

Nov 1st, 12:00 AM

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### Citation

Hong, D., and Hwang, M. (2006) The Status and the Prospects of Deconstruction in Graphic Design, in Friedman, K., Love, T., Côte-Real, E. and Rust, C. (eds.), *Wonderground - DRS International Conference 2006*, 1-4 November, Lisbon, Portugal. <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers/drs2006/researchpapers/107>

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## The Status and the Prospects of Deconstruction in Graphic Design

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### 1. Introduction

Looking into the on-going features of communication design, we can easily notice the designers devoting themselves to exploring a shared aspiration for visually strong, new, beautiful objects: sometimes they are so carried away that non-designers even treat them like some kind of addicts. This feverish trend is a manifestation of the contemporary design aiming at art for Art's sake accompanied by postmodernism pursuing de-unification and variety. And this has made it possible for deconstruction to strongly appeal to designers yearning for unprecedented, powerful artistic presentation. Complying with this trend, Korean designers have also made experiments with designs advocating postmodernism. Especially, deconstruction seems to attract the designers most in that we can observe its frequent appearances in Graphic Design, Website Design, and Typography in videos and movies. These deconstructive presentations take various shapes; however, research on their origin and categorization has not been conducted so much. Acknowledging its urgent call, this paper investigates the theory and practical representative methods.

### 2. The theory of Deconstructionism

The first appearance of deconstructionism<sup>1</sup> in Design was noted in 1988 at 'Deconstructive Architecture' exhibited in the New York Modern Art Museum and a seminar of deconstructive painters held in London Tate Gallery, whose theoretical background was based on a French writer, Jaques Derrida. He asks for a new definition of aesthetic by urging us to put equal importance on the ideas opposing the fixed ones and social norms. Deconstructionism accentuates reorganization by means of illogical and disordered processes.

#### 2.1 What is Deconstructionism?

Deconstructive design challenges, in essence, universal beauty and design structures fitting the stereotyped popular view. Its disordered methods are recognized quickly by the public, and incite more interest

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher, N., & Andrew B. (1988). *What is Deconstruction?*(pp53-60).London: Academy Editions



and reception after receiving life through criticism. Deconstructionist forms break away from the preceding Modernism's unified standards and seek after new forms of tension, so that they often have destructive and incomplete images. The influence of Deconstructionism on Typography and Graphic Design was first observed in the late 1980's<sup>2</sup>. Its affect on Architecture and Fashion Design had existed distinctively even before. Graphic design had also accepted Deconstructionism; however, it was the late 1980's when deconstructive styles were developed along with the popularity of computers. Deconstructionism in graphic design makes the whole atmosphere of a particular page decided by its subject, and the type functions as a method of illustration as well as delivers a mood. It also emphasizes the interrelationship between the text and the pictures by overlapping them.

Deconstructed and separated from a whole and not integrated into a unity, the elements of design are mostly cutting-edged, repeated and penetrated. We see these features everywhere: architecture, fashion design, industrial design, advertisement, graphic design, etc. Frank Gehry,<sup>3</sup> an architect, inoculated buildings with the idea of incompleteness and subjectivity, and Jean-Paul Gaultier introduced fashion design works having no distinction between interior and exterior of clothes and underwear and outer garments. The absence of target products like Benetton brought about a dramatic turning point of paradigm in advertisement.

## 2.2 Deconstructive Representation

The section examines representative methods of Deconstructionism.

### 2.2.1. Decomposition

Decomposition refers to philosophical decomposing. This process breaks down a text conceptually, analyzes it and then categorizes it according to its form. It can be called an analyzing tool which refuses to deliberately make a form. It interrelates elements of a text randomly instead of suggesting a designated attitude on the referring process or the natural qualities of manipulable object.

Randomness includes the literally opposite concept, 'order', and the deconstructive design process is constituted through repeated transformations; moreover, the transformation should be brought about by automatism. The images derived from this process explore their order and origin, which refuses to be part of traditional design process.

