

**PARTING**



WRITINGS  
ON  
Graphic  
Design

I A N L Y N A M

**T**





## INTRODUCTION

This book is a collection of graphic design oriented essays that I wrote over the past few years. The name, *Parting It Out*, is a manifold look at the fragmented ways in which I look at both graphic design and the world. The book itself, in essence, is a kit of parts, a collection of essays that lived separately in different publications, yet are now housed in the same volume.

The term “parting it out” refers to car thievery and the disassembly of stolen cars for component resale. When I was a teen, I engaged in this activity twice. I am not proud of it (nor am I ashamed of it, frankly), but it serves as an apt metaphor for this book—disassembly and reassembly. Much in the way an opportunistic individual can view an automobile, anyone can view different aspects of contemporary and historical graphic design—as something of intrinsic value and interest (yet hopefully the viewer has slightly more prosocial intentions casting their gaze over these scant few hundred pages). Within these collected essays, graphic design is viewed from a variety of perspectives, and their aggregation is an attempt to bridge the disconnect between design history, design criticism, typography-oriented writing, memoir, and pure ol’ plain fun prose.

These essays are also a reflection of my activities day-to-day. Maybe the best way to explain why I do what I do, as well as how and why I do it, is to bring in another disparate component, notably my academic Statement of Teaching Philosophy, as it is another piece that’s already written and would just be rewritten here anyway:

My current practice is a hybrid of teaching graphic design, researching and writing on design history and design theory, examining contemporary practices through critical writing and speaking, organizing exhibitions focused on unexplored aspects of design, and simultaneously operating a working design studio that works in the cultural and commercial sectors.

As the basis of design is the applied synthesis of conceptual thinking and form-giving in a meaningful way, I strive to ensure that students I work with are able to gain as full an understanding of the processes, legacy, and development of design through a wide array of educational and pedagogical methodologies. These take form in many ways, including:

- close reading and active discussion of design history and design theory
- practical hands-on tutelage for specific software or craft-oriented elements of contemporary design processes (e.g., teaching software, code, fine typography, and form-making)

- cultivating an active critique-based micro-culture within the classroom, while imparting the connections between culture and design, ensuring that the processes of design are not isolated
- ensuring that students are aware of contemporary forms of design and practice
- active design research and writing projects, while ensuring that students are able to present their work in a professional, yet exuberant way
- proposing professional affiliations with established companies and organizations when adequate and beneficial
- expanding students' visual vocabularies and working methodologies (e.g., employing 'rapid' prototyping, 'slow' prototyping, chance processes, ethnographic research, applied project constraints, and speculative project scenarios)

I strive to lead by example and to be an individual creating design research, writing, exhibitions, publications, and tools that are additive to both the sphere of design as well as to culture at large. I pursue self-initiated projects within both the academic sector and my own practice, not merely relying upon established curricula, syllabi or client project briefs.

In short, I am continually interested and engaged. I do my best to extend this enthusiasm for design culture to students and peers in a friendly, collaborative way. I continually create tools and initiate scenarios to help my work in academia—be it a database of design essays to share with students, regularly presenting physical and digital work of value with students in “show & tell” format in class, or offering students examples of professional job-hunting ephemera. I am intrinsically interested in helping to define the development of design as an area of cultural production for the benefit of society.

Simultaneously, academic work as well as design research is an area for growth and personal development—the very best teachers actively listen to their students and I do my very best to listen. I learn from my mistakes, adapt syllabi, listen to my academic peers, and am growth-oriented. I want students to get the very best out of our shared time together and I try my best to be flexible and to teach with humility. I treat my colleagues with deference and professional respect, and am genuinely friendly and approachable. I am interested in the work of others around me.

My personal working philosophy is inspired by German designer and design writer Otl Aicher's faith in allowing the process of making a project help to contribute to and mold its outcome. I am also influenced by the writings of Norman Potter - in particular, how can a designer add value and meaning to a client's project? My work is also influenced by the Canadian cultural critic Andrew Potter in assessing culture and design from a political economy-oriented perspective. I am an active reader, as well as a writer, and am continually seeking to develop my design strategies and working methodologies.

Currently, global culture is infatuated with the notion of authenticity, particularly within the realm of design. I ask students and readers to strive for more: to produce meaningful work that is both genuine and of exceeding quality, while being ultimately additive to culture.

This, my concurrent career in teaching, is something that I have chosen to infuse this book with by interleaving assignments given to students at Temple University Japan and Vermont College of Fine Arts. They represent the iterative process that graphic design education can be in the simultaneous Post-Postmodern/Neoliberal era—a time for exploration of fundamentals of thinking and making hand in hand.

Иван Луциан  
April 2015





## WEDDINGS

Takeshi is a Japanese male who works as an administrator at a medium-sized corporation. Ayumi is a Japanese female who works as an administrator at a medium-sized corporation. They were married in December of 2013 in Hokkaido at a nice hotel. I was invited to their wedding, but was unable to attend. However, I did see a video of their wedding a week afterward.

The marriage was conducted in the fashion of a Western-Christian wedding with a white man playing the role of priest and coordinating the exchanging of vows, while the couple was clad in a Western-style tuxedo and wedding dress. This was followed by dinner service, while the couple made the rounds greeting their guests individually.

The event's symbolic meaning was amplified by the bride and groom donning Santa and elf costumes to serve dessert at one point—the hybridity of marriage and Christmas feeling very Postmodern. Next was a digital slideshow of the bride and groom, showing them from childhood through adult maturation, followed by images of them together. Afterward, they did another costume change and prepared to bid their guests goodbye. Meanwhile, another video was projected—a slow-motion replay of highlights of the entire wedding that had just occurred with the guest list as the credits rolled. Then, everyone left.

This was perhaps the most interesting wedding I have ever witnessed (even if witnessed secondhand from a removed geographical position) due to the collision of symbolism and conflation of cultural ideas that it contained, most notably via the instant nostalgia that the couple and the wedding planner/production team attempted to infuse within the event by projecting the near-instant replay of the event, with time itself being slowed down in the video. As a global culture, we expect some time to pass before a notable moment in life can become crystallized as being worthy of nostalgia. Instead, the producers behind the event attempted to skip the required period of metaphysical ‘fermentation’ and present the event as being instantly memorable, fraught with meaning and, ultimately, to emerge fully-formed as being both worthy of nostalgia and instantly nostalgic.

This case of ‘instant nostalgia’ is not isolated to this wedding, but in fact represents much of what is problematic with graphic design in the West at the present moment. Graphic design, a practice named in 1922, has had more than enough time to ‘ferment’ and become an area of cultural production, research, and exploration that is filled with meaning. The difficult thing is that, if one peruses his or her local bookseller's graphic design section, the pickings are slim.

