ossible to reach a consensus. But to cast this
s and outcomes, into the language of prob-
m" too broadly or narrowly and "solving" it
n, constraints are roadblocks that must be
pressure fostering creativity. One is almost
solving, though it might be better to think
solving. It's fine to be goal-oriented in our
are so many goals. Can't we also say: exer-
cise taste, haunt imagination, organize data, leave a mark, take a stand, raise curiosity, heighten senses?

Does anyone see a problem in that?

---

## TERMINAL TERMINOLOGY

*Katherine McCoy*

"Information architect" has become the term of choice these days for communications designers working in Web design, e-commerce and interactive media. Richard Saul Wurman is often credited as the father of this term, although he did not use it originally to indicate interactive electronic communications. Wurman's new terminology was an attempt to create a more high-minded description of graphic design, something that eschewed style in favor of the more noble goals of clarity, objectivity and rational functionalism. These days, designers often use the phrase to indicate their serious intentions and solid professional grounding. Everyone seems to want to be an information architect, from Massimo Vignelli to Clement Mok, and especially new-media designers.

I find this term "information architect" troublesome, a very narrow description that omits a world of design strategies, especially those required for the design of resonant user experiences.

In this current use, the term "architect" apparently refers to the planning and structuring of a site or software application, the syntactical dimension of the design process. It also suggests a pathetic attempt to gain credibility and respect on the coattails of a more venerable and prestigious profession. This use of "architect" indicates a serious misunderstanding of the discipline of architecture, since that field includes far more than structure, organization and circulation.

---

Originally published in *Print* Vol. 55, no. 1 (January/February 2001).

While "information" is used as an overarching modifier, the word itself is extremely specific. Why "information" and not "communication"? Information design is a subset of communication design. The term "information" implicitly references a school of thought called Information Design, its adherents a distinguished lineage stretching from Otto Neurath to Michael Twyman and Robin Kinross. In that approach the values of clarity, objectivity, rationality and ordered organizational hierarchy (most frequently based on a Swiss grid) are connected to the "crystal goblet" school of graphic design and the modernist ideal of culturally neutral, value-free design. Order the content, and it will speak for itself. "Information" underscores that traditional divide between information and persuasion.

However, in today's world of interactive media and the design of experience, graphic design's old dichotomy of information versus persuasion is no longer pertinent and imposes a limited and outmoded framework on the current landscape. Information is one type of content and cannot possibly describe the entire scope of interactive electronic design. Interactive media content is one big bowl of soup that includes computation, information, data, entertainment, learning, gaming, dating, relating, propaganda, shopping and advertising. All communications design—and now product design as well—must be consciously persuasive and seductive to create memorable experiences and resonant brands.

Cool, detached communications design might have been occasionally effective when it had the advantage of a continuous physical presence. But now dematerialized, temporal and nonlinear communications are more experience than artifact. They need all the viscous juice we can give them, including subjective emotion and sensual experience. "Stickiness" is a useful term to describe the resonance of a rich user experience, the quality that good design must now aim to achieve. This is generated by persuasive, seductive character and behavior that defines the sum total of the user's experience and interaction with the message, product and service.

What theories can help us create persuasive and resonant communications, considering that character and behavior would seem to be key attributes to animate our users' experiences? The semantic category of semiotics, the science of signs, describes some aspects of character and behavior, but neglects others. As described by semiotics, semantic associative meaning is an encoded language process. But character also has to do with nonverbal, non-language expression by means of preverbal, subverbal or subconscious experience. The term "information design" has the same flaw, describing a language-based process and omitting nonlinguistic aspects of communication. Non-language theories, like phenomenology, can contribute to design and guide us toward richly haptic, sensory and nonrational modes of experience. "Affective human factors" is an interesting new area of research that is exploring the role of pleasure and emotion in interface design. Its proponents call this "hedonic design."

To achieve stickiness, experience designers can use other, sensual dimensions beyond vision and hearing. Sight and sound are contemplative senses that deliver somewhat distanced, abstracted and more cerebral stimuli, which tend to be more culturally mediated. The contact senses of touch, taste and smell are more primal, evidencing some



sort of hard-wired link to memory. Smell, in particular, is a powerful mnemonic trigger that stirs rich, spontaneous associations from past experience. Emerging media technologies promise to deliver kinesthetic body sensations that design can harness to create characterized user experiences.