### 2.2.2. Decentring

Deconstruction frequently introduces inclined planes and slanted lines breaking away from the previous concept of the vertical and the horizontal. It could be seen as a repulsive action to an orthodox standard of grid. The vertical and the horizontal that were the essence of 'De Stijl' were evaded and this extrication from grid refers to decentring. The vertical and the horizontal are the criterion by which our

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<sup>2</sup> Micheal. B., William, D., Steven, H., & DK, H.(1997). A Brave New World: Understanding Deconstruction, *Looking Closer 1*(44-47) New York: Allworth Press.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher, N., & Andrew B. (1988). *What is Deconstruction?*(pp60-71).London: Academy Editions



location and state can be confirmed in the sphere of gravity, and they functioned as an imperative order to the representation of communication design. By getting away from this standard, the operating direction of gravity is distorted and this decentring arouses a feeling of uneasiness, that one is caused by a deviation from experience and expectation.

**Table 1** Theory of Deconstruction in Visual Communication Design

Theory of Deconstruction	Application	Conceptual Approach
- Decentring	Decentring	Destruction of the Grid Refusal of Horizontal and Vertical Concepts Destruction of Design Theory
-Disjunction	Disjunction	Destruction of spatial concept by means of replacement
-Decomposition	Decomposition	Weakened legibility Destruction of traditional typography
- Decontinuity	Decontinuity	Aesthetical Deconstruction in form, color and size
Denial of History	Separation the present and past	Residency in the domain of Post-modernism
Formation of inter Text	Introductory of Logos <sup>4</sup>	Denial of traditional typography Times and objectives of chaotic position

### 2.2.3. Discontinuity

Discontinuity means destruction of continuity by means of a composition of mixture, overlay, distortion and accident. Continuity of graphic design refers to two relationships. One is an internal relationship which shows spatial continuity to the preceding design and the other tells about continuity between design and popularity. The relationship of these two requires communication design to be pragmatic and social.

### 2.2.4. Disjunction

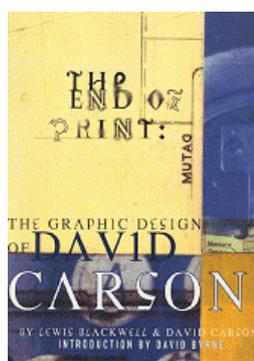
Disjunction describes the state of separation and fission. This concept is an idea of limitation and interruption. According to this, a designer's effort to organize and integrate a part of his work requires him to acknowledge its discordance with outer cultural circumstances. Disjunction connotes rather perpetual and mechanical operation that creates fission systematically in a new time and space colliding with traditional views of design formation.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher, N., & Andrew B. (1988). *What is Deconstruction?*(pp88-89).London: Academy Editions



### 3. Deconstructionism in Design

Deconstruction made an appearance with diverse and rather striking layouts in communication design. Deconstructive design was introduced to printed media when *Pioneers of Modern Typography* was printed a second time in 1982 after its first publication in 1969 and *The Liberated Page* was published in 1987<sup>5</sup>. These two books provided a substantial opportunity to experience the progressive designers' works of early 20th Century including Dadaist, Futurist, De Stijl artists, Constructivist. The books introduce Filippo Marinetti, El Lissitzky, Piet Zwart, Kurt Schwitters, Herbert Bayer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Jan Tschichold, Theo Van Doesburg, etc. Herbert Spencer, the writer of these two books, claims visual interpretation of a word for emphasis obtained the attention of the typographers of Dada and Futurism. Marinetti, as a futurist himself, proposed that design formulas be reformed, and started refuting the uniformity of text paragraphs. He encouraged to write in diverse styles of type aiming at a harmony of paper and typography. His ideas and works had a direct effect on a number of designers such as Rich Valicenti, Neville Brody, Katherine McCoy, Rudy VanderLas, Lucille Tenazas, Tibor Kalman<sup>6</sup>. Their works present a striking contrast to the typography of minimalism in the 50s, 60s and 70s. As a matter of fact, deconstructive designs demolished the harmony of traditional typography far more drastically with their extremely opposite presentation than Marinetti had asserted. Various styles and diverse weight sizes applied to one work and the distortion or unexpected appearances of Initial Caps had the people read from completely different points from the previous texts, which is explicitly noticed from the works of Joel Katz, David Carson, Joe Miller, and so forth. People met with a new notion of legibility. The purpose of type can be either the same as the one in the illustration or just the creation or delivery of an atmosphere. Deconstructionism has taken on experimental disposition since destroying the harmony between grid and typography in extreme ways.