The bulk of design literature, and, more specifically, graphic design books and publications, are those steered toward very specific reading audiences. These books can be broken down by subgenre, most notably as:

- ◆ a selection self-help manuals for the budding graphic designer
- ◆ a smattering of graphic design history books (either focused on a single practitioner or functioning as general surveys)
- ◆ a ton of practical how-to guides
- ◆ too many books about typographic grids
- ◆ an overwhelming amount of monographs
- ◆ a dizzying array of books showing contemporary or near-contemporary slices of graphic styles
- ◆ collections of logo designs
- ◆ packaging prototype books

In Western graphic design literature at present, books-as-tools, style guides, and hero worship dominate—there is nearly nothing suggesting anything outside of the problem-solving/commercial/early Modernist methodological paradigm. Because of the dearth of graphic design books that substantially explore the potential of graphic design, it is normal that veteran graphic designers seek the art and architecture sections of bookstores. And by “potential,” I am referring to expanded forms of discourse (conscientiously abstaining from either the term “theory” or the term “practice” in this lone instance—graphic design publishing is, and has always been, overburdened with practice-oriented writing and not enough theory). There is nearly nothing being produced in the current moment in the way of graphic design theory. In short, there is a void.

It is not problematic that graphic design draws on the discourses of art and architecture, though it is troubling that homegrown discourse within graphic design is so slow to develop. Due to this, Western graphic design literature just offers far less than contemporary art and architecture theory and literature in terms of breadth and depth in approaches to practice itself, as well as criticism and theory. Graphic design culture at large is still caught up in satisfying clients and being goal-oriented to a fault. This is evidenced as much by the dearth of criticism and theory as it is by the apparent lack of interest in these pursuits by practitioners.

The printed legacy of graphic design has rarely transcended its origins in commercial art and advertising art. The bulk of our literature today is too much akin to the manuals offered by commercial art schools’ correspondence courses from the turn-of-the-century. Most graphic design publications today offer preset methods and

methodologies, mechanical coursework in various flavors, and are predominantly hydra-like in their combination of oversimplification, banal generalization, atavistic/retrograde approaches to form and practice, and are conservative in the applied thinking and writing.

In the West, it is as if we are stuck in a temporal/causal loop—the expanded approaches to graphic design instigated by Postmodernists in the 1990s have (in-effect) ended, and there have been few further attempts at an expansion of discourse and practice. Graphic design in North America and Europe relies and insists upon a nostalgia for slices of the early/mid-Modern era. The continued popularity of the writing and design of pioneer practitioners such as Paul Rand (as a nostalgic symbol of Modernism and good, old, long-lasting corporate identity) and Bruno Munari (as carefree symbol of those interested in operating at the intersection of design and art) reifies this as the West’s continued interest in Helvetica, the Swiss/International Style, et al. This fascination with the then-nascent Modern movement is symbolic of both a form of cultural constipation (at best) and of what constitutes a stoppage in the development of graphic design as a form of cultural production (at worst). However, approaching graphic design from a different geographic location allows for a renewed perspective of history, and allows one to sidestep entrapment in the time loop of Western graphic design.

Paul Rand is important in Japan for his contributions to the development of nascent domestic graphic design through his alliances with Yusaku Kamekura and the designers in Graphic '55 (Nihonbashi, 1955), the first exhibition in Japan that catapulted the activities of graphic design into general public consciousness. However, he is more of a footnote/interloper/influence than the de-facto timelord that he is in the West. It is this difference in perception that is important in understanding graphic design culture from a global perspective. What/who is important in one culture is not necessarily so in another culture, or, in the case of Rand in particular, brings about a difference in perspective heretofore unknown in viewing graphic design from a Western viewpoint.

Another example is the late Swiss graphic designer Emil Ruder—his published work saw popularity in the West in the 1960s and 1970s due to the clarity and availability of his books in English. In Japan, Ruder is emerging as a more seminal figure only at the present moment due to translations of his work such as *Emil Ruder: fundamentals*, Seibundo Shinkosha, 2013, initiated by his former student Helmut Schmid. When concepts and ideas appear in cultures is as meaningful as what they consist of. Consideration of individuals’ and concepts’ relative importance to a culture adds an additional dimension to commonly accepted notions of graphic design history in the West, as well. Japanese graphic designers and

educators have always utilized a greater reliance upon abstraction and intuition with their approach to design thinking and practice—semiotics has not come into play in the discussion of graphic design that it did in the West. It is the same for many of the popular Western topics of the 1990s, such as the influence of the vernacular and questioning the role of graphic authorship. The majority of essays on these topics have not yet been translated into Japanese, and are therefore not part of greater discourse.

However, the recent published work of designer and writer Yoshihisa Shirai, notably his essay “On Printers’ Flowers” (IDEA Magazine 325, 2007) and reprinted in the book *A Natural History of Printers Flowers* (Seibundo Shinkosha, 2010), has helped form a critical historical understanding of the decorative/baroque in typography in a conscious manner in contemporary Japanese graphic design. His analysis of decorative ornament has helped provide Japanese graphic designers with an in-depth historical understanding of the use of Western typographic ornament, cultural context, and a detailed understanding of implementation. This exploration of historical Western design is helping to expand design discourse in Japan—providing a deeper understanding of design history and culture.

Simultaneously, IDEA editor Kiyonori Muroga has steered the publication to increase its coverage of Japanese graphic design history, expanding literature beyond merely lionizing the earliest practitioners from the 1950s and filling in the historical gaps of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s through exploring less-known but equally important graphic designers. Other writers at IDEA (most notably Barбора) have written extensively on the development of both Japanese and Western independent and DIY small press initiatives over the past half-century, expanding the history of designers as literal authors on a global scale.

Designer Tetsuya Goto has been writing a serialized feature called “Yellow Pages” for IDEA since 2014, which is an expansive bilingual survey of graphic designers in other parts of Asia (to date in Beijing, Seoul, Taipei, and Hong Kong). This series is of immense importance, as it explodes preconceived notions of Japanese design myopia and symbolizes Japanese graphic designers’ extreme interest in design culture elsewhere in the East.

Graphic design literature in Japan is moving forward and looking outward. There is an increased awareness of time and space that is pervasive throughout Japanese culture at the present moment, though most of it is nostalgic in nature. Of note in terms of popular culture is the Japanese movie *Always 3anchoḡme no Yūhi* (2005)—the film epitomizes retrograde tendencies via a gauzy-lensed look back at the post-World War 2 reconstruction-era in Japan and a yearning for “the good old days.”