To inform our process for these additional sensory dimensions of design, designers must investigate additional theories. Cognitive and perceptual psychology and an array of language theories are already applied in the more rigorous design schools. In addition, perhaps we should investigate behavioral psychology, the psychology of personality and animal behavior.

The ultimate goal in all this must be to ensure that persuasive character and user relationships evolve. This will be possible for character created by digital media. Computer technology allows a software application to evolve and learn from its interaction with the user. Random vectors and unexpected interactions may have some appropriate roles in interaction design for a generation of users raised on computer gaming conventions. We need to provide users with the experience they expect, and more utility, value and function heightened by delight.

How can user experience design create that essential stickiness, developing branded character rather than a superficial veneer? This must be an organic, inside-out process, an outgrowth and culmination of intrinsic, embedded character to achieve any authentic brand identity. An integration of the designed product's affordances and the user's response, utilization, appreciation and participation creates an effective branded identity.

Branded character in interactive electronic experience is like a car's character; the latter affects the user's driving style and creates a rich user interaction. Think of driving five different vehicles to town—the experience will be different each time, even though the activity, the route and the destination are the same. So when we design an interactive electronic experience, we could ask, "How does it drive?" Is it brisk and tight, low to the ground with instant response like a BMW roadster? Is it cranky and recalcitrant like an old pickup truck? We could also ask, "How does it smell?" Think of the pleasure of that "new car smell," the smell of leather seats, or the musty smell of a garaged old car.

How does this analogy extend to a Web site or a software application? The experience in both cases needs to go beyond superficial imitations of personality like AOL's "You've got mail," or overly rendered personalities like the computer Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

This is a revised vision of the designer's role. Networked pervasive products, for example, are more about behavior and less about graphic and product form. Thinking of the car analogy, we realize that much of a car's character comes from engineering choices that affect the contact senses—the drive train, suspension, brakes and engine compression. Too often, traditional design has been about the aesthetic senses triggered by the reflection of light on a car's surfaces. Perhaps "character engineering" would be a more descriptive and appropriate term. But I hope not. Design needs to define its own identity rather than playing the "wannabe."

So what's in a name? What we call ourselves influences how we see our roles and how our colleagues relate to us in cross-disciplinary teams. Too often, designers have been categorized as the look-and-feel specialists that are brought in at the end of the process. Hence the ambition of "information architects" to participate in a project from the beginning. But neither look-and-feel nor "information architect" adequately describes this new discipline. We need a term that includes these components, and more.

Even before interactive communications arrived, the traditional term "graphic design" was troublesome, too; librarians always shelve our books under "printmaking." "Industrial design" has also been problematic. People think these professionals design factories. Computing is also having trouble with terms: "Ubiquitous computing" and "pervasive computing" are mystifyingly vague.

"Experience design" is a little better, but still vague. But if we and our peers continue to think of ourselves as information architects—or industrial designers or graphic designers—we will never be positioned to design branded behavior and character experiences for our audiences, or to acquire the theories and skills necessary to do so.

---

## THE HOLE IN ART'S UMBRELLA

*Roy R. Behrens*

More than eighty years have passed since the founding of the Bauhaus, the most famous art school in history. The school's name was a sandwich of two German words, *bau* (building) and *haus* (house), to indicate, as its founder Walter Gropius explained, that "to embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts" and "the ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building." In coining that name, as design historian Frank Whitford has noted, Gropius wished to evoke other associations. The German word *bauen,* for example, means "to grow a crop," which brings to mind Friedrich Froebel's kindergarten ("child garden"), the preschool system in which Gropius was raised, where children are treated metaphorically as seedlings while each of them also must nurture a plant. The name also alludes to *bauhütten,* the term for the guilds of artisans who worked together on the great Gothic cathedrals during the Middle Ages.

On the cover of the Bauhaus manifesto, published in 1919, was a woodcut of a cathedral by Lyonel Feininger, an American living in Germany, known for his Kinder

---

Originally published in *Print* Vol. 54, no. 4 (July/August 2000).