**Fig.1 The End of Print**



**Fig.2 Graphic Arts-Neville Brody**

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<sup>5</sup> Micheal. B., William, D., Steven, H., & DK, H.(1997). A Brave New World: Understanding Deconstruction, *Looking Closer 1*(48-50) New York: Allworth Press.

<sup>6</sup> Micheal. B., William, D., Steven, H., & DK, H.(1997). Photography, Morality, and Benetton, *Looking Closer 2*(230-232) New York: Allworth



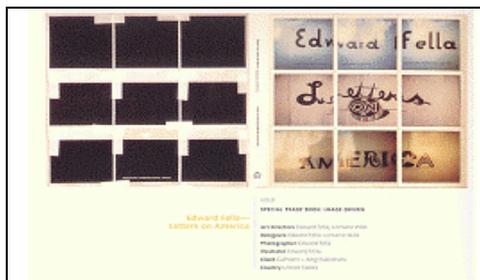
### 3.1. Deconstructive representation and communication designers

New interests in the field of design such as anti-war, feminism, sexual liberation, politics, environment, human rights were fostered as the profession experienced the rapid progress of postmodernism since the turbulence of the 60s. These interests have been represented by means of the new styles strongly stimulating human sensitivity and intuition. Specially, graphic design was transformed into radical images with the advent of the magical Macintosh computer and the accompanying digital types. These are presented in varied forms of communication design; the forms can be classified as print media and multimedia design. And at last Edward Fella, influenced by Cranbrook design<sup>7</sup>, started distinguishing himself by his pioneering contribution to deconstructive design. His works deconstruct, segregate or expose multi-layered meanings embodied in his visual languages and designs as the images which are stretched, slanted, cut, and broken as if they had been written with a broken pencil. Edward Fella is well-known for his non-commercial work as well. He is currently professor of Graphic Design at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and is still enjoying activities of design mostly for designers.

After 30 year's working as a commercial illustrator and designer in Detroit, Fella returned to graduate school at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan at the age of 48. Cranbrook was offering one of the leading graphic design courses in the States. The faculty members from new-Bauhaus along with the Mckoys fuelled Fella's work with postmodern theory over graphics, and he launched his earlier explorations into more extreme paths. His experimental work and raw art had a huge impact on other students and designers. Especially, his deconstructive experiments of reversal, exaggerated size, irregular kerning, cutting, etc. and his scavenging of art and design became a model for the Cranbrook type.



**Fig.3 Edward Fella's Art work**



**Fig.4 Letters on America-Edward Fella**

Edward Fella's education at Cranbrook taught him to idealize the work based on modernism and utilitarianism and a combination of art and design practice; still, art was painting to him. As art de-materialized in the 70s, he turned to marginal art practices and vernacular work especially focusing on typography. Fella won Chrysler Award in 1997 with his peculiar publishing work, and after receiving an honorary doctorate

Press.

<sup>7</sup> Micheal. B., William, D., Steven, H., & DK, H.(1997). Underground matriarchy, *Looking Closer* 2(136-141) New York: Allworth Press.



degree from CCS at Detroit, his designs were collected and are now owned permanently by the New York International Gallery.

Edward Fella put out a book, in 1974, comprising collages made spontaneously out of natural images and types with his illustration and a photocopy system. And after twenty six years his first ever book consisting of image pictures of typography and his own illustrations, 'Letters on American' was published.<sup>8</sup> This book was created with the assistance of Lewis Blackwell, the coeditor of 'The End of Print' with David Carson and Lorraine Wild, a colleague professor of CalArts as a prestigious design theorist and publisher of design literature. It contains as many as 1,187 vernacular<sup>9</sup> photographic images collected for tens of years and 1,212 pictorial images drawn by himself. With this book, Fella transgresses the orthodox, aligned arrangements of order, equilibrium, continuity and the like, and puts forward the claim that we should accept paradoxical tradition but disturb, distort and derange its concepts to stand out unenforced visual factors emerging marginally.