However, the recent writing in IDEA—the lone bastion of sustained deep discourse on indigenous Japanese graphic design—is redolent of a quite different attitude and desire for expanded global discourse and an exploration of domestic culture beyond mere nostalgia. The editorial staff and collaborators involved with the magazine are looking at other means and methods of design practice, thought, and understanding.

By evaluating graphic design culture through the twin lenses of time and space, what is proposed is that Western graphic design literature and discourse can be kickstarted again. As graphic design theory is sorely lagging behind other disciplines, perhaps by looking to other cultures’ investigative methodologies and divergent histories we can find other approaches and perspectives. Without renewing these, graphic design is doomed to an even further prolonged ‘instant nostalgia-zation’ due to its emphasis on the importance of Dribbble Likes, reTweets, Facebook mentions, Pinterest pins, and Behance badges.

Known and accepted histories of graphic design have divergent viewpoints, back stories, and potential approaches that are as-yet unexplored. For example, there is a virtually unknown connection between postwar Japanese Modernism and Swiss Modernism that is as much interpersonal as it is developmental. That Swiss typographers Josef Müller-Brockmann and Max Huber were married to Japanese women is known and acknowledged, but

that Huber’s wife Aoi Huber (née Kōno) is the daughter of the incredibly important early Japanese Modernist Takashi Kōno is not. The familial relationship between two men who helped contribute to the formation of aesthetics of graphic design for whole countries on opposite sides of the world is something that should be both studied and analyzed.

Perhaps our understanding of the culture of graphic design—its theory, history, and practice—is akin to a wedding slideshow. We just see the snapshots—the edited version of history from very particular perspectives. We don’t see things from the perspectives of ex-lovers, second cousins, or fathers-in-law. Time must pass for cultural production to be deemed worthy of sustained merit, but most of all we must be cognizant of time itself and its influence—notably, our place in history, and what we can do to ‘un-stick’ ourselves in time in the West. We have the ability to move past this collective cultural moment of instant gratification, not by reengaging with graphic design with nostalgia, but with a renewed sense of inquiry.

## GLUE VAPORS & GO

I attended high school in the countryside of upstate New York<sup>1</sup> during the very late 80s and nascent 90s. During this time, a popular T-shirt for the local hayseed headbangers to wear was a Metallica tee that bore the slogan, “We Were Metal When Metal Wasn’t Cool.” This is essentially the same ethos behind the late Japanese graphic designer Kiyoshi Awazu’s body of work in the 1980s—he was analog when analog wasn’t cool. The world was waiting with bated breath for the digital revolution to arrive, doing their damndest to create a seamless world of perfect models populating perfect advertising efforts, but Kiyoshi Awazu did an about-face and embraced the primitive side of commercial art. And this is why I lionize him as a figure in Japan’s design history. In that era’s world, enamored with slick façades, his romance with the crude and imperfect feels like a breath of fresh air, even 40 years after creating his most vital work.<sup>2</sup>

I had been biding my time, waiting for a decent eulogy-in-print of Awazu in the international graphic design press since he passed away in April 2009. Awazu was among the upper echelon of Japanese graphic designers throughout his career domestically, though he has received far less attention abroad than his peers Yokoo Tadanori and Tana’ami Keiichi. But it looks like Awazu’s time in the spotlight isn’t coming, so I’ve taken up the task here in hopes of encouraging design aesthetes internationally to examine his life and body of work. It’s funny—the same lack of sentiment expressed abroad is neatly mirrored in Japan. Chatting with Kiyonori Muroga, the editor-in-chief of Idea Magazine, he expressed the view that he’d always felt that Awazu was a lesser force than his contemporaries, but, with his passing, Awazu’s lifework is potentially worth a deeper study. With that unconscious taunt, I picked up the gauntlet...

Born in 1929, the self-taught Awazu took up the mantle of graphic designer in 1954, designing posters for kabuki and less-popular shingeki theatrical troupes such as Shinkyō Gekidan, Zenshinza, and Shinseisazuka. This was followed by a number of years in which he created posters for film studios such as Dokuritsu Eiga and Nikkatsu, quickly gaining notoriety for his deft mixture of illustration, custom lettering, and detailed typography. Awazu’s 1955 poster “Give Back Our Sea” was both award-winning and culturally resonant, establishing the designer as an advocate of social causes through his portrayal of a fisherman barred from his trade. His posters for the 1957 documentary, *The Crying Whales*, and the 1957 play, *Chūji Kunisawa*, further cemented Awazu’s position as a young designer to watch.

Awazu spent the rest of the 1950s and the 1960s hard at work, refining his folk-influenced style, experimenting with color and form, and investigating the possibilities

of chance processes after an encounter with composer John Cage. In a bold move at the time, Awazu consistently declined invitations to join advertising agencies and larger design studios, opting for a more autonomously directed career outside of advertising. His frequent collaborations with architects helped infuse some of Japan’s national monuments with a proto-hippie folk sensibility that eschewed the hard edges of modernism for an organic massing of lines and naturalistic forms. The 60s found Awazu continuing his work in film, creating fascinating poster designs for the avant garde film, *The Woman In the Dunes*, and *Kwaidan*, an adaptation of four traditional Japanese ghost stories as popularized by journalist, amateur ethnologist, purported orientalist, and plural miscegenist writer,<sup>3</sup> Patrick Lafcadio Hearn.

Freewheeling formal experimentation influenced by Pop Art and 60s counterculture from both abroad and home in Japan also found their way into his work, primarily influencing Awazu’s bold color schemes, raw linework, and nuanced typography.<sup>4</sup> Traces of Ben Shahn’s illustrative approach and lettering pop up in Awazu’s work in the 1960s, as do elements of the Push Pin Studios appropriation of “olde-timey” advertising cuts deployed decoratively, a compositional approach influenced by Yokoo Tadanori, concentric linework, and a reliance upon overprinting for dazzling optical effects.

Canonized for his early works, Awazu’s veer into graphic left-field in the late 60s and 70s seems only to be the territory of visual connoisseurs. I personally know of a grand total of two other giant fans of his work amongst design aficionados abroad. A wide swath of his experimentation in the fields of architecture and theater from this period is as yet undocumented in English—the excitement of British paper architects Archigram married to the decorative elements of *ukiyo-e* expressed through the medium of coarse-grained silkscreen. Traditional motifs are filtered at times through a highly disturbing contemporary lens—dismembered heads emitting copious bodily fluids and the omnipresent crows of Tokyo crying tears of shame, interleaved with expressive hand-drawn characters, their strokes swollen and collapsing upon themselves.

