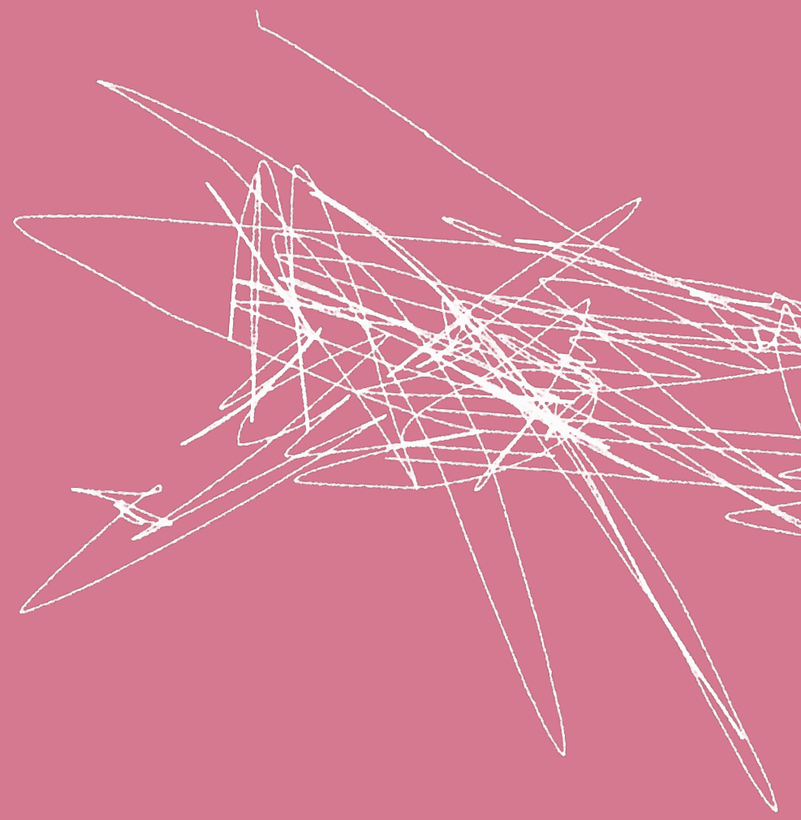


The division bell:

an essay

I. THE HOLLYWOOD ELEVATOR PITCH

"Do we as designers get to have an identity through authorship?" I imagine myself asking indignantly, for some reason riding in an elevator with a companion whom I may or may not have known from before. Slightly less unlucky passengers observe as I press on: "Did you know Barbara Kruger started out as a graphic designer? Personally, I think it's obvious, and I also think that you could still call her that, but everyone else says she's an *artist*, which is also not wrong…" I've now moved from elevator to hallway while my hostage listener looks around for an escape, but seeing no options, I whisk him into a room full of academics and creative professionals where, over the next twenty minutes, my prattling turns into filibustering and reaches the ends of the room. "Artists have identity. So do writers, but writers don't seem to have *authorship*. They used to, but not anymore." Now, as I toss papers about, my hair tousled with passion,

This spread: Mohammad Alizade.
Preceding & final spread: Laura Vinck.

I'm looking a lot like James Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* — or James Stewart in almost any film. And there's a woman who seems to know me, decked out in shoulder pads and victory curls, histrionically egging me on from the gallery. "What even *is* identity?" I shout. "Or authorship? Are they truthful things? What is *truth* … ? I wish to ask my distinguished colleague, has he ever looked at the back of a cereal box …"

Such questions first came to me humorously for their admittedly dated connotations — hence my rendering of them in a quaint, late-thirties Hollywood patter. However, the more I have explored design in a highly personal and interdisciplinary style, the more pertinent these thoughts have grown. I found that, in a design setting, raising the question of *identity* invariably raises corollary issues of creative *authorship* and artistic *truth*, and my enquiry hinges on pulling apart the latter two as a means of understanding the former — especially in using comparative research methods and myself as the rhetorical lens. Whether designers can cultivate identity through authorship as is done in other creative disciplines begets the following integrants, which I will explore:

- Does the authorship paradigm of other creative fields have a place in design, especially if a designer's "identity" is to be derived, as it is in other fields, primarily from how an audience "receives" a creative work?
- Moreover, does the relationship between audience and author remain consistent across non-design creative fields, or does it shift?
- Is a designer's work rooted in the same, if not similar, artistic "truth" as found in other creative fields? If not, can it be? Conversely, can/does the apparent artifice of design representation give us some unique kind of truth that could be employed beyond commercial ends?
- What "truth" is there really in notions of *identity* and *authorship*? Does it tell us something profound; or, like what seems to be the case in design, are notions of identity and authorship in non-design creative fields no less superficial, or "truthful" than the relationship between a designer and their work is often held to be?
- Can the apparent superficiality or "untruth" to design identity and authorship be harnessed or perhaps serve as a basis for transformation of the discipline? Can the usual non-design artistic notions of "truth" be used to accomplish the same?

I want to stress that — spoiler alert — the changes that I hypothesize for design in response to these considerations are meant as springboards for *intra*disciplinary evolution and not revolutionary changes that I foresee completely upending the field. I spend most of my time exploring these ideas from a philosophical and semantic point of view and offer only loose theoretical, methodological, and praxis-based solutions. My short film and *visual* arm of my thesis as such is meant as an "expansion," or practical application of these solutions, and with it, I seek to challenge design boundaries through its form and content that exist for purely expressive reasons and require audience engagement for interpretation. Knowledge of this *written* arm of my thesis is thus not entirely necessary, but can enrich one's experience by prompting considerations of authorship, identity, and artistic truth in relation to the visual work.

The next section opens with a bold statement that acts as an answer to the question we just heard the imaginary Jimmy Stewart so innocently ask, and I feel a little bad about it — like I'm suddenly Orson Welles,[1] rebuking poor, idealistic Jimmy with pompous contrarianism. However, it's a nice lead-in. So, "*do we as designers get to have an identity through authorship?*" I again ask, though trying to sound neither like Jimmy Stewart nor Orson Welles, but like myself. If you have the stomach to step off the elevator with me and talk for a minute, let's find out.

1 Orson Welles notably turned his nose up at — or outright disparaged — both his contemporaries and successors, some of whom had even cited him as a major influence. These include pioneers like Sergei Eisenstein and Alfred Hitchcock, as well as Ingmar Bergman; Federico Fellini; Jean-Luc Godard; Michelangelo Antonioni; and Woody Allen, for whom Welles had a "physical" dislike.

Swapnil Dhruv Bose, "The Reason Why Orson Welles Hated Alfred Hitchcock and Woody Allen," *Far Out*, December 16, 2020. *See Endnotes for* URL.

"What matter who's speaking,
someone said what matter who's speaking.
There's going to be a departure…"

— Samuel Beckett,
Texts for Nothing, third text[2]

II. AUTHORSHIP: THE SEMANTIC MYTHOLOGY

Design is an authorless profession; no work of design has an author.