Mackintosh Computer and the development of hardware and software made digital rendering methods (multi-layering, blurring, distorting, cutting, etc.) more available to designers. In Europe a progressive design company, "Why Not Associates" fascinated the readers by presenting unrestricted practices of typography and new visual effects attributed to improved digital performance. Neville Brody in Britain and David Carson in America published 'The Graphic Language of Neville Brody' and 'The End of Print' respectively, so that the readers appreciated the most refined design works of Deconstructionism. Notably, Korean graphic design, once it accepted deconstructive theory and methods, started obtaining worldwide attention. For instance, "601 Bisang" a Korean design company was awarded the gold medal in the Editorial Design category of 2002 New York ADC, which demonstrated the enhancement of Korean graphic and its possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

Website design was more facilitated by constructed infra and developed script and could utilize the unprecedented visual images. William Todd Purgason wrote 'Flash deCONSTRUCTION' and is acknowledged as one of the leading website designers. He is the creative director of an interactive design studio called Juxt Interactive, and at the same time he is building the outstanding websites of worldwide famous clients including Billabong, Macromedia, Toshiba, and Fufitsu. He supports deconstruction saying "

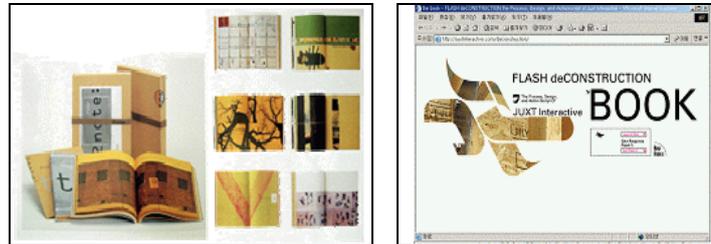
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<sup>8</sup> Edward, F., (2000). Off the Road by Lewis Blackwell, *Edward Fella: Letters on America*(pp10-18).

London: Laurence King Publishing.

<sup>9</sup> Youhong W. (2001) A Study on the Vernacular Trends of Typography, *Journal of Korean Society of Design Science*, 14(2), 225-234

<sup>10</sup> Richard, W(2002). *Art Directors Annual 81*(pp204-205). East Sussex: RotoVision.



**Fig.5 Second Note-601Bisang(Korean Design Company) Fig.6 Juxt-William Todd Purgason**

### 3.2. The Methods of Deconstructive Representation

Deconstruction in the field of graphic design centers on transgression and reformation denying traditional vertical and horizontal grid as well as disregarding legibility of letters. It also advocates Logos with the spirit of experiment augmented. Its methods of representation are as follows:

-Anti-Aesthetic doesn't impose a center of gravity. It enjoys only fun with fun-oriented elements like scribbles irrelevant to the design's contextual meaning. However, this method is popular to motivate people visually through an intended and well-planned selection of material and layout.

-Distortion can be easily rendered visually now thanks to the development of digital technology. Designers prefer this method in that it made it possible for anyone to express as much as they want. Distortion as a byproduct of digital investigates designers' perception and expands the domain of representation.

-Cutting-Edge and Blur Effects suggests new experimentation by transgressing and deconstructing contours. The two skills have contributed to the development of typography and spread quickly as a style empowered by designers' shared support.

-Kitsch is respected by deconstructive design. Since it selects generally not-beloved materials, the respect for Kitsch gave rise to doubt for modernists promoting practicality. It concentrates on picturing contemporary societal and cultural realities.

-Neo-Classicism was not the result of the search for a new artistic trend or approach but an accessory product found in the course of pursuing a new approach that contended against postmodernism. Consequently, neo-classicism is more likely to return to the previous convention rather than to explore new experimental methods and verify them. It endeavors to present the materials to excite nostalgia and has gotten attention from the commercial field with its appeal to audience's sympathy.



