definitions are not associated with writing; in fact the most inclusive is a "person who originates or gives clearly index authoritarian — even patriarchal — connotations: "father of all life," "any inventor, constructor or founder," "one who begets," and a "director, commander, or ruler."

All literary theory, from Aristotle on, has in some

DESIGNER AS PRODUCER

visual penmanship.

In his 1996 essay "The Designer as Author," Michael Rock described the contradictions as well as the freedoms suggested by the concept of the lone creator had attacked within literary studies. In 1968 the French theorist Roland Barthes had proclaimed the "death of the author," the end of the writer as a singular, self-contained voice. Barthes described the circulation of signs, styles, and genres within the vast social system that constitutes literature. Meaning is made by readers as well as writers.²

In the early 1990s, Michael Rock became prominent within the graphic design field as a critic and educator. He founded the firm 2x4 with Susan Sellers and Georgie Stout in 1993, where he and his colleagues were able to fold ideas developed as writers, teachers, and students into an influential design practice. Many of the studio's projects are based in research; the outcomes promote flexible use by clients and audiences. In place of forging a "signature style," 2x4 works to uncover visual

While the author may be a solitary originator of content, the producer is part of a system of making.

forms from popular culture or from a client's own history. In Rock's words, "Ultimately the author equals authority....We may have to imagine a time when we can ask, 'What difference does it make

[illegible][illegible]


DESIGNER AS AUTHOR

form or another been theory of authorship. Since this is not a history of the author but a consideration of the author as metaphor, I'll start with recent history. Wimsatt and Beardsley's, seminal text, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946), drove an early wedge between the author and the text, dispelling the notion that a reader could ever really know an author through his writing. The so-called death of the author, proposed most succinctly by Roland Barthes in 1968 in an essay of that title, is closely linked to the birth of critical theory, especially theory based in reader response and interpretation rather than intentionality. Michel Foucault used the rhetorical question "What is an author?" as the title of his influential essay of 1969 which, in response to Barthes, outlines the basic taxonomy and functions of the author and the problems associated with conventional ideas of authorship and origination.

Foucauldian theory holds that the connection between author and text has transformed and that there exist a number of author-functions that shape the way readers approach a text. These stubbornly persistent functions are historically determined and culturally specific categories.

Foucault posits that the earliest sacred texts were authorless, their origins lost in ancient history (the Vedas, the Gospels, etc.). The very anonymity of the text served as a certain kind of authentication. The author's name was symbolic, rarely attributable to an individual. (The Gospel of Luke, for instance, is a diversity of texts gathered under the rubric of Luke, someone who may indeed have lived and written parts, but

with colour the indents become the narrative, shape the conversation


 shape the text
 support, not as
 much criticize it

is this when the point is strong or when it disagrees?