Dramatic proposition, I know. And *mostly* authorless, it may be more accurate to say — although you may find, based on your own inclinations, that you can sum up the field as either entirely authorless or existing somewhere in the gray. To start off, let's acknowledge that the word "author" taps into an array of cultural moments, with a variety of contexts riding on its shoulders. It has been the public orator, the clergyman, the iconoclast; the agnostic, the atheist, the philosopher, the poet; the universalist with too big a heart and the solitary genius seemingly without one. Now, it is very much attached to the literary tradition, but when considered in its more discoursal form (if we capitalize it), it functions in a nebulous role facilitating several creative modalities. In the more flexible, transdisciplinary form, the *Author* becomes the creator, the hands of whom still manage to reach deep into a finished work. Before we can elucidate this idea further, and before we can situate it within design, we have to survey — in a somewhat nonlinear fashion — the critical and cultural routes that brought us here.

Near the turn of the millennium, Michael Rock observed how the meaning of the Author has changed across time, where the "earliest definitions are not associated with writing."[3] However, at present, it inextricably ties the textual to a singular mind: through literature, firstly, and through nonfiction — what we might term *everything else* — to a secondary degree.[4] Though he is thinking in the "modern" tradition

Opposite: Axians/photo experiment.

2 Samuel Beckett, "Texts for Nothing," in *The Complete Short Prose 1929–1989* (Grove Press, 1996), 85–90.

3 Michael Rock, "Designer as Author," in *2x4 Studio* (1996), par. 3. *See Endnotes for* URL.

4 *Literature* includes fiction, poetry, prose, lyrics, and the avant-garde. *Nonfiction* refers to all that stands in contrast: biographical and editorial writing; theory, criticism, and analysis, ETC.

Ibid.

that scholars generally place in the wake of the Renaissance, Rock is a tad short-sighted in dating this association in the West to eighteenth-century England with the Statute of Anne; as this overlooks Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Marlowe, along with the fertile literary traditions of early-modern France and Italy.[5] Moreover, the phenomenon of the Author predates temporal formulations of "creative modernity" in the other fields that, like literature, bear antecedence to design. Though we also still read through this "text-and-master" lens, it is Foucault who most potently flavors our current understanding of the Author. In the late sixties, he questioned the supremacy of a writer's intentions in textual interpretation, instead emphasizing the sociocultural and institutional discourses that shape their perspective, and in turn ours, as better facilitators of meaning. In this way, we create an opening in the text "where the writing subject endlessly disappears."[6] The essence or "true" meaning of a text was no longer drawn from the writer's perceived intentions, that lone, artistic genius; it now manifested externally, though internally to the reader and informed by all the outward and inescapable biases of culture, era, convention, and other social complexities. At that same moment, Quentin Skinner similarly argued that "knowledge of the social *context*"[7] should carry greater weight in textual analysis over adhering to the Modernist "orthodoxy"[8] of treating textual works as the products of an infallible mind, one immune to sociocultural influence. Soon after, Barthes propelled us even further by drawing an important distinction between *work* and *text*, where a *work* is "an object of consumption," while a *Text* "recuperates [*the work*] as play, task, production, practice."[9] Essentially, the *work* is the piece itself, blessed as an audience finds it with its initial

5 He likely chooses the eighteenth century as it was at this time that, in the West, the distinction between fiction and history (i.e. fiction versus nonfiction) first emerged. Prior to this, the locus of literary works tended always to be some historical figure or event, but bathed in mythology — and which the contemporary populace took to be fact. *Ibid.*, pars. 7–9.

6 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard & Sherry Simon (Cornell University Press, 1977), 301.

7 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1969), 40.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill & Wang, 1986), 62.

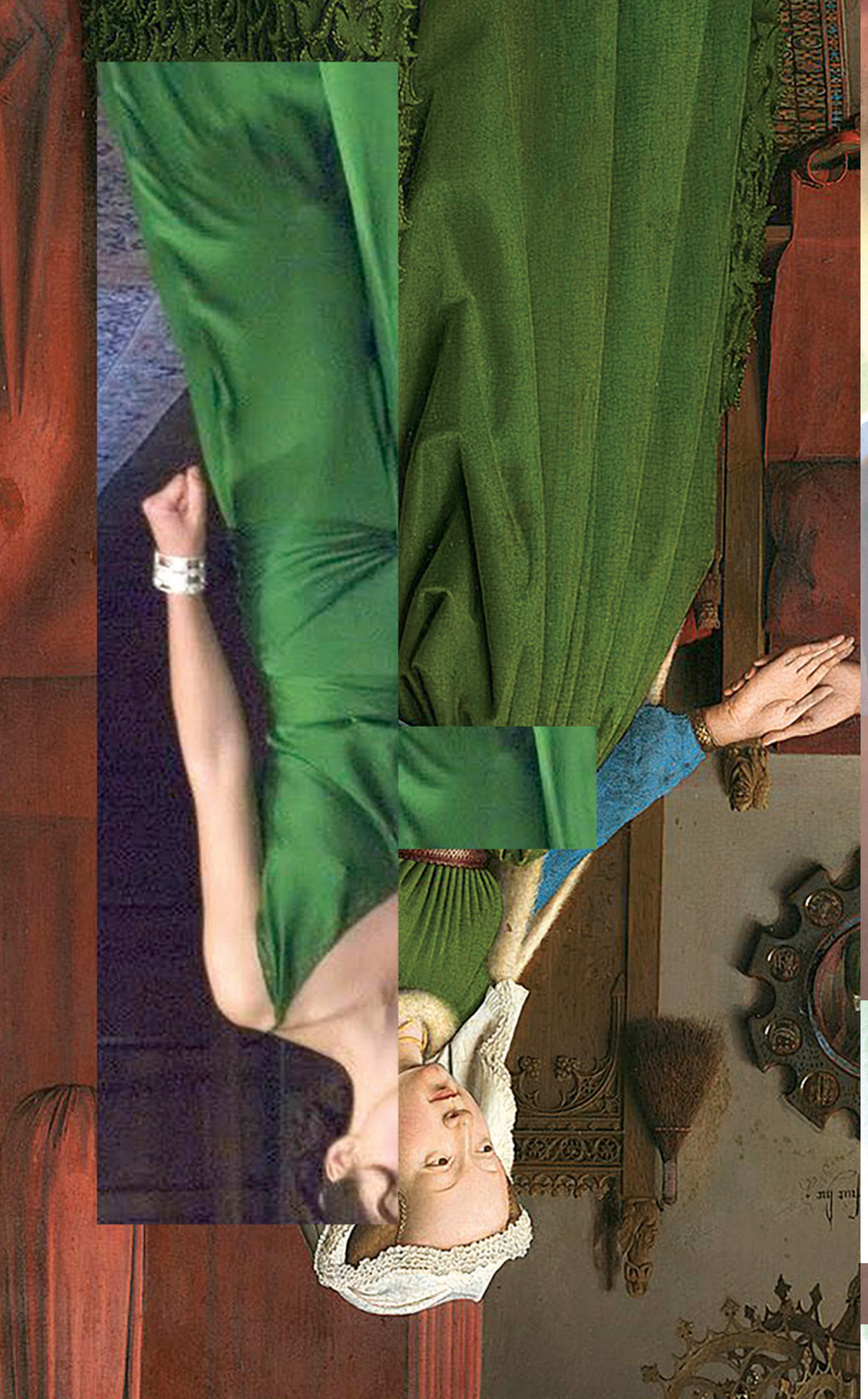
carriage of meaning by the Author, while *Text* refers to the act of critically interpreting the work. As Barthes would have it, the capitalization of the second item implies that the interpretive act builds upon the content to yield a greater return on intellectual investment for the reader. However, it begs the question of whether works are effectively rendered expressive skeletons in the process, becoming like dioramas for us to, as C.S. Lewis put it in a similar fashion to Skinner, "let loose our own subjectivity upon [*them*] and make them [*our*] vehicles."[10]

