

T HE AESTHETICS OF THE LINE. DESIGN WITHIN DESIGN

45. Todo trazo de diseño está siempre manifestado en un gran número de ejemplares idénticos entre sí. A través de los mecanismos de reproducción gráfica, la obra única se convierte en obra múltiple. El trazo diseñístico supone una representación de lo humano, lo único y lo irrepetible mediante lo mecánico, lo múltiple y lo reproducible.

46. Podemos pensar que el caso del trazo de diseño es similar al de las obras de arte reproducidas en posters o publicaciones. Nada más lejos de la realidad. En el trazo de diseño no existe la obra única referencial, la fuente primigenia de la posterior ubicuidad. En el trazo de diseño sólo hay ubicuidad.

47. El trazo de diseño no es el resultado de un juego estético gratuito, sino un artificio decidido y realizado en el marco de estrategias comunicativas que deben, finalmente, demostrar su rentabilidad.

48. Lo único es representado por lo múltiple; lo original y lo singular por la manifestación del modelo; lo exclusivamente humano por lo predominantemente mecánico; lo arriesgado por lo seguro; lo espontáneo por lo que se elabora a partir de un plan, lo plástico por lo icónico; el juego por el trabajo; lo gratuito por aquello que busca una rentabilidad...

49. La utilización diseñística del trazo supone un ejercicio en el que cada valor es representado por su opuesto. Y ello porque el estereotipo al uso del arte se simula a través del estereotipo al uso del diseño. En esta dialéctica, el diseño-trazo, y, en general, el diseño-débil, se presenta como una síntesis, una síntesis que no es superadora de nada, sino simplemente un juego más en este mundo de banalidades regidas por el mercado.

50. Al igual que el diseño funcionalista se legitimaba con el disfraz de la necesidad derivada de lo útil, el diseño artístico se ha legitimado con el disfraz de la libertad derivada de lo estético.

51. Pero, vístase como se vista, la práctica del diseño no está regida ni por lo estético ni por lo funcional en sentido estricto. La práctica del diseño, vístase como se vista, está regida por lo retórico. Lo retórico entendido no como compendio sistemático de ornamentos, sino como tratado de las estrategias persuasivas.

52. Lo estético y lo funcional, en el diseño, no son más que argumentos de lo persuasivo.

53. El diseño de moda para el mercado ha sido el diseño-trazo, el diseño-débil, el diseño que pone por delante el argumento del maridaje con el arte. Pero no hay mezcla, sólo simulación, porque la práctica artística y la práctica diseñística, en última instancia, poseen dos lógicas distintas.

1. In our cultural context, during the last decade, the line has invaded the aesthetics of graphic design. Logotypes, symbols, signs, posters, leaflets. In all of these the line appears as one of the distinctive marks of the times.

2. The peak in the aesthetics of the line occurred at the moment when design becomes social fashion. Design was transformed in the symbolic element of the culture, and the line in one of the signs which help us to recognize it.

3. The line is a graphic form, but not every graphic form is a line. The line is a graphic form capable of functioning as an icon, which can function as a symbol; but which, as a line, is basically an indication.

4. The line is used as an icon when it represents a figure, when it serves, via some principle of similarity, however simple it may be, as a reference to an object in the world. This function is not always conferred on lines; at times they appear as purely abstract forms.

5. The line functions as a symbol when, by means of form, colour, texture, composition... it alludes in a more or less conventional way to cultural values.

6. What the line does with a graphic form is to give it its indicative character. From this indication, representation is achieved by means of implication. The line is a mark which implies the act of producing it: the gesture.

7. The line is an indication of the gesture.

8. The line is an indication of the gesture of graphic production.

9. Just as a footprint in the sand is an icon of the foot, since it reproduces its shape and size, the line is also an icon of a gesture, since it presents some of its characteristics: its direction, its size, its intensity...

10. The line, as an indication, refers us to the graphic gesture, to the production carried out within the framework of design activity. The line places design in the foreground. It is a product of design which speaks of design itself. The act of stating within what is stated. The article inside the text. The design within the design.

