

Traditional Design & New Technology

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Introductions

Liz Danzico

- I'm the moderator
- AIGA
- Boxes and Arrows
- Teach Design History at New School
- Bobulate.com
- More interesting facts about me...

Mark Boulton

- This is all my idea/fault
- MarkBoulton.co.uk
- BBC.co.uk
- More interesting facts about me...

Toni Greaves

- ToniGreaves.com
- More interesting facts about me...

Jason Santa Maria

- JasonSantaMaria.com
- Happy Cog Studios
- Alistapart.com
- More interesting facts about me...

Khoi Vinh

- NYTimes.com
- Ex-Behavior
- Subtraction.com
- More interesting facts about me...

What Are We Talking About?

Central hypothesis Part I

- We might want to frame things in terms of an idea that we can prove/disprove.
- E.g., Traditional design values do not translate to the Web. True or False?
- How do we define it?
- In simple terms, we're discussing the dichotomy between *digital* and *non-digital* design practices

Central hypothesis Part II

- Liz: Traditional design has changed as a result of new technology. True or False?
- Jason: What are we trying to get across? Do we want to show how good design ideals have a place in Web design? Well, yes, that's true, but everyone likely knows that already. So what are we really bringing to the table?
- Khoi: This is a great point, and it's why I think this slide (or this point in the presentation) are crucial because they set up the audience to understand what they're going to get out from the rest of the session. We have to work this out A.S.A.P. because the rest of the panel planning will from from this.
 - Liz: I would scratch my above comment to say that we're trying to get across **why and when certain traditional design values are worth applying to web design (new technology values)**. This will set us up nicely to show things that happened early -- where designers were, almost blindly, trying to emulate the only thing they knew: print design. Immediately, I would follow by stating quick examples (like Lumière brothers and type) where this very thing happened. Then go into much of the content the section "traditional design goes online."

Central hypothesis Part III

- Mark: Following on from Liz's comment (and Jason's and Khoi's via email), the hypothesis needs tying down.

I like Liz's hypothesis: **why and when certain traditional design values are worth applying to web design (new technology values)**

It's very close to what I had in mind when I had initial discussions with Khoi.

- TONI: A concern about the word "values"... Stating design in terms of traditional or new technology "values" sounds a bit like a judgement statement (in part, perhaps, because of the recent political ownership of the word). Having worked in both print and web, and having experienced print designers with "attitude" against the skills of new technology designers, I think we just need to be wary of how this is framed, given the new technology audience that we will be speaking to. Perhaps the word is "practices"? Any other thoughts? Or am I completely high to be concerned about this?
- The word 'worth' is an important one in this. We should try and define what we mean by it.
- Mark: This hypothesis should be presented in a medium context though (I'm guessing not a huge amount of the audience will be very familiar with print design). So, some core differences in the medium need to be highlighted:
 - Print: The idea of permanence; you get it printed once and that's it, so it has to be right.
 - Web: 'Oh, it doesn't matter, let's just get it live' kind of approach.
 - Print: Established process with a rich history.
 - Web: User Centred Design methodologies. This doesn't really exist in 'traditional' graphic design
 - it's a traditional process - top down.
- Mark: With such differences between the two medium is it at all appropriate to assume that traditional design values can be applied? I think they can, but it'd be great if you disagree! :)

What is 'traditional design'? Part I

- Mark's take: Traditional design is the *craft* of Graphic design which has evolved and exists in the print medium.
- Khoi's take: essentially the practice non-digital, offline design
- We want to be specific, but we also want to be sure to speak in *plain terms* and avoid defaulting to design-speak
 - Liz: Some of the best panels I've seen have each person stating a different point of view. I think it might be interesting if we agree on a central hypothesis, but disagree/define differently traditional design.
 - Mark: I'd second that. Shall we each define exactly what we mean by 'traditional' and go from there? I've edited mine above.
 - TONI: Traditional graphic design is "visual communication", through the organization of language and images.