At any rate, this is how we largely study literature today: with a methodology that foregrounds sociocultural context and discourse against authorial intent. In other words, meaning sourced from a foregrounded background. It is a recent gear-switch after eons of slow building as well as a thoroughly Western problem, still bogged down by very Western trappings. Here is how we can trace the paradigm and codify it: it was Plato, Aristotle, and all those pre-Christian progenitors who laid our contextual foundations, with walls and rafters raised through the Medieval-to-Renaissance years by the continent's later innovators of prose, poetry, and drama, many tracing their craft right back to the old Empire and to whom their Modern and early-Modern successors were frequently indebted — by explicit indication or not. It is not difficult, for example, to draw the line from Shakespeare to Defoe, then to Dickens, to Tolstoy, to Woolf, and Butler (Judith, that is). But even in the wake of the post-Modern anarchy that turned us into skeptics of the Author (the change that occurred between Woolf and Butler), we continue to live in the houses of authorial convention built long ago according to Christian, heteronormative, patriarchal codes, only having really done a small bit of remodeling by way of theoretical repainting, the knocking down of some old walls, and the fashioning of a few new interpretive windows. In popular literature, this is strongest, as we praise the work of King or Rowling or Sedaris as one piece of utterly unique art after another while around each a cult of sorts fawns.

10 C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), 24.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Photo experiment; Atonement*, 2007, meets van Eyck's* Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434. Both works present realities much more complex than they at first seem, shrouding the identities of their inhabitants in layers.*



The "origins" of this habit of placing authors on pedestals were pagan and non-heteronormative, anyway (*Arcadia*), compounding the irony. Before spotlighting context in his argument opposing authorial omnipotence (*authorial authority?*), Skinner cautions against layering modern politics over past texts to thereby create a "mythology of doctrines;"[11] but what we have taken away from Skinner, along with the other theorists, is that context effectively overtakes, even trumps, the Author. We look for modern racial or religious nuance in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* and do as much critical theorizing over *Mrs. Dalloway* as over *A Room of One's Own*, and nevertheless, we exalt the writers of both as figureheads whose output defines their time, seemingly allowing context or discourse to outrank authorial intent in one instance while reversing the order in another. We create our own semantic mythology when defining the Author as we perceive them to function in literature, but only once their era has come and passed, it seems. The Author, then, not only changes shape across time and society, but it may be pregnant with contradictions in any given moment. It is a symptom of a world whose "truths" can be found in the items and ideas we *make, verum esse ipsum factum,*[12] from context; to the works that respond to and serve those contexts. Regardless, the juxtaposition of arguments for authorial infallibility against theories that prioritize context reveals the fluidity, the depth, the semantic disputations intrinsic to literature — a paradigm that seems comically unfit for the still very commercial and still very new field of graphic design. Rock, himself a designer, was writing about his own field in his investigation into the *Author*. This was because, by the late nineties, graphic design had seen such conceptual development that its scholars[13] were taking the time to field groundbreaking questions of authorship as they pertained to contemporaneous work.

This spread: Reddit.

11 Skinner, 7.

12 "The true is what is made," one of Giambattista Vico's key principles, taken from his *Origins of the Latin Language*.

Alexander Bertland, "Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)," in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002 (2024). *See Endnotes for* URL.

13 It was also by this time that design was first seen to have what you might call "scholars."

But in design, we still lack the honor of time to speak of Foucauldian external validations, to make a "Barthesian" categorical differentiation between two species of work, or to advocate for the "Skinner-esque" need to contextualize field-research methodologies. Now, hang on a moment — why this sudden trilogy of mismatched eponymous adjectives? And why do Barthes and Skinner require quotes? Aside from the obvious answer that one has had enough influence on scholarly thought to earn his own terminology, these adjectival propositions reveal something profound in literature that we may be able to apply more than ostensibly to design. The literary Author, in praxis, inhabits an unseen layer in which their creative agency is perpetually subject to cultural determination, and this layer neighbors that in which the Author perceives their creative agency to be an autonomous thing, definable outside of cultural norms. They never operate of their own creative volition; their output must always be evaluated by an audience to grant them Authorship. The profession in turn requires a social sphere that is either overlooked or only sporadically acknowledged in our current cultural setting, especially considering the solitude that any creative role demands. This dichotomy of agency constitutes a semantic mythology of the Author as they constantly straddle these regions, mostly unaware of the dividing line between the assumed role granting inward autonomy and that which follows and calls for outward validation. If there were a bell hung to signal the code-switching inherent between the two sides, it would ring throughout the author's working day. And here, we can turn once again to Woolf: yes, authorship begins with the solitude of agency, when the idea germinates in the mind and autonomy then takes shape with the act of creating. This internal agency is matched, though seemingly canceled out, by the external agency of the audience — the rigorous debating, the ruminating, the *criticism* — carried out in response to a work; especially in the way we now define "work" (Text *à la* Barthes). So, we define *author* in a combinatory manner: first, of an individual's offering of value, and second, of the value of that offering as determined by socially accepted parameters dictating artistic and cultural convention. Furthermore, these parameters seem to require a minimum but indeterminate amount of time for digestion, reflection, and evaluation before authorial status is bestowed — the passage of time marking the difference in how

we grant Authorship to current or "popular" literature versus "classic" works, for example. In this way, Authorship is an ever-changing shadow role whose form keeps only as long as the dominant cultural conventions permit. Conversely, the dominant culture may be troublingly fickle in deciding exactly which "shape" an author is even permitted to take.

III. THE TREACHERY OF IMAGES

Let's also note that authorial shape mutates to an infinitely greater degree when moving beyond the written word. *Text* is one half of design, the other being *image*, bonded together in a systematic amalgamation. What of the origination of meaning, the way we ascribe *Authorship* to works in disciplines wholly encompassed by the second component? This is the same hermeneutic question we posed of literature, but it is perhaps more so the driver of art, even christened with a name that allows for a more transparent discussion in visual studies than in literary and critical theory. It is *intentionalism*,[14] the oft-debated methodology of deriving meaning in what we will term *image-art*: painting, drawing, screen printing, photography, digital art, motion graphics, film (whether within the school of cinema or outside of it), installation art, land art, performance art, conceptual art, found art — all of it. Like literature, these modes of expression have been subjected over the years to their own sagas of interpretative peril where critics oscillate among artist, viewer, and context, evaluating where "true" meaning originates. *Extreme intentionalism*,[15] as it is sometimes termed, is the aesthetic byword for image-art when held in the eye of the Modernist beholder, where artist (*Author*) takes precedence over viewer or context. It dominated in various iterations until relatively recently, though it still holds critical sway, and perhaps more so than in intentionalist readings of literature. Image-art modalities are linked by the common thread in which interpretation derives more from an accessible though embellished metaphor than, as with many forms of literature, the logical framework of a narrative, which itself is a set of constitutive propositions.[16] Literary narrative, as such, becomes more of an

Opposite: FotoFora/*photo experiment*.