11. By means of the line design becomes self-referring; it alludes to itself. When design is in fashion its very products must speak of design and design-making.

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12. Behind the line there is a discourse on design activity, a polemical discourse, through which a specific conception of this activity is implicitly raised.

13. Thinking of the characteristics of the line and the gesture which produces it means thinking of the values which the design exercises on the same design.

14. The line is a sign of gesture and gesture is characteristic of man as opposed to the machine. The line refers us to the human faced with the mechanical.

15. The line is a sign of the gesture and gesture is personal, peculiar to a specific subject. The essential component of any signature is the line gesture. The line refers us to the individual facing the collective.

16. The line is a sign of gesture and gesture is more corporal than mental. The body moves and the gesture is produced. The aesthetics of the line favour the body over the mind, action over reflection, passion over reason, romantic impulse over classical restraint.

17. The line supposes a certain degree of freedom at the moment of execution and in the final result. The production of the line, always supposing that the subject has not automated it through repetition, brings into play the boldness of the creator. There is no absolute control over the process and the conclusion. It is like taking a leap into the unknown on the basis of a decision or impulse. A leap that can turn out well or unhappily. It is possible to determine the starting point, the point of arrival and the direction to be followed to get from one to the other. But the precise path is always carried out in free fall. The exercise of freedom is always linked to risk and uncertainty.

18. The line consequently possesses a certain degree of the unpredictable. It usually affords a surprise even to the subject who has just produced it. For this reason, the line favours information over redundancy.

19. In the face of geometrical or geometricized forms and of consolidated figurative shapes, any line possesses its own peculiar and always distinct appearance. Thus the line refers us to what is singular, original and different, as opposed to what is repetitive, identical and hackneyed.

20. The line is the consequence of the instantaneous and unrepeatable gesture, the gesture that has been developed in a here-and-now which will be later converted into a mythical there-and-then. The line therefore, like any artistic piece, possesses the aura characteristic of a unique work.

21. The line emphasizes the importance of the plastic space, the space of the graphic production, the material space in which the gesture is carried out and in which its form, colour and texture are inscribed. And so the iconic space remains in the background, the space of what is represented, that possible figurative space in which are found simulations of objects belonging to real or possible worlds.

22. The spontaneity and liberty in the execution of the line, and the character of its plastic nature, allude to an act in which there exist no objectives that go beyond the pure aesthetic field. The execution of the line is thus established as a free act.

23. The line, in short, is the graphic device which condenses the semantic values which make up the most widespread social stereotype onto the artistic element: all that is human, all that there is of gesture, all that is original, creative, unpredictable, impulsive, unique, unrepeatable, plastic, playful, gratuitous...

24. The aesthetics of the line supposes for Graphic Design the establishment of its symbolic artistification.

25. Fashion did not come from design, it did not come from the line; fashion came from line design, from artistified design.

26. Line design stands as a compromise between art and design. A little from here and a little from there. A halfway meeting.

27. Design presupposes a radical time separation between the act of projecting and that of producing.

28. Conceive a form while it is being produced. (Not design. Art-action.) Conceive/plan a form and later produce it just as it has been conceived/planned. (Design in the strong sense. Strong-design.) Conceive/plan a form, more or less, and later produce it in terms, more or less, of what has been conceived/planned. (Design in the weak sense. Weak-design.)

29. The line is a symbol of weak design. Weak design, like weak thinking, belongs to the field of the already outdated fashion of Postmodernism. But weak design, like weak thinking, is also part of the wider-reaching cycle of the crisis of Modernism.

30. Weak design, line design, which promises an artistification of design, appears as a compendium of art and design.

31. But weak design does not achieve the artistification of design through a mixture of equivalent, or quasi-equivalent measures, of art and design. On the contrary, the artistification of design is achieved by means of a process of representation.

32. It is not a question of design combining with art but of design pretending to be art.

33. Finally, the designing line is a represented line and therefore, through the line, the artistification of design is also a represented artistification —a shared simulation.

