

our discussion here, sometimes for a discipline to move forward it is necessary to consider the possibility of perspectives that lie beyond its current purview. It is this alternative sense of form, as something which is newly minted in the world of experience, and which arises from some complex yet mappable origins, that I have explored over the past two years.

I believe that any aesthetic and informational practice has ethical implications, as it determines to an incredible extent the way we represent the world to ourselves, and therefore the choices available to us, and the modalities by which we might act. In a time of unprecedented ecological disaster, we simply cannot blithely continue our existing paradigms that blind us and bind us. To borrow Marx’s adept phrasing from an earlier time, awake, graphic designers! You have nothing to lose but your chains!

This thesis book plots a series of methodologies and insights that begin to formulate a platform for a new design practice. This inquiry, like the proverbial snowball, is just now cumulatively beginning to gather real speed and traction. While the bulk of work included here is necessarily experimental, each project a stepping stone in a wider inquiry, I feel I am now at the point where specific, increasingly powerfully focused projects will become possible. The design of this book itself is one such further experiment. It is in some respects a critique of the thesis book, a deconstruction of its norms and normative function as producing desire (in the Deleuze and Guattari sense, i.e. power relations). One of the key claims of post-structuralism is that meaning never exists on a 1:1 basis; the meaning of something is not inherent to the thing, but depends on contextuality. Things proliferate a plurality of meanings, in other words. An intuitive understanding of this has underpinned many of the decisions that went into making this book; decisions which, again, I now find confirmed within the framework of deconstruction. The interviews, for example—a necessary part of any thesis book—are here conceived more conversationally, leveling the duality and implicit hierarchies of interviewer/interviewee. The duality of speech/text is similarly problematized and leveled, as the mode of transcription preserves the spontaneous vernacular without conferring spurious propriety through ‘normal’ and normative modes. And my own textual authority as ‘author’ is surrendered into instead a plurality of voices: my voice within each interview, my multiple voices captured in time-stamped notes, the practical voice of the captions, and the design voice that emerges through selection, emphasis, and sequencing. The goal in all this, as in all post-structuralist work, is to empower the viewer/reader: to explode the numerous highly constructed cultural, psychological and economic conditions on which the work is contingent. The aim is to lay bare the genesis of the ‘thing’ as an improvised and ongoing negotiation between multiple voices; this, as Hrebeniak points out, is the structure of America itself as a mythic construct, but it applies equally at microcosmic level to such productions as a thesis book. That, at least, is my hypothesis for this experiment; whether the parts adhere through suggestive cross-fertilization, or fly apart in a nightmare of ill-conceived chaos is an open question, but one that was also asked on a national level in the form of the Civil War. Hence the reason for the format of my book: a square, the form of the city (the ideological space), but also two twin verticalities, chained together by a spine (the form feels almost like vertebral disks; the book as ‘corpus’) which, perFORMatively, enacts their union.

The result may not look like ‘graphic design’ as we have become conditioned to think of it. It may appear unaware of current trends, and may be (mis)read as belonging to some earlier ‘trend’. But to conceive of design in terms of trends is again to consider form as the latter of the two kinds I elaborated above: as end object, open to imitation, cooption, or satire. I am not particularly interested in asking what the ‘thing’ looks like, so much as staying with the question of what it is trying to do and where it comes from: by attention to these deeper tectonics of ‘thing’ genesis, its form will eventually be something not only ‘new’, but also ‘right’.

So, as has been the case with any performance throughout the centuries, I now step to the front of the stage, and beg your indulgence: that with an open heart and a spirit of play, you confer your license on this record of my dreaming.