14 Szu-Yen Lin, "Art and Interpretation," in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002 (2024). *See Endnotes for* URL.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Marxist applications within theories of constitutive rhetoric, like those formulated by Maurice Charland or Louis Althusser, offer more on narrative methodologies.

elaborate puzzle, while image-art offers puzzles in a single, impactful visual instance (though narrative film — discussed later — can complicate this a bit). But Authors of image-art do not operate in a vacuum; their work carries just as much sociocontextual baggage as does literature. We may often miss a key component leading to a deeper understanding of a work if we fail to consider that, as theorist Szu-Yen Lin puts it, "factors present at the time of the work's creation … play a key role in shaping a work's identity."[17] And so now, the output of image-artists, like that of writers, may likely be more colored by methodologies of *contextualism*, or *anti-intentionalism*, in some narrower incarnations. Consider as "templates" for this the following: the culture of postwar America setting the scene for Rothko, Pollock, and other Abstract Expressionists; the influence of the Industrial Revolution on Monet and Courbet; or the nods to earlier pop-culture imagery in Peter Lindbergh's "new realist" fashion shoots of the nineties.

Despite this, Authors of image-art generally seem to be treated with more reverence, privileging them as originators of meaning where literary Authors now lose out. The Expressionists, the Impressionists, the Dutch Golden-Agers, the Renaissance "men" (to include Artemisia Gentileschi) — all celebrated practitioners of any other movement, if we name them, who are metonyms for their canons. Why else would museums continue to thrive as the egomaniacal show-spaces celebrating the material accomplishments of certain individuals? Image-art, unlike design, is not made for function or to offer a solution to a problem. It is the result of meditation, feeling, expression, existing for the sake of itself; to be appreciated, to confront, or to be interpreted. It is, at its most basic, deliberately impractical. So, the *artist* assumes the more unquestioned role of *Author* and remains the most compelling source for meaning, sometimes also serving as the sole point of a work's external validation. Literature, on the other hand, *conjures* images in the mind that are subjective to the individual, unlike the immediacy of image-art with its color, composition, and

17 Lin, "Art and Interpretation," par. 27.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Anthony Perkins' disturbed visage as Norman Bates in Psycho*, 1960, another Hitchcock opus, cropped into Albrecht Dürer's Christlike 1500 self-portrait. The result fuses two portrayals of men deeply interested in representation, albeit for very different reasons.*

materiality. Perhaps that is why the literary Author is outmoded, if not dead completely, when squared off against the still-preeminent Author of image-art: while the latter fabricates a visual portal of meaning that exists in plain sight in the physical world, the former orchestrates a world of imagined visual strata whose meaning requires extensive reasoning to be understood. This is what led Foucault to equate writing with death through the "total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer"[18] via contextual interpretation, and like the gray layer where a writer's autonomy clashes with external reception, this difference in signification constitutes what theorist and philosopher Hugh Silverman describes as "the chiasmatic conjuncture of the painter's seeing … and what is seen."[19, 20]

Design generally provides no such arena for its makers. In its dominant commercial, "problem-solving" form, which still largely defines the field for the public via pop culture, job descriptions, university curricula, and, as we will later see, much of the discipline's scholarly literature, its text is neither crafted to express chapters of self-sustaining content and over which an audience will pore, nor are its images cast in the same caliber as those of image-art to be anatomized in the same way. Both literature and image-art have evolved so appreciably that the conceptual depth of each has given us everything from *The Canterbury Tales* and *Don Quixote* to *As I Lay Dying* and *A Clockwork Orange* in the first case and the *Venus de Milo* to the *Ghent Altarpiece* to Donald Judd's many *Untitleds* in the second. These works created as well as deconstructed visual and textual genres through the generations. Warhol perhaps first blurred the line between art and design at mid-century, albeit momentarily, giving us a seminal formal challenge to expected design "genres" (and genres of image-art) with his stacked Brillo boxes and repeating Campbell's soup

18 Foucault, 301.

19 Hugh Silverman, "Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art: Aesthetics — Then and Now," in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (Penn State University Press, 2012), 362.

20 Heidegger also pithily said it as, "neither is without the other," referring to both artwork and artist in his *Origin of the Work of Art*. His focus on context presaged Barthes and Foucault, but he similarly argues that art both expresses and creates social concepts of "truth," implying that *truth* is essentially human-made.

Martin Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, trans. & ed. Julian Young & Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

1500

AD

Ibertus Durrerus Noricus
ipsum me propria sic effin-
gebam coloribus aptus
anno XXVIII.

cans. Predating Warhol, Magritte did something similar with one of his most well-known paintings, referenced in the title of this section with the textual motif that he actually employed in a number of other works. But Magritte did not really "speak" with the same visual design language that Warhol did throughout his œuvre, and Warhol's use of design was in a "meta-found" fashion, anyway. This means that these did not represent the major structuralist shifts that the listed works of literature and image-art did for their respective disciplines. Design would thus continue along its cookie-cutter path, remaining "merely… a driver for economic growth,"[21] as designer Ruben Pater states, bound irradicably to capitalism and satisfying a material gain versus one in spirit or intellect. In practice, design is the mere functional cousin in the mostly "truth"-seeking, noble family of arts. The fieldhouse of the creative world — athletic, agile, and alluring in the forms it offers, but sitting like a concrete block near the ornate red-brick shrines where craftspeople gather to respond to the world around them in a manner untethered to the pursuit of profit. Image-art and literature endeavor to find and represent a *Truth*, that which is of a more "natural" world, revealed through work as its currency and turning the profit of the betterment of the mind or spirit; while most design endeavors, by contrast, champion the opposite within a much more fabricated realm.

Before we start to sound too much like Heidegger, Kant, or Marx, let's reflect: why are the products of design not so "truthful?" Is *profit* as a prime determiner in defining a certain thing such an unethical blot? It is not so much a good-versus-evil binary, but simply that when the driving factor is profit, the lofty reaches of expressivity are very much trumped by formulæ for material necessity: the application of what has worked before to calculate the greatest financial success. Only minimal risk is undertaken, together with whatever set of actions is sufficient to push the chart line at a right-upward diagonal. Products driven by these criteria are *products* in the economic or "literal" sense; creature comforts, luxuries — *fetishized commodities*.[22] They are the work of a system, a material methodology

Opposite: KentLife.org.uk.