What was potentially most notable about Awazu’s work in the 1970s and 1980s was his devotion to the poster as a form of graphic expression. This was a time when public perception and appreciation shifted from “pure” graphic design to more photo-reliant, advertising-based big budget initiatives such as those produced by art directors like Eikoh Ishioka for the PARCO department store chain spanning film, print, and broadcast. While Japan’s design industry moved wholesale to a fascination with the gloss and sheen of the photograph and the airbrush, Awazu battered away via pen, brush, ink, and press type, creating a virtual cosmos of flattened figure/ground relations.







Despite being out-of-step with visual trends at that time, Awazu had established himself as a force to be reckoned with, and commissions continued with an increased focus on collaborative projects in the field of architecture. Most notable of these projects was Awazu's exterior for the Nibankan Building<sup>5</sup> in the red-light district Kabukicho. Reminiscent of proposed early Modern Japanese kiosk designs, the Nibankan Building's various planes are pasted with bright colors and geometric shapes—like a Pop Art painting fragmented and vomited on a simplified, though not simplistic, multi-planar structure. Designed by architect Minoru Takeyama, the building was featured on the cover of Charles Jencks' breakthrough 1977 book, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. The collaborative, forward-thinking, and formal approach, as well as the holistic graphic treatment, was an early precursor of hyper-decorative treatments by other Post-Modern architects, most notably Michael Graves. Included in the architectural plan was a proposal for five-year interval graphic revisits, with the pop colors and shapes to be revisited regularly. Adventurous and forward-thinking, the re-skinning of the building was meant to mirror the constant change that is so much the innate essence of Kabukicho.

Nestled in nearby Harajuku, the Awazu Design Office chugged away—Awazu and an assistant working through each day's assignments, breaking for extended games of Go amidst the fumes of the Japanese cousin of Krazy Glue, Awazu's adhesive of choice.<sup>6</sup> He preferred the clear, very, very permanent sealant for paste-up in lieu of the then-typical rubber cement. Then, in 1988, the company quietly packed up and relocated to a remote part of Kawasaki, where Awazu had Kyoto Station architect Hiroshi Hara build him a palatial modern home with an in-house studio amongst the rice fields and rolling hills of Kanagawa. From his new home, Awazu continued his assorted activities, exhibiting internationally, and taking on design commissions, sculpting, and screenprinting.

In 2000, Awazu took over the job of Director of the Toppan Printing Corporation's<sup>7</sup> Printing Museum, the ardent independent contractor finally becoming a "company man." Awazu steered the museum, situated in the industrial Edogawabashi district, to numerous awards and an enhanced status amongst cultural institutions in Tokyo. Meanwhile, he continued to actively research and exhibit, exploring a long-held interest in the petroglyphs of Native Americans, which culminated in an exhibition on the subject.

Awazu passed away in his beloved Kawasaki after an extended bout with pneumonia at the age of 80. His website is still operational as of February 2, 2015. It has yet to mention his death.<sup>8</sup>

Walking through Kabukicho today at midday, the Nibankan Building stands disheveled and worn. The last graphic facelift was probably a decade ago. Most of the businesses in the building appear to be closed—a mini-economy of bath houses, pachinko parlors, and assorted tawdry service providers boarded-up and shut, most likely forever. Looking up at one of Awazu's masterworks, a raspy voice from nearby resonated in my ear—a proposition from a prostitute. Leveling my eyes at her, I smiled and said, politely, "No, but thank you" in Japanese. I'm a service provider, too, as was Awazu-san, and, looking at the lovely giant red number 2 topping the building, and the striped and concentric circled amalgam that is pasted on the building's surface, I couldn't have been more adequately pleased.

#### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Pain.

<sup>2</sup> And, frankly, this statement stands for his contemporaries. Yokoo devolved into a bad painter (and worse actor), riding out his early fame on a gilt-edged red carpet. Tana'ami has busied himself exploiting the early aesthetic which he departed from decades ago, trotting out inkjet prints on canvas that have been poorly painted-over, offering low-rent Thomas Kinkade-style productions as "originals," despite the evidence of the paint-by-numbers methodology in play.

This whole trend reifies the time-worn concept of *The Designer As Failed Painter*—that all designers originally sought fine art careers, but have taken up the workaday practice of graphic design as a way of earning a living—a myth that is given form by societal stereotypes of "high" (fine) art versus "low" (applied) design.

Designers should revel in their activities, not fawn over the activities of the painter in the garret rendering still lives brushstroke-by-brushstroke. Do what you do and OWN it.<sup>A</sup>

<sup>3</sup> And this is where I give Hearn crazy props. He was a white man with the gall to marry a black woman 50 years before it was legal in Ohio, and then to marry a Japanese woman in Japan in a time when it was fairly unthinkable.<sup>B</sup>

<sup>4</sup> And turtles! Awazu was fucking apeshit for turtles. He worked so many goddamn turtles into his work that it's painful. This includes not one, but two known gigantic three-dimensional sculptures of turtles—one adorning his later Kawasaki home and another public sculpture.<sup>C</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The Nibankan Building stands as architect Takeyama's precursor to the Shibuya 109 Building, every foreign otaku's wet dream/nocturnal emission—the hub of Shibuya fashion which opened in 1979 and whose cylindrical structure is a major stopping point for nearly every one of my study abroad students from the U.S.

<sup>6</sup> This bit of information speaks to me somehow—Awazu was consistently dedicated to experimentation and visual research and chose to seal his progress in the most permanent way possible, as well as a method that is highly irritable to the general human existence due to its toxicity. There is something devoutly poetic about this.

<sup>7</sup> Toppan is the Disney® of Japanese printing conglomerates. To date, my failure to pick up a paltry freelance project for the Toppan Printing Corporation stands as one of my biggest epic career fails to date.

<sup>8</sup> This, too, is somehow poetic. No matter how hard the PR spin (or lack thereof), one cannot evade mortality.

<sup>A</sup> This being said, it is disclosure time: I was offered a live painting gig at Tokyo Big Site, Tokyo's biggest auditorium, for a whiskey trade show a few years ago. The organizer, a friend, confused me writing about graffiti and lettering with me being a tried-and-true graffiti writer/street artist, and asked me to paint a giant canvas in front of a crowd of hundreds alongside a real sumi-e ink painter working on a similarly-sized sheet of rice paper.

Due to scant design commissions at that time, and a sizable financial reward for pictorially synthesizing the essence of a 30-year-old single malt whiskey which was going to be dutifully poured down my throat on canvas during the painting process, I gratefully took up the task at hand. What resulted was the murkiest painting of deconstructed pop cartoon characters to ever grace an auditorium stage. (And a mammoth hangover.) A painter I am not. And now, a few years later, I occasionally have to insist that I am decidedly not a painter to the folks I happen across who saw me flinging acrylic paint around on stage that day.