34. Not every result of a graphic gesture really appears to be a line. The result does not always correspond to our cultural model of what is, evidently, a line. The form that is produced may seem, in the end, hardly spontaneous; or it may turn out to be excessively geometrical; or it may accidentally

give cause for it to be interpreted exclusively as a deliberate and precise representation of an object in the world.

35. The line of the design does not necessarily have to be the result of a graphic gesture, it does not really have to be a line. Quite simply, and independently of how it has been produced, the design line need only *appear* to be one. This is the principle of the game of representation.

36. There are many ways of representing a line. Take a pencil and draw, with care, a silhouette starting out from our cognitive-perceptive model of what a line consists of; fill in the inside area, from one side to the other, with some colour and, if possible, introduce gradation in the tone of texture. Then we shall get an unquestionable line.

37. Moreover, in such a context, the execution of a graphic gesture must be understood as one more way of representing a line, not used because it is the most authentic way but only because it is, in some cases, the most effective way. Sometimes the gesture is repeated, trying time and again until the desired line appears, the line which, paradoxically, has to look as if it is the result of a single definite decisive gesture.

38. On occasions what is in fact a real genuine line may raise doubts as to its authenticity as a line. What is real is not necessarily what is most credible.

39. The significant thing is always the cultural model, not the real object.

40. The design line is what it is, not because its origin is the result of a gesture but because it looks as if it is. It is a represented line which refers us, at the same time, to a represented gesture.

41. We can say we are going to represent a dog, we are going to represent a tree, we are going to represent a house, we are going to represent a wheel, we are going to represent a line.

42. Thus, in any representation of a line, the supposed values of freedom, creativity, originality and uniqueness yield to the restrictions imposed by the display of a cultural model, a model which, once it has been established, must subsequently be clearly recognizable.

43. In the image of graphic design, the plastic space which the line favours is finally converted into an iconic space, into a figured space, in which the manual line is established as a simulated object through the mechanisms of graphic production and reproduction.

44. Sometimes, with a kind of double trick, the establishment of the line as a represented object is made explicit (the Barcelona'92 symbol). Here the line appears as a figure which projects its shadow onto a background, thereby creating the illusion of a three-dimensional space.

45. Every design line is invariably shown in a large number of identical examples. By means of mechanisms of

graphic reproduction the unique work becomes the multiple work. The design line supposes a representation of what is human, unique and unrepeatable while the mechanical line means what is multiple and capable of being reproduced.

46. We might imagine that the case of the design line is akin to that of works of art which are reproduced in posters or publications. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the design line there does not exist the unique fork to refer to, the original fount of subsequent ubiquity. In the design line there is *only* ubiquity.

47. The design line is not the result of a free aesthetic game but it is an artifice that is decided on and carried out within the framework of communicative strategies that must, in the end, demonstrate that it is profitable.

48. What is unique is represented by multiplicity; what is original and singular by the display of the model; what is exclusively human by what is predominantly mechanical; what entails risk by what is safe; what is spontaneous by what is worked out from a plan; what is plastic by what is iconic; what is game by work; what is untrammelled by what seeks profit...

49. The use of line in design supposes an exercise in which each value is represented by its opposite. And this is because the stereotype at the service of art is simulated by means of the stereotype at the service of design. In this dialectic, line design and, in general, weak design, appear as a synthesis, a synthesis which does not surpass anything but which is simply one more game in this world of trivialities governed by the market.

50. Just as functionalist design justified itself by dressing up as necessity derived from utility, artistic design had justified itself in the guise of liberty derived from aesthetics.

51. But, however it is dressed up, the practice of design is governed neither by aesthetics or by what is functional in the strictest sense. The practice of design, however it is dressed up, is governed by rhetoric —rhetoric understood not as a systematic compendium of ornaments but as a treatise on persuasive strategies.

52. What is aesthetic and what is functional in design are no more than arguments of what is persuasive.

53. Fashion design for the market was line design, weak design, design which emphasizes the argument of a marriage with art. But the mixture does not exist, there is only simulation, because artistic practice and design practice, in the last instance, possess two quite distinct logical bases.