21 Ruben Pater, *Caps Lock: How Capitalism Took Hold of Graphic Design, and How to Escape from It* (Valiz, 2021), 86.

22 The concept from Marx's *Das Kapital* describing the social relationship within capitalism of value placed on things, in contrast to social relationships as they exist among people.

sustained by "wins" but the primary force behind, as Alfred Marshall put it, "the ordinary business of life… the social action … connected with the attainment, and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing."[23] Literature and image-art are very much at times concerned with ordinary life, but not in their very essence as a business, and the social action attached to such fields revolves around, as stated, an intellectual or spiritual improvement of wellbeing rather than the attainment of material requisites. That these works can make their Authors buckets of money is also symptomatic of their assigned value in a capitalistic system, where *value* is attached to the self-sustaining existence of the work, while a design work generally acts as just one of the *means* for another object to make money. It is the jacket of the book or the branding of the gallery exhibition. The "truth" of design may then be regarded as an *un*truth by comparison. Borrowing from Lucretius, Baudrillard distills this view most famously in what he describes as the *hyperreal* of modern consumer society, surrounding us in the form of a "generation by models of a real without origin or reality… a *precession of simulacra*."[24] It is the tangible and the intangible; objects, things, products, services, and their connotations and tropes which cultivate needs where none really exist, constructing a culture where personal growth, success, *thriving* is defined not by the procurement of practical or intellectual skillsets; mastering rewarding cultural practices; developing meaningful social relationships; and other practices of "nonmaterial" elevation, but by playing each of us as a character in the opposite narrative: that of *material* elevation, of ever-maximizing object-attainment and the status it brings. What's more, attaining a certain status only encourages the desire to assume the superseding one, along with any corresponding material requisites, marring our perception with "the existential feeling that we are not entirely happy about ourselves,"[25] as Pater says in his own, very Baudrillardian critique of advertising design.

23 Mark Blaug, "Economics," in *Encyclopædia Brittanica* (2024). *See Endnotes for* URL.

24 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

25 Pater, 199.

Design as most know it builds and is built by such artifice. So it has been since the Industrial Revolution, with field scholars' favored starting point for "modern" design work — at *la Belle époque*, during the Parisian poster craze, the now-prized Art Nouveau artifacts of which existed to drum up interest in *business*. We inhabit a logical progression of that era, besieged from all angles by what art historian and theorist James Elkins terms *visuality*, a facet "of late capitalist first-world culture"[26] and increasingly the primary way we perceive our world. Motion and UX design, two design modes with ever-growing importance, most pertinently illustrate this condition at the moment — along with more ingrained languages like type and title design, though when consumed in the parent format of video application. The Truth that most commonly collides with us is not that of expression, the soul, or the mind, but that of artifice; made of plastic or nothing at all, and borne of market-targeting, need-satisfaction, and upward mobility as the molding forces of happiness. The truth of selling. A truth that rarely, if at all, belongs to the consumer as an individual, but to the corporation. A truth that, rather than delivering happiness, as truth should — brings little more than a fleeting infatuation with one's milieu. Design facilitates this cozy, manufactured reality, and of all the creative fields, it is the only one offering the *simulacrum* as its primary deliverable. And what of its practitioners?

Its Authors do not in large part exist in the form we have so far explored, and if they ever do, their output is usually not tied to Truth as reflected in other creative representations of the world. In this way, design's apparent *authorlessness* renders our original assessment of Authorial agency — defined as a twofold thing both internally independent while contradictorily, outwardly dependent — either irrelevant in the context of design or poised to take on its own, new form in the future of the field. It seems to be that the majority of design might rear little more than what to some is the ugly head of simulacra, but for one thing, growing circles of design give us work that present something else; and for another, in the more dominant design circles, there is no reason that the simulacrum has to continue serving as form and content's default template. More pressing still, it's not like there is a complete lack of artistic value or "Truth" where one is greeted by design

Opposite: Pexels/*photo experiment.*

26 James Elkins, "What Is an Image?" in *The Stone Art Theory Institutes* 2, (Penn State University Press, 2011), 2.

simulacra, at least insofar as the merits of "corporate" design are concerned, along with noteworthy examples of the opposite, socially conscious type of design that engages content resembling corporate visual languages for the express purpose of critiquing them. Design truths *are* artifice on planes where their schemata exist according to well-understood articulations, such as in typography, logo design, branding identity, or packaging design, all of which can become self-aware artifice in clever hands. Deliberate, sensory, Baudrillardian — Platonic,[27] even — simulation. Rick Valicenti's self-published *Suburban Maul* is a good, though low-profile, example, featuring on one spread a "McMansion" American home with the Toys "R" Us logo realistically slapped over the front door. When design uses the conventions it simultaneously breaks, or when it integrates activist, expressive, ironic, or meta-rhetorical content, the question of design *Truth* weighs more heavily, and with it, the veracity of design Authorship.

Branding identity becomes a puissant design language when subverted. For a designer to formulate a creative logic to go beyond the typical reaches of identity branding, or to craft the branding to do more than offer the clarity of a logomark and type palette across store shelves or in city streets, they must break free from design's more common profit-maximizing marketing logic (*object-attainment*) to pursue a *value*-maximizing one.[28] That is, marketing not fueled by capitalism, but by creative expression, a social cause, an academic inquiry, or any other value-based endeavor that can be logically engaged for its own sake. In so doing, the Truth denoted by literature and image-art can more readily apply in design spaces. A design Author, if they exist, must not be held to the material goals of a parent entity; as in that moment, their Authorial agency is puppetry, drawing with an overseer's hand, beautiful as the final work may be. The designer in this area is usually anonymized with the completion of their work, killed off in the Foucauldian sense, like the "death" to which a writer submits themselves as their work takes on life through dissemination. The designer must exert their own hand, but for a different result. Despite contradictions in how we assign Authorship to writers, painters, and their ilk, designers must reach for that same idealistic, contradiction-rich plane of creativity for recognition. For now, those Platonic, Shakespearian, Woolf-esque foundations remain, with centuries of critical remodeling overlain as one field and then another has developed; but with the free pursuit of material happiness that we have embarked upon, our dwelling spaces have metastasized into a Babel-like ziggurat of bought-and-sold narratives, dressed in the usual plumes of design but distracting us from new crests of ideation that appear and which employ the Truth seen in other creative fields. We are on a "quest for authenticity (*being-founded-on-itself*)" that masks a "quest for an alibi (*being-elsewhere*),"[29] still meaningless forms without our material surroundings, crawling up and down the pyramid that accommodates us daily with the treachery of the *artificial-truth-through-image* haunting us while never penetrating quite as often as it surfaces.

IV. CYCLES OF PARADOX

Despite the commercialist normalcy, the Authorial paradigm we have observed in other fields still emerges — and is fighting to keep emerging — in newer applications of graphic design, defying the armies of simulacra with rallying cries of *Truth* and heralding for the designer the agency of identity-through-authorship. Though it hasn't yet given us the same pomps and vanities as, say, history painting, post-Modern writing, or minimalism, pockets of design over the last several decades have demonstrated a striking application of the personal that speaks of its own accord and renders certain design works to function like works of literature or image-art. This in turn affects the interpretation, the meaning, the *use* of the design. This shift is frequently attached to the work of graduates of the Cranbrook Academy in the late seventies and early eighties, but it can be traced back further. The Revolutionary Russians and the Dadaists were certainly the antecedent groups, where multimodal creatives like Höch, Hausmann, and Rodchenko created unusually agenda-driven design work or work that straddled the line between art and design with a mix of visual

27 In the *Republic*, Plato decries art as mere representation, a copy of the natural world. Representation, meanwhile, is nothing more than an illusion, rendering art *simulacra*.