<sup>B</sup> Little-known fact: Hearn also had a bum eye due to getting punched in the face on a high school playground and never allowed anyone to photograph him with his bad eye on display. A casual online image search shows that Hearn is always posing to hide his eye, or has his baby blues closed.

<sup>C</sup> I am randomly excited about this. When I was 16 years old, I got an awful, but miniscule, full-color tattoo of a cartoon turtle sporting a top hat with a wilting flower





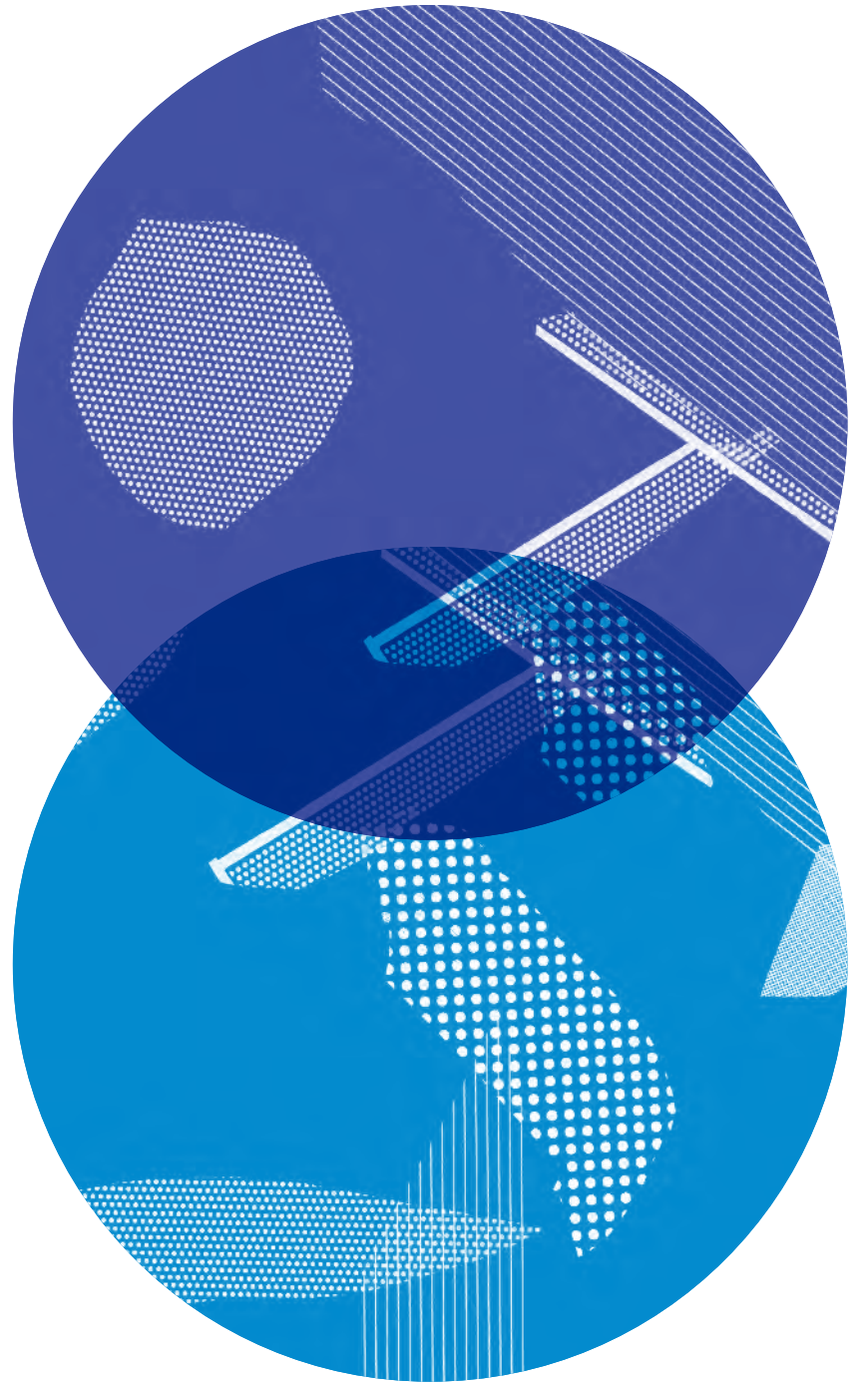
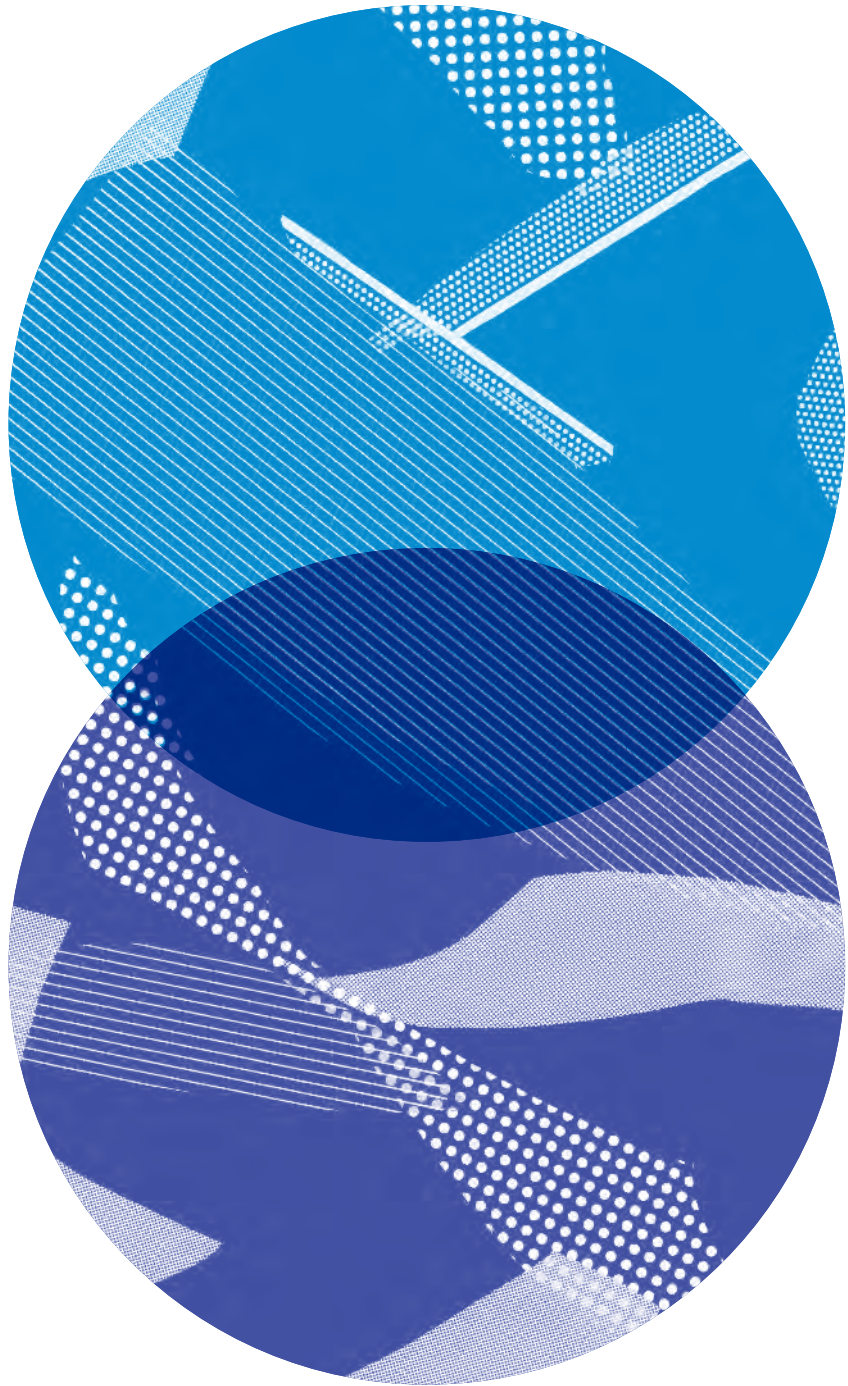