**Fig.7 Anti-Aesthetic**



**Fig.8 Blur & Distortion**



**Fig.9 Kitch**



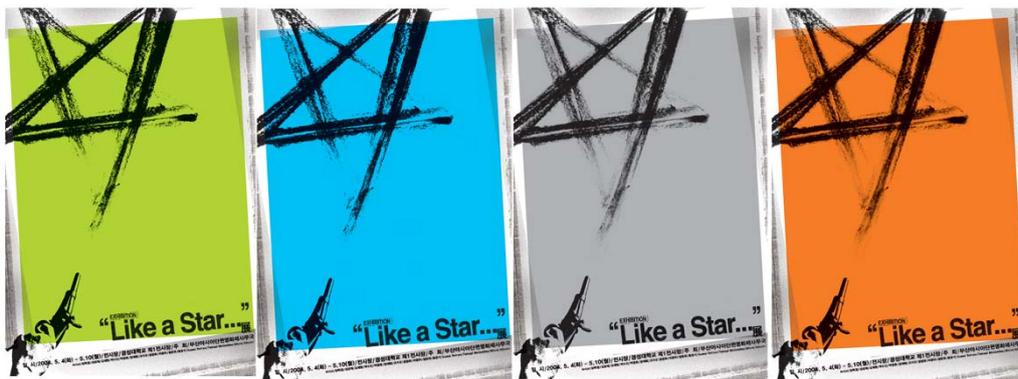
**Fig.10 Neo-Classism**



**Fig.11 Cutting Edge**



**Fig.12 Cutting Edge 2**



**Fig.13 Like a Star-84<sup>th</sup> NY ADC Annual Merit Award (Designed by Hong, Dong-Sik)**

#### 4. Conclusions

The revolutionary medium, digital, provided a source where designers stuck in the boundary of modernism were brought to light by the creativity and the spirit of experiment that lay deep in their consciousness. With the help of digital, the designers have been able to enjoy freedom in many aspects of graphic design. Digital has changed the aesthetic norms and values tightly defended by modernism. As a result, orthodox or traditional grid system has gradually given away and instead extreme, experimental and spontaneous representation has augmented. This advent of new graphic style led young designers to experience catharsis by reflecting post-modernism and deconstruction. However, there have been undesirable, never-intended but pretty much expected consequences as well: Graphic design has been flooded with reckless decorations and over-weighting the importance of commercial publishing business increased the number of



works lacking in artistic refinement. Since the unnecessary decorations inserted into a printed medium interfere with its main contents, the informative value of the medium deteriorates as well as the readers develop an inclination to shift their attention from the contents to the style; it frequently happens that readers see the style exclusively. People get accustomed to a style rapidly and it doesn't take long before it loses its effect on people, and then a new stimulator is required. Many of the design works we call post-modern need something just more than its aesthetical aspect. Designers have to reclaim, evaluate and analyze post-modernism until it becomes, as a designing tool, a social and cultural convention: I hope the term 'convention' doesn't sound negative. Deconstructionism is another radical approach in design, and its birth suggest that designers need to comprehend the origin of 'anti-intellectual'. To make this happen, analysis of the trend of lifestyle and design tending toward future and strategic research on visual elements need to be conducted persistently.

The role of the reader is questioned when interpreting these works and the works can be seen as 'open works' inviting the reader to be a part of the process. Culturally, politically, environmentally, socially, psychologically these images engage us and are open to personal interpretation-we start to form our own path of understanding. Our senses are open to the possibilities the work contains. The graphic works have a tactile quality asking us to touch, scratch, sniff, and even taste the imagery. They combine witty ideas with serious intention, taking us through a range of emotions. The works utilize a wide vernacular of graphic imagery from cartoon popular culture imagery through to industrial materials and references; they are rich forms of communication bordering on occasion between order and chaos. Graphical devices such as pictograms, icons, are incorporated to connect us with our senses.<sup>11</sup> The typography and image are staged in playful manner in order to perform we become part of the performance. Our senses are enlightened by the use of juxtaposition inspiring us to contrive new forms and relationships-loud/silent, still/slow. We are constantly being awoken to the possibilities of the works and how they cognitively change our perception of the world. The graphic imagery indulge the senses by combining typography both hand drawn and digital with exciting use of image. The 'texts' in the works form signs and are arranged into a sensuous syntagmic sequence. The book cleverly achieves the use of metaphoric substitution to represent the senses, where found discarded everyday objects are imbued with new characteristics and significance, which play with our senses.

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