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Project Gutenberg, 1998).

28 Value-maximizing theories in art, also understood as *utilitarian*, espouse that an interpretation of a work of art (*image-art*) should extend, or *maximize* its perceived value, making its existence more rewarding for the audience. Such approaches are rooted in contextualism, as the perceived value must draw reasonably from the context in which a work was made.

Lin, "Art and Interpretation," pars. 31–32.

Following spread: Volvo/ *photo experiment.*

29 How Baudrillard sums up his critique of our collective fetish for amassing objects in his 1968 doctoral thesis and first book.

Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (Verso, 2020), 81.

expressivity and curiously applied type — much of it unconcerned with profit as the end goal. And once design grows from trade to profession at mid-century, enter Saul Bass and Paul Rand, designers whose work revels not only in the unique voices and visual flourishes of its authors, but also signals a creative identity shining as brightly through each piece if not more so than in the proto-design material of the European avant-garde. Bass and Rand were, in a sense, Authors.[30] No matter how moneyed and integral to the development of commercial branding concepts their portfolios may have been, Bass' plump swooshes, comforting color palettes, and isotype-derived icons, along with Rand's eccentric visual universalism replete with smiley faces and the occasional rebus puzzle have left behind a legacy of communicative simplism, psychological accessibility, and a humanism rooted in Modernist ideals. These men can be perceived in a dichotomous light, as though they drew with the hand of an "overseer" to turn a profit, they forged their practice as trailblazers, leaving work that speaks as much of the creative identity of an Author as it does of successful corporate profit margins. However, this ultimately defines their status as *Authors* largely in terms of novelty. But then comes Cranbrook, along with the likes of Rick Valicenti, Paula Scher, David Carson, Barbara Kruger, and Marian Bantjes, all of whom either originated or were influenced by post-Modern design and all of whom created work that began to break free from the Western ziggurat to inhabit creative islands off in the distance. The work of such designers — some of whom aren't even formally referred to as such — signals *Authorship* like the ringing of a bell through the injection of identity, be it elemental or all-defining; and in service of various values, be they personal, of outward concern, or both, to call our attention to the dividing line between design that is apparently authorless and that which denotes the opposite creative mode.

These post-Modern designers can each be summed up by their flourishes of distinct visual character, which may exhibit diverse range, as well as a regular exploration of values, causes, or interests pushed beyond simple commercial goals (though oftentimes the two will be serendipitously wed). The recognition of meaningful flourishes across a canon is one of the hallmarks of the *auteur theory* to filmmaking, a similar kind of Authorial modality that dominated twentieth-century cinema. Auteurship placed creative "ownership" of a film with the director and in so doing foregrounded their unique visual and topical choices — and therefore *identities* — for the audience, not unlike as one finds in a praised genre work by a famed novelist or an ambitious painting by an Old Master. The auteur theory is often applied to Alfred Hitchcock, and despite challenges as early as the sixties by the likes of Pauline Kael[31] and Ian Cameron,[32] the framework still affects how we derive meaning and elevate films as an art form. Roger Ebert, one of the only other critics besides Kael to have had considerable influence on entry-level though sage film criticism, generally seemed to indirectly support the auteur approach in his writings. *Auteurship* — not unlike literary and image-art *Authorship* — exploded in the postwar period with Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, Japan's Nūberu bagū, and British kitchen-sink realism, and we still tend to understand a film according to the theoretical working methods that drove these movements — that is, by equating a work's merit metonymically with its director. Just think of Quentin Tarantino, Jordan Peele, Greta Gerwig, or Ari Aster. Comparative literature theorist Geetha Ramanathan observes that female directors, especially those of color, pursue a "self-fashioning of the… subject in the diegesis [*as a*] route to establishing female auteurship,"[33] creating a scenario where the auteur — that Modernist, lone genius — is maybe experiencing a second wave, but one of reclamation. Regardless, it would only reinforce Modernist notions whence we derive cinematic meaning, giving us films that satiate minority concerns and desires but which are very much *works* in the Modernist sense: irreducible from the form assigned to them by their Author and imparting through their form, content, and narrative rationale that Author's *identity*.

30 However, Rand contradictorily stated, "Design issues are form and content and proportion…design can help elucidate or explain social issues. Social issues are not design issues."

Janet Abrams, "Paul Rand: A Profile," in *ID Magazine* (1994), 50.

31 Jessica Rafalko, "'Auteur, Schmauteur,' and Other Such Eloquent Musings on the Different Critical Frameworks Offered by Pauline Kael and Peter Wollen." *See Endnotes for URL.*

32 Glyn Davis, "Authorship," in *Far from Heaven* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 42.

33 Geetha Ramanathan, "Ambiguities of Auteurship," in Kathleen Collins: *The Black Essai Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 54.

But unfortunately, popular discourse doesn't hold all those Cranbrook designers and their post-Modern children to be Authors branded proudly with their own artistic or creative *Identities* — as we should perhaps write it — in the sense that we regard Hitchcock, Woolf, and the others to be, including even theorists like Barthes or Foucault. We also go as far as to christen the bodies of work of our film critics as Author-penned: Kael, highly decorated with a Guggenheim Fellowship and a slew of journalistic awards, drew up her arguments in a remarkably prosaic fashion (though she did write for *The New Yorker*); and Ebert was the first to win a Pulitzer for film criticism. Did you know that there is a Pulitzer for just about every creative language *except* for design? The Cranbrook graduates are notably nameless, identified only by their alma mater; and any Tom, Dick, or Heidi should have raised their eyebrows by now that every name we could come up with representing post-Modern design was nowhere near the household-name status of our two corporate granddaddies, Saul and Paul. What's more, Authorship has incurred a reputation that seems now to be viewed as anathema to design. Rock ultimately lambastes the Author paradigm in a design setting for how it

> "...encourages both ahistorical and acultural readings of design. It grants too much agency, too much control to the lone artist/genius, and discourages interpretation."[34]