on my ankle. 22 years later, I am married to a Japanese woman whose name literally translates into "Turtle Mouth." She views the tattoo as foreshadowing (and awkward for her family, as tattoos are taboo in Japan, particularly the rural area where her extended family resides). I just view it as evidence that I am highly prone to making really fucking stupid decisions.

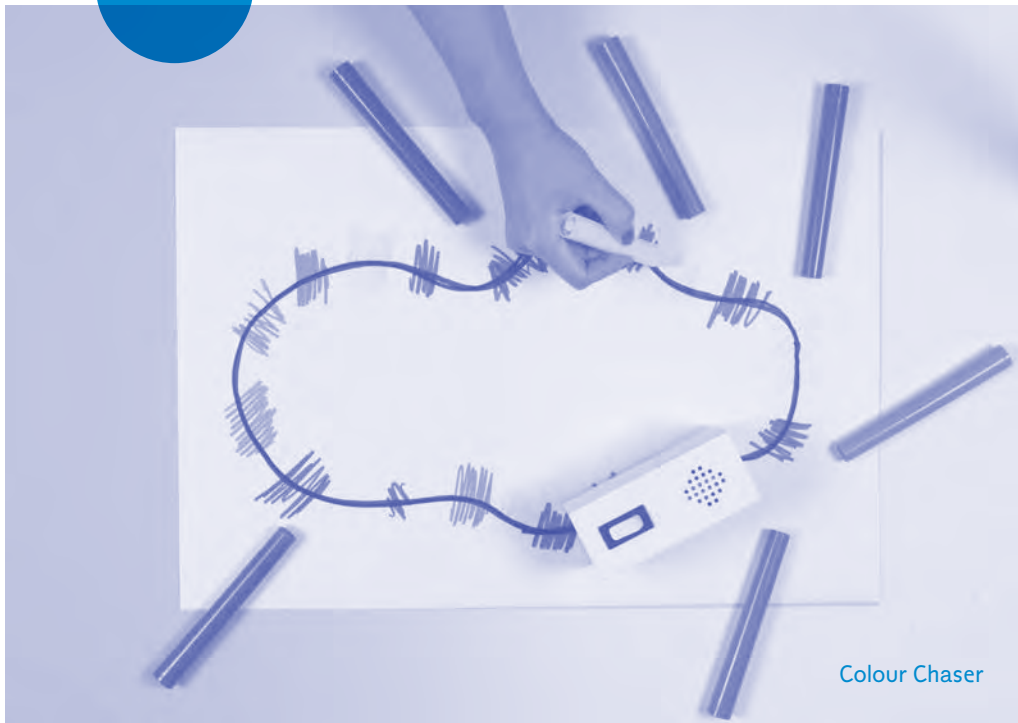
#### POSTSCRIPT:

In mid-2014, the Nibankan Building was given a completely new façade more in keeping with the barrage of host clubs that exist in that neighborhood—Awazu's plan has been completely abandoned in favor of baroque ornament that was most likely downloaded from a stock vector website.

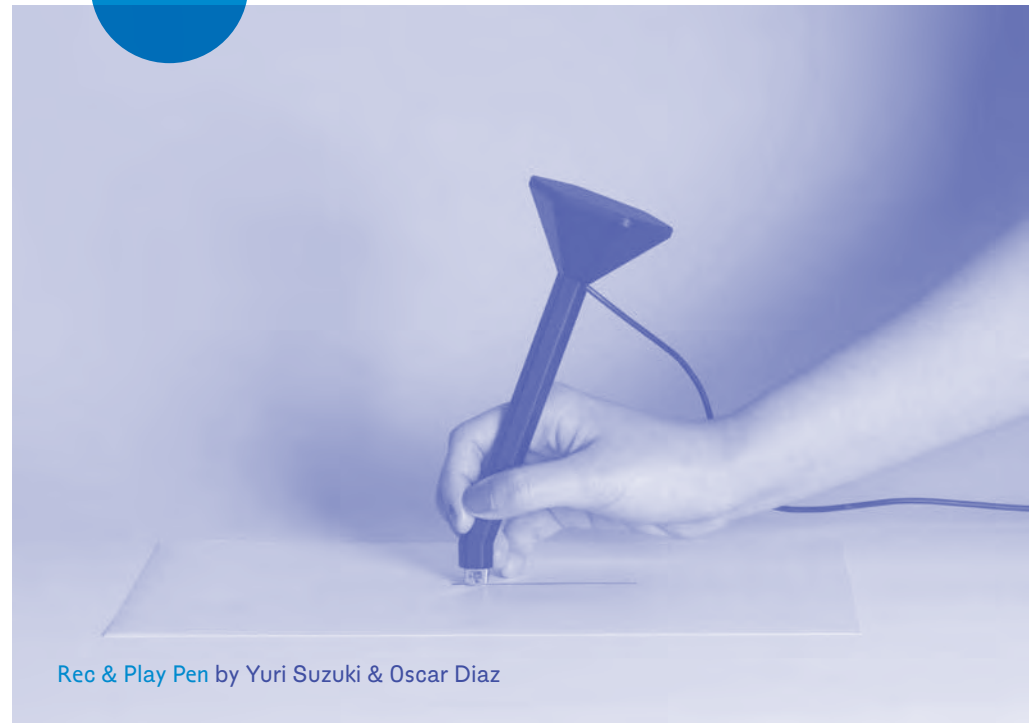








Colour Chaser



Rec & Play Pen by Yuri Suzuki & Oscar Diaz

# NEW RED ARMY

## Reading/research:

- Funkstorung - Additional Productions LP/CD
- 99% Invisible "Razzle Dazzle" podcast episode
- Disruptive Pattern Material by Hardy Blechman
- The Gun by James Chalmers
- interview with Metahaven on Design & Research
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/02/world/asia/beate-gordon-feminist-heroine-in-japan-dies-at-89.html>

Students are encouraged to bring in supplementary materials that explore the dimensions of corporate identity, military identity, nation-building, and military representation.