What is 'traditional design'? Part II

- Liz's take: If design is purposeful planning, then traditional design is the form those plans will take. (I stole this from *The Cheese Monkeys*.)
- Mark: I'd like to disagree with this (you know, bearing in mind the previous slide ;). This statement, to me, implies that 'design' is the thinking bit and 'traditional design' is the aesthetic bit. I don't think this is the case. But perhaps this is one of the problems with the web medium and traditional design? Traditional design is seen as the aesthetic, and as there are 'too many constraints' on the web, that aesthetic cannot be attained.
- New technology enables tradition to evolve.
- There are design problems that Web Design can solve that Traditional Design cannot.
- Mark: I'm not sure there are. But it would be great to discuss/debate this point further.
- TONI: Ah, Mark, I take great joy in being able to debate you on this ;). I disagree, as I am defining traditional design as "visual communication", I would argue that web design is this (v.c.), and more, as it has the ability to be a more sensory experience. It also can be more of an exploratory journey than the linear process that is typical of design in the printed form.

What is 'traditional design'? Part III

- Jason: Design in broad terms of history has been much more blue collar trade/craft by way of information design, e.g., posters, flyers, newspapers etc.
- TONI: Jason, this is a great point. This is actually one of the reasons I see for it being difficult to apply historically traditional design to the web, as the web, now, feels owned by big business (as opposed to the exploratory environment of the late '90s). This is also how the appalling term "look and feel" came into existence to describe design (should we touch on this?). Perhaps because of business people not truly understanding designs value, so design ends up becoming mere "cake decoration" or sorts.
- Design in more specific, more modern terms, is driven by transactions and popularity: marketing, advertising, sales of products/services
 - Khoi: I'm not sure I completely agree. I think it's a very good point to say that design has lost almost all of its blue collar characteristics; we should definitely expound on that. But it's also true that even design from that era of working class, jobbing printers was geared towards advertisements. Probably we should just refine the point a bit.
- There was a large-scale shift/rift in design because it signaled the gap between graphic design and commercial design

What we mean when we say 'new technology'

- Design touches many forms of new technology, but for the purposes of this session we're talking about *Web design*
- We're not talking about CD-ROM design or kiosk design or anything else
- TONI: I'd add that web design encompasses not just the visuals, but the general experience of a site. This is a distinguishing point from print design (otherwise we're just talking about graphics in one medium or another).

Things not covered here

- This slide to narrow the scope of our discussion
- CSS in-depth
- Web standards
- How to make money with graphic design
- How to become Web designer if you're a print designer (or a "traditional" designer)

Personal v. commercial design Part I

- There's a quicker path to applying traditional design values to new technology when the client is the designer
 - Fewer technological restrictions (plug-ins, bandwidth demands okay)
- For today, we're interested in the framework of commercial work, where designers must create solutions that meet real-world business criteria
- Liz: Wasn't this always the case, unless we're talking about art versus design? I mean, I know that's not entirely true, but I ask mostly to see more details about what you mean.
- TONI: I agree with Liz, and would question whether this even needs stating. Graphic Designers have always worked in a commercial world.... as opposed to being artists.

Personal v. commercial design Part II

- Liz asks: What do you mean by “Personal?”
 - Khoi: I would define “personal” as any design work not expressly completed for business interests, excluding design portfolios.
 - Sketchy answer, I know. Does anyone else want to chime in?
 - TONI: Yep, lose this slide. ;) (see my note on previous page)

A Brief History of Graphic Design Online

From markup to layout

- HTML started as a markup language for scientists
- This is the story of how it evolved into a design language
- One of my favorite examples is George Eastman. The move from expert photographers to consumer-level photography is such a great example of the story of how to give over control to consumers; how to create a common language...
- Khoi says: that's great! We should flesh that out...
- Several slides to follow...

From markup to layout

Part II

- **Mark: Where we were:**
 - Designer's emulating what they knew best. Trying to make print design work online.
 - But also, a loss of control. Anybody can build a website right? 'Amateur' design in the form of the web. (I think this fits with your George Eastman example)
 - Show some slides of 'cutting edge' site designs (1994 - 96)TONI: Great idea.