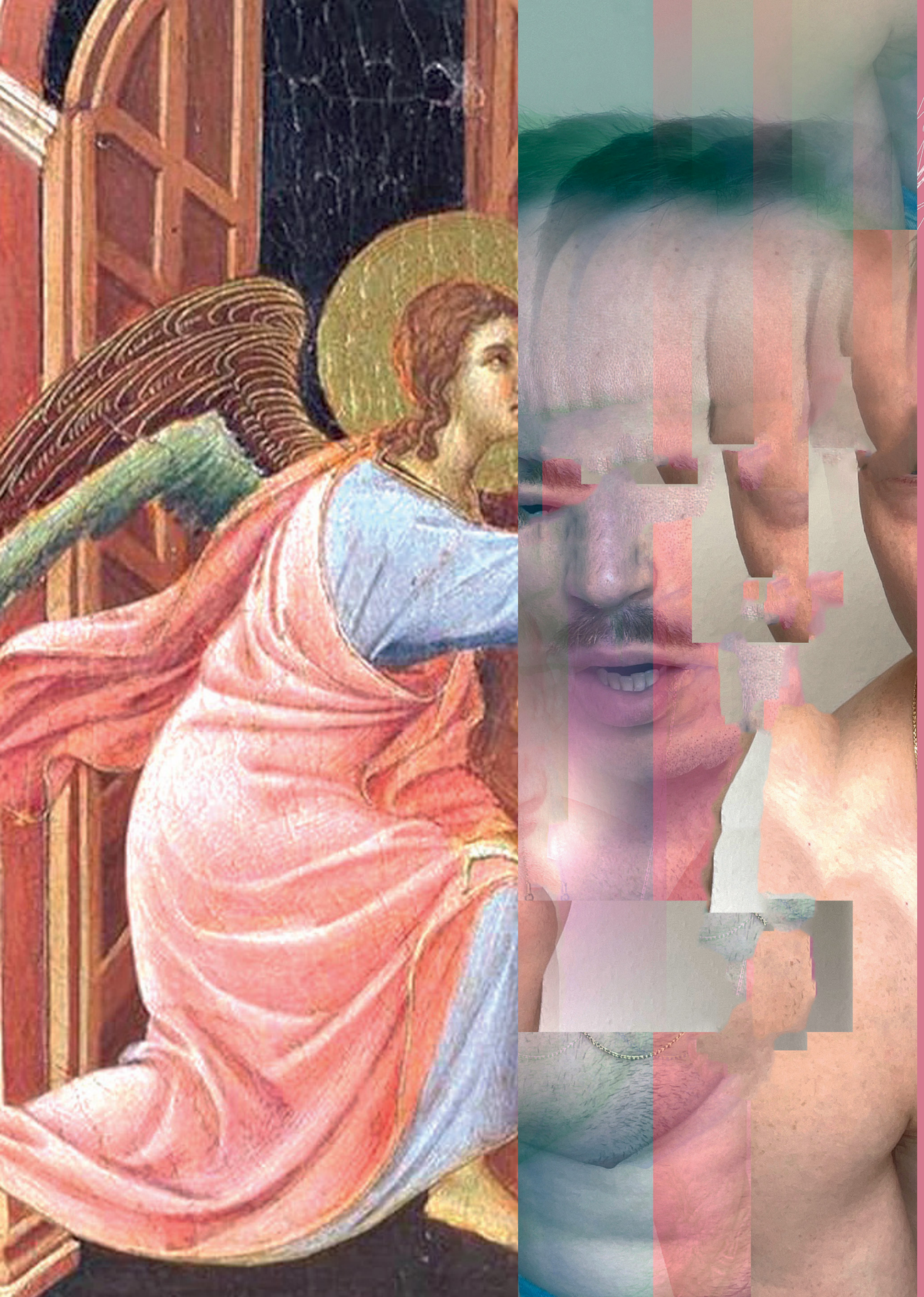
Its usefulness, he concluded, lay only in reassessing the design process, not as a framework for understanding works of design in their final form. This is due, as he states, to design being "a profession traditionally associated more with the communication than the origination of messages."[35] His point does not miss the mark when we consider that nearly all image-art and literature invent, express, and deliver rather than synthesize, repurpose, or amplify in a secondhand manner *messages* in some form. This

Opposite: detail from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco, 1512/ photo experiment.

34 Rock, par. 46.

35 *Ibid.*, par. 2.

FOLLOWING SPREAD
Audrey Hepburn with George Peppard and Patricia Neal in Breakfast at Tiffany's, *1961, colliding with Vermeer's* Girl with a Pearl Earring, *1665. Both works depict young women of vague origin who take on superficial new identities to put an attractive mask over a previous one.*



is what relegates design to the "authorless" bin, despite the work of the post-Modernists, who still represent a recent phenomenon — and one that, while influential, existed on the fringe, in the safe microcosm of upper academia, studied now as a phenomenon with a soft endpoint. Postgraduate design study is still viewed with some indifference by the general public, and the mere decades that have elapsed since the first waves of post-Modern design were felt have not given us sufficient time to see more designers gain collective attention by shaping their work according to the myriad alternate values — *Truths* — that contrast with design's prevailing commercialism. These include but are not limited to the personal; the expressive and artistic; the spiritual; the academic and research-oriented; the social; the political; and then allowing the work to exist largely for the sake of one or a plurality of such thinking modes — and of course also for the rhetorical sake of the designer's message, even if it falls outside of such conjectural categories. If designers so retooled their wheelhouse, their identities as creatives would also transform. "Designer" may no longer serve to always be synonymous with "creative professional," "art director," "editor," or any of the other common, euphemistic monikers. The title may earn a new definition overlapping with *artist* or *writer* or *scholar* — or perhaps some hyphenated term would materialize.

Embracing such an approach could recast typical design output flavors, resulting in a *terra incognita* of diverse new entry points and leading to work that would define new modalities or fall between those currently known. Work of an interdisciplinary, intradisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary — *pan*disciplinary — persuasion. Such new orders of design, especially the pandisciplinary, may initially act deconstructively within already understood design bounds, but could shift to function re-constructively to assemble new design modes within, around, in support of, in contrast to, and/or in dialogue with other disciplinary perspectives. If the designer were to then also deliberately reject the commercial as the totalizing mechanism of a project or body of work, the result would not just be *non*material, which implies a passive absence, but *counter*material by virtue of existence defined by intentional negation. This negation may also be likely to occur in a more self-aware fashion than not, and so the

Opposite: detail from Duccio's Maestà *altarpiece, c. 1308/photo experiment.*

design treatment may (and probably should) aesthetically match the innovative subject matter. This shouldn't be a requirement for work to qualify as "pandisciplinary" and/or "countermaterial," as this would in some cases be overly subjective; but, to the appropriate community, an easily recognizable deconstructivist, theoretical framework would neatly conjoin with a deconstructivist visual methodology that should be just as easily recognizable. Dynamic print matter possessed of this rebellious "consciousness" and distributed outside of profit-making ends (E.G. posters characterized by expressive type and imagery made for free events or social causes) might be the most basic example of countermaterial design well in use. The dynamism of such material would set them apart from, say, examples of print matter that, while maybe also unreliant on profit, may be equally unreliant on innovative design methods. A *countermaterial* state may also indicate means of assemblage departing from typical design form to present a markedly unorthodox one. This all could greet us in a number of ways, some of which include:

A. Any multiplanar approach integrating two or more planar languages in what may be deemed an "atypical" construction as compared to common planar design convention, E.G.*

- **i.** *Two-dimensional work requiring user/audience engagement with three- and/or four-dimensional expository languages.*
- **ii.** *Three-dimensional work requiring user/audience engagement with two and/or four-dimensional expository languages.*
- **iii.** *Four-dimensional work requiring user/audience engagement with two and/or three-dimensional expository languages.*
  - **a.** *Any further such multiplanar combinations.*

B. Work built upon rhetorical deconstruction, especially such that challenges the role of the audience as "users" in their engagement with the work (E.G. complicating the "use" of visual communication modes with contrasting but integrated, expressive or artistic functionality of elements that remain coherent).