Murmurs have arisen within Japan's Conservative Right that Japan is in need of a standing military force, something outlawed in the post-WWII Japanese Constitution.

Create an identity for this new military force including considerations of:

- context
- time
- application

At the bare minimum, the project should culminate in an identity standards manual that includes:

- naming standards
- logo
- color standards
- typographic standards
- orthographic standards
- uniform standards
- vehicle standards

Your manual should be at least 60 pages in length. It should not be a mere recycling of known quantities in terms of military style. This project is iterative in nature. What follows is an outline for benchmark goals. Students are expected to make their project as awesome as possible (in the Biblical sense).



## SPATIALITY

The class will work together to design a set of black tee shirts with large geometric glow-in-the-dark graphics, then will photograph the shirts worn by class members in a light-proof dark room, creating 20 different compositions with assorted visual hierarchies in 3D space to be reproduced in 2D.

Class members will collectively produce a booklet (24 pages minimum, A5 size, folded & stapled), a set of five posters, and any other materials you feel are vital to convey the essence of the project. It could be another tee shirt, a book, a movie, a website—whatever you fancy!

All elements should be formally linked and feel like part of a complete package.

## THE LEAN ALTERNATIVE

Ninety minutes north of Phoenix, Arizona, down a dusty unpaved road through the high desert lined with scrub grass and saguaro cacti, lies a tract of land traversed daily by roadrunners, mountain lions, and horn-snouted javelina.<sup>1</sup> The thin trickle of the Aqua Fria River runs through the canyon that backs the site, the occasional buzzard circling overhead. Sagging lines of rusty barbed wire held up by weathered, sun-bleached, and sand-and-wind-shaped wooden stakes crisscross the plain infrequently. Highway 17, obscured by a small rise, faces the tract—its continuous stream of commuters traveling from the foreclosure-riddled metropolis of Phoenix to tourist destinations like Prescott and Flagstaff. In the air is a distance-muted whine emanating from the cars on the thin interstate. It is this aural reminder that helps to define Arcosanti as a concept and project, an attempt at a pro-social respite from the Age of the Automobile.

Arcosanti's foundational ethos is Paolo Soleri's oft-quoted concept of "arcology," the fusion of architecture and ecology into a high density, multi-purpose, and miniaturized urban area that utilizes minimal land and energy. Proposed arcologies would pack homes, work, and civic areas into a complex, tight area, facilitating access on foot and building communities naturally. These proposed urban spaces would be situated directly next to rural areas uninhabited by humans, with agricultural areas connecting the two zones, maximizing food production and distribution systems in a holistic plan. Energy consumption is minimized via the use of passive solar-heating-using apses, greenhouse systems, and garment architecture to take advantage of natural light, heat, and wind. Overall an arcology is a comprehensive plan that is in direct opposition to urban sprawl as a way and means of living. Construction began on Arcosanti in 1970 and was expected to be completed within a decade, though that construction timeline has stretched out over the past forty years with a minimum of forward momentum due to a lack of funding and Arcosanti's reliance on volunteer labor.

Today, Arcosanti-in-progress stands as a ramshackle assemblage of ultimately mismatched buildings, piles of materials, and disused large-scale construction equipment. Stray wheelbarrows and concrete mixers dot the site, looking ill-used and parked in precarious places. A pair of gravel parking lots accommodate the loosely-quoted 50,000 visitors who come each year to gawk at the dystopian scene. Yet, parts of Arcosanti are breathtaking, in particular around the back, where tall, thin Cypress trees sway in the wind, a small sculpture of golden figures at their feet,

# LETTERS OF NOTE

Draw a matching set of romaji, katakana, hiragana, and basic punctuation. It may not be calligraphic and it may not be mono-line. There must be modulated strokes. Only use pencil.

# GET VERTICAL

Reading/research:

– 文字の組み方 by 大熊 肇  
(Moji No Kumikata by Hajime Okuma)

Typeset a 2,000 character-long text using the Japanese tategaki (vertical) orthography. Look at many books and magazines to see what might be the best way. Have reasons for the font or fonts used, spacing, and the page size.

## ON POTENTIAL:

### A Parable. Of Sorts.

“For the first five years after school, don’t say ‘no’ to a project.”

-Bucky Fukumoto

Potential is a weird thing. You have heaps of it when you graduate from college, particularly a university with a program as singularly dedicated and focused as CalArts’ Graphic Design program. When it comes time to walk out the door, many folks just kind of deflate for a while.

If you are one of the rare few who has already figured out a job, you just kind of mentally check out for six months and grind the work out, then return to conscious, conscientious form-giving. For most it’s a bit different—there’s the post-graduation scramble to find a job of some sort. That challenge of finding work feels almost insurmountable, or at least it did to me when I graduated nearly a decade ago, but, then again, I have never really figured out how to work in someone else’s design environment properly.

I was finishing my final book—the collection of work that I’d put together over the two years obtaining my MFA—during the last few weeks of school when I got an e-mail from a friend of a friend asking if I’d be interested in a massive website redesign for a wildly mismanaged shoe company. I jumped at the chance, despite having very little working knowledge of best practices in web design, and began retrofitting the HTML 4 site nightly across 22 languages while polishing off what was left of school. It was daunting. The budget was more than I’d ever made in one go at anything before. Twenty times more. There was no contract. It was a shitload of work with a steep learning curve in terms of development for that time. Yet, before I knew it, I’d graduated and had finished the project. I assumed that it was just part of the sleepless blur that was the grad school experience.