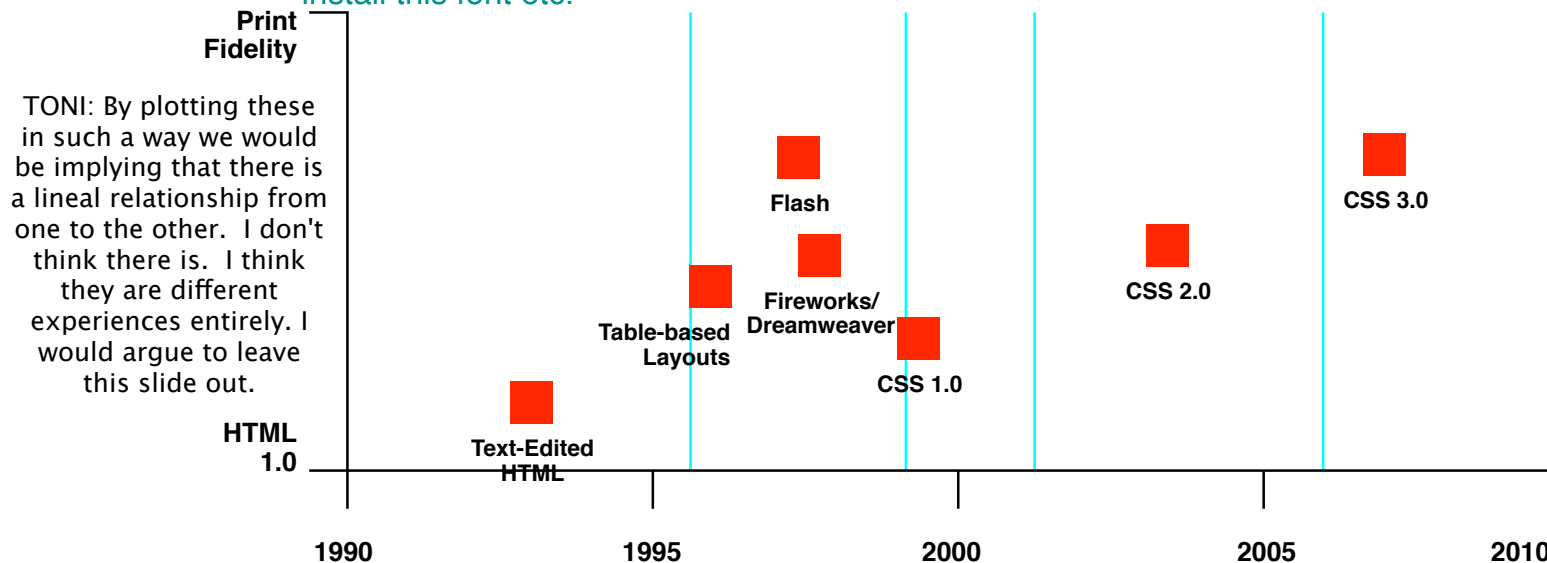
Designer's abandoned the web in droves (in my experience, with many print and advertising designers, this is still happening) stating it's a medium with 'too many restrictions'.*

- TONI: In many ways, after the .com crash, web designers also were shunned by the traditional design community. When trying to get work in print, they were deemed as being a bit "second rate". Classism in design. I heard accounts of this, and also personally experienced it when working in print design for a huge and well-renowned company (that happens to make sport shoes with swooshes on them ;)

*I don't have anything to back this up just yet, I've just been told that so many times!

The evolution of control

- A completely unscientific plot of how various Web authoring technologies have brought us closer to print fidelity
 - Liz: Does “print fidelity” here just represent “traditional values?” Or is this just one segment of traditional design?
- Khoi: I just threw this together, so please have at it.
- The cyan lines are meant to divide up the timeline into “eras.” I just haven’t come up with good names for them. Obviously, “Web 2.0” could be one of the names.
- Jason: great opportunity for us to use humorous names for the eras: 2advanced, skip intro, multi-version, etc.
 - Khoi: A great point! We should include some of the ‘design workarounds’ of those eras. E.g., skip intro and multiple versions as you suggest, but also, best viewed in, please install this font etc.