C. Speculative nonmaterial work (I.E. motion graphic, virtual reality, or holographic applications) that, while not fulfilling any current conventional use, does not seek to satisfy or postulate a use immediately analogous to already existing commercial, two-, three-, and/or four-dimensional design convention.

D. Design especially as encountered in research-oriented or academic settings (and principally those that are interdisciplinary), where the preceding applications and others can flourish in controlled creative environments, free from limitations met in the professional world. In the best cases, work made under such conditions acts barometrically for the conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical future of design.

I would also stress that these hypothetical design structures are neither entirely fictional (*speculative*) nor meant to raze the horizon at any point of tried-and-true design modes and conventions (*revolutionary*). They should suggest primarily intradisciplinary change, where older, larger design models will more than likely remain in place and dominate — at least as long as the present socioeconomic order remains (refer back to our discussion of the literary Author, *p. 57–8*). Furthermore, countermaterial and pandisciplinary design, if they were to ever more readily proliferate, may never quite escape a *definition-through-negation* because of the perpetual comparison likely to work of more standard (*commercial*) disciplinary form and content. Much of this theorized design may also not be referred to as "design" at all; but as "art," or "interdisciplinary" or "multimodal" design, at the very least. Nonetheless, if definitions of equal strength were to round out whatever "countermaterial" or "pandisciplinary" design represent, these new modes could thrive in their own self-contained spaces.

**Two-dimensional: having length and breadth but no depth (E.G. print matter).*
Three-dimensional: having length, breadth, and depth (E.G. sculptural art).
Four-dimensional: having length, breadth, depth, as well as time (E.G. film).

However, since many still only understand design when it dons the robes of profit, those already churning out the kind of work that is resistant to typical field categorization become excluded. We in turn will miss most design that is clearly informed by an Identity, that has an Author leaving their signature. Truth and Identity may be hiding in plain sight before us, belied by a predictable visual mask. Our proposed ideas hang almost like specters, further suggesting that we haven't yet stepped fully into the space where a new Identity-driven design Authorship could flourish — the "new form" mentioned earlier, one that opposes the fear that such authorship is unwelcome, that the Authorial paradigm of Truth seen in other fields is inapplicable to design. Still, we sit and stare at created images, most of them duplicitous in character, most of design still occupying an authorless realm. But this can be a rhetorical strength; as on the one hand, that the designer is trapped in a cycle of siphoned energy, of ever-relinquished authorship, of expiration with creation — sounds a constant death knell to the Author who acts as one without ever receiving such status. Through their work, the designer is *Author* but *author*, canceled out, hearing the peal of the darker bell, perceiving death, though without there ever having been life. This impossible death occurs simultaneously with creation and it completes the cycle when the product receives its finishing touches. This furthers the anonymizing of the designer addressed earlier, which we now see might as well be death. Isn't an Author made anonymous in truth sacrificing their life? Here, unlike before, the bell heard signals a circle of death-by-creation rather than some sort of divide. But Authorship nevertheless persists, as we have seen with the recent murmurs of change in the design field. This paradoxical life of the *Author/author*, though, existing as it does mostly for the sake of the commercial and alongside the incongruous death delivered by each made work, must certainly be able to be reconciled to a *non*paradoxical life — where Truth can drive the process and self-contained Authorship can emerge. The truth formerly of prevarication. A Truth drawn necessarily from Untruth.

This spread: Pexels.

To achieve this, we must break these cycles of paradox, of artifice, that keep designers in fetters, slogging the same path. These cycles — *circles* — are unlike though so similar to lines that divide. Both lack a terminus, but one separates two entities while the other spins items together through changing sameness. And how to break it? By turning back to and enforcing the division line cited earlier, that which separates the budding and heretofore more "Authored" forms of design from those that follow, unthinking, the design status quo. The "First Things First" manifesto of 1964 professed this ideal, though vaguely, and while subsequent revisions have sharpened its ethos and candor to fit how the field has evolved in the ensuing decades, its brevity still demands deeper theorization. I have attempted to present something like that here, but the truth is, directions on drawing such a division line to differentiate design of Authorship, Truth, and Identity can only be so specific. My solution rests upon generally discarding the externalist, materialist intentions that characterize the design of majority, and instead, looking inward at one's values to guide the process and outcome. It should be a humanist undertaking, yielding "a reversal of priorities in favor of the more useful and more lasting forms of communication."[36] We have already heralded examples of design of such ethos: we've touched on Dada, the avant-garde, Cranbrook, and Warhol; but there was also William Morris, the social reformist whose interdisciplinary design practice challenged the dehumanization of the Industrial Revolution; Barbara Kruger and her transdisciplinary typographic conceptualism that exists purely to be felt and interpreted; the critical, typographic irony of the 1993 *Lift and Separate* exhibition — contemporary to Kruger — at the Cooper Union; Marian Bantjes and her blend of art, design, and craft that staunchly resists categorization; and Tauba Auerbach and her deliberately pandisciplinary subversion of design languages and modes. Design that may not look or act like design. Design that may pursue a different rhetorical aim than what

36 Rick Poynor, "The Evolving Legacy of Ken Garland's First Things First Manifesto" in AIGA, 2021, par. 6. *See Endnotes for URL.*

is expected of it. Design that destabilizes the semiotic nature of its own components. Design that challenges, questions, offers unusual and novel content. Design that employs a multimodal dialogue. Design that engages with the viewer without peddling status narratives or myths of object-attainment to fulfill an ulterior motive. The design of expression, edification, and embodiment. These things are still the exception to the rule; for as the most recent, 2020 version of the "First Things First" manifesto declares, "Commercial work has always paid the bills, but ....this, in turn, is how the world perceives design."[37] When it comes to the design field's elevator pitch, money still does all the talking.

Field scholar Meredith Davis evaluates design as ready to take on further theoretical direction, opining that it is "still exploring the extent of its domain." This practice is difficult due to the field's "permeable [*boundaries*]" and its nascence when placed alongside other fields.[38] So, while its bounds remain soft, the divide we set may need to be impermeable at first to invigorate Authored design and to see precursory design Truths grow, and as we foster design Identities and our Truths mature, pores can puncture the membrane to permit multidisciplinary osmosis and to open new spaces of recognition. Work filling these new roles will and do stand in contrast to the images of artifice that will be still, like now, "forever radiant with their own fascination,"[39] but our previously sealed methods and modes will have opened a fissure inviting an "interplay of signs"[40] where the new spaces and the regions newly overlapping will present a terrain of signifiers requiring a new fabric of meaning. Because although we usually look inward to kindle meaning in our work — and indeed, this has fueled the spirit of our discussion — it is only half the story. As we have already seen, external forces shape the prizes of our inward dialectic, meaning that it is *we* who can fashion new contexts to allow for works