I moved into a sublet in central LA. The client was happy and offered more work, which I took, but there was a catch. These were sizable projects that paid decently, but they never took that much time. I’d had a fair amount of production work prior to my grad school experience—I knew all my key commands, command line image processing, and assorted shortcuts. I had enough code under my belt, and since projects for the company never took more than a few days, I began looking for a full-time job to fill my days. I was hungry. I had potential and I knew it. I wanted more, plus loan payments were around the corner.

So I applied for jobs around LA. It didn’t go great. Job #1 was at a cheeseball “ad agency” in Venice which wasn’t really an ad agency. The two other designers working



## A GRAPHIC DESIGN READING LIST

I came to graphic design late. During the Emigre/dot com bubble era, I worked behind the counter at assorted copy shops, and I missed much of the excitement surrounding graphic design criticism in the 1990s. When I did go back to school to study graphic design and simultaneously make the transition to becoming a graphic designer, there was no easily available reading list—what I could get was based on reading everything in sight that was related to the subject, which left a number of glaring holes in my education. It wasn't until I went to grad school and took Design History and Design Theory classes that much of what I missed was included in any type of curriculum.

Since then, I've actively kept a library and running archive of important design reading. The best writing in graphic design is an essay format, not in full books. What follows is a semi-comprehensive (but by no means complete) list of some of the best writing about graphic design and typography (in English) from history. Almost all are essays.

My hope is that this index functions as a potential pathway for individuals who are interested in getting deeper into reading graphic design literature. One can start anywhere and wend his/her way through history to the contemporary moment.

Simultaneously, providing a suggested reading list is problematic—it would appear that there's been an explosion of writing about graphic design in the 2010s if one were to try to analyze this list as somehow canonical. This is not the case by any means. As my colleague Randy Nakamura has noted, “much of 20th century design writing is still tucked away in moldering print publications that have never been digitized or re-printed.”

### 1800s:

Bing, Siegfried - Where Are We Going - 1897  
Jennings, Humphrey - The Derby Silk Mill & The Black Country - 1883  
Loos, Adolf - Potemkin's Town - 1898  
Marx, Karl - The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret - 1867  
Morris, William - Aims in Founding The Kelmscott Press - 1895  
Morris, William - The Ideal Book - 1893  
Sullivan, Louis - Ornament in Architecture - 1892

### 1900s:

Hoffman, Josef & Moser, Koloman - The Work-Programme of the Wiener Werkstratte - 1905  
Loos, Adolf - Ornament and Crime - 1908  
Marinetti, FT - The Founding & Manifesto of Futurism - 1909

### 1910s:

Balla, Giacomo - Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing - 1913  
Balla, Giacomo & Depero, Fortunato - Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe - 1915  
Bragdon, Claude - Projective Ornament - 1915  
Dwiggins, William Addison - An Investigation Into the Physical Properties of Books - 1919  
Marinetti, FT - Destruction of Syntax - 1913  
Mondrian, Piet - A Dialogue on Neoplasticism - 1919  
Ruskin, John - Modern Manufacture and Design - 1918  
Soffici, Ardengo - The Subject in Futurist Painting - 1914  
Tzara, Tristan - Dada Manifesto - 1918

### 1920s:

Corbusier, Le - The Engineer's Aesthetic & Architecture - 1923  
Depero, Fortunato - Outline of the Art of Advertising Manifesto - 1929  
Dexel, Walter - What Is New Typography - 1927

Dwiggins, William Addison - A Primer of Printers Ornaments - 1920  
Dwiggins, William Addison - New Kind of Printing Calls For New Design - 1922  
Goudy, Frederic - I Am Type - 1927  
Gropius, Walter - The Theory and Organisation of the Bauhaus - 1923  
Huelsenback, Richard - En Avant Dada - A History of Dadaism - 1920  
Huxley, Aldous - Printing of Today - 1928  
Lissitzky, El - The Conquest of Art - 1922  
Lissitzky, El - Our Book - 1926  
Lissitzky, El - The Topography of Typography - 1923  
Lissitzky, El - Our Book - 1926  
McMurtrie, Douglas - The Philosophy of Modernism in Typography - 1929  
Meynell, Francis - With 25 Soldiers of Lead I Have Conquered the World - 1923  
Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo - Modern Typography - 1926  
Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo - The New Typography - 1923  
Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo - Typophoto - 1925  
Renner, Paul - Futura, The Font of Our Time - 1927  
Rodchenko, Aleksandr & Stepanova, Varvara - Program of the First Working Group of Constructivists - 1921  
Teig, Karel - Modern Typography - 1927  
van Doesburg, Theo - The Will to Style - 1922

### 1930s:

Agha, MF - What Makes a Magazine Modern? - 1930  
Bayer, Herbert - Toward a Universal Type - 1935  
Brodovitch, Alexey - What Pleases the Modern Man - 1930  
Calkins, Earnest Elmo - Advertising Art in the United States - 1936  
Cooper, Oswald - Leaves From An Imaginary Type Specimen Book - 1937  
Dufrene, Maurice - A Survey of Modern Tendencies in Decorative Art - 1931  
Ehrlich, Frederic - The Revival of The New Typography and Modernism In General - 1934  
Havinden, Ashley - Visual Expression - 1938  
Lissitzky, El - Do Not Separate From From Content - 1931  
Marchand, Roland - The Designers Go To The Fair - Topic 1930s  
Marchand, Roland - The Designers Go To the Fair II - Topic 1930s  
Mauss, Marcel - Techniques of the Body - 1934  
Morison, Stanley - First Principles of Typography - 1930  
Schwitters, Kurt - Theo van Doesburg and Dada - 1931  
Tschichold, Jan - New Life in Print - 1930  
Warde, Beatrice - The Crystal Goblet - 1932

### 1940s:

Beilenson, Edna - Experimentation and the Individual: A Psychological Approach - 1949  
Burtin, Will - Integration - 1949  
Cleland, TM - Harsh Words - 1940  
Dwiggins, William Addison - A Technique for Dealing With Artists - 1941  
Eames, Charles - Organic Design - 1941  
Giedion, Siegfried - Anonymous History - 1948  
Kepes, Gyorgy - Function in Modern Design - 1949  
Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo - The New Vision - 1947  
Paepcke, William - Art in Industry - 1946  
Van Doren, Harold - Streamlining - 1940  
Warde, Beatrice - This Is A Printing Office - 1940



**PARTING IT OUT** is a collection of essays spanning much of graphic design as it applies to aspects of contemporary culture—from the Olympics to typography to Japan to Cuba to sign painting.

A practicing graphic designer, design teacher, and design critic based in Tokyo, Ian Lynam has crafted an assembly of writing that is equal parts personal narrative, design criticism, design history, and cultural study.

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Kiyonori Muroga, *IDEA*

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Shawn Seymour, *Lullatone*

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