Art Direction v. Design

Two distinct modes of our craft

- Expand on my rambling at <http://www.lesslink.com/ad/v/d/>
- Mark: a few slides here to define what design is and what art direction is, especially with regard to the process of art directing

This is art direction

- Art direction is about ideas and narrative. It's about the bigger picture - guiding the execution of the parts of the whole, including design.
- Mark: Not very eloquent, I know, but it's a start. This section I think is key to our hypothesis. Art Direction is very much 'traditional'.

These guys were art directors...

- Brodovitch, Beale, Golden, Brody etc.
- ...and most of us who practice online are *designers*

Is it even appropriate to art direct?

- Does it make sense to apply principles normally associated with advertising and publication design to software design?
- Draw a distinction between user interfaces for content (e.g., online magazines) and software (e.g., online productivity applications)

Narrative in design

- Storytelling as a binding agent for design elements
- Today's user interfaces have incrementally more narrative than 10 years ago, and those have incrementally more than 10 years before that...
- E.g., WordPerfect 1.0 v. Microsoft Word 5 v. Writely
- We still have a long way to go
- Liz: Does this slide belong in the next section?

Traditional Design Goes Online

Methods of incorporating traditional design values on the Web Part I

- This section outlines ways in which we try to make the Web more like offline design
- Indicative of how these changes happen historically:
 - Lumière brothers and the discovery of the movement of the camera (moving the camera never occurred to people, since they were used to watching plays)
 - First type looked very much calligraphy because they was what people knew writing to look like.
- TONI: There is a great quote by Henry Ford that says something like.... "If I had of asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." So, the connection... It doesn't come naturally for people to think differently, but when they do, it can be ground-breaking.

Methods of incorporating traditional design values on the Web Part II

- Jason: We should probably mention Flash here.
 - There will be a lot of Flash people in the crowd too, and there are plenty of examples of successful Flash.
 - We aren't getting hung up on semantic stuff, so we should be able to focus on the good side of it like the storytelling and interactive capabilities.
 - Mark: Any examples? A lot of stuff Hillman Curtis did shows good narrative and art direction. - http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/web_motion.shtml
- TONI: Second Story would have a lot of good examples for this. <http://www.secondstory.com>

Emulation

- The “analog” look
- Textures
- Metaphorical accuracy
- Making a Web page look like the printed page

Grid Systems

- The “uptight” look
- Subdividing an ‘infinite’ page with rules devised for finite pages

Typography Part I

- Graphics v. ASCII
- CSS
- sIFR
- How much do typographers think about the Web?

Typography Part II

- Embedding Web fonts
 - <http://www.w3.org/TR/2002/WD-css3-webfonts-20020802/>
 - Bitstream have thrown in the towel WRT font embedding
- Typographers have yet to fully embrace the Web as a typographically important medium
 - Typographic awards aren't given to online typographers
 - **There's more to typography than the font you choose.**
 - Example: ISTD award given to a site that's built-in Flash and looks like a cross between a printed page and a TV ad
 - <http://www.frostdesign.com.au>
 - Typographic bodies need to take a serious look at what's being done online and to get over the medium's typographic quirks

Illustration

- Still M.I.A. (mostly). Some examples of sites that use illustration:
 - A List Apart
 - Salon
 - (The late) Suck.com
- If used, used primarily for illuminating a site's 'platform,' rather than its content
- Any illustrators in the audience? Thought so.

Photography

- The preferred method for dressing up a user interface
- The proliferation of inexpensive digital imaging has played a big role in getting images online
 - Sub-\$100 scanners
 - Sub-\$1,000 digital SLRs
- The result is that we're dominated by 'cut-rate' imagery
 - Stock photography

Discussion

Tell us what you think

- And we'll tell you why you're wrong! (Joke.)

Bibliography

Some Reference Sources...

- Graphic Design: A Concise History
- Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History
- History of Graphic Design
- [Add your favorite bathroom reading here...](#)
- Anything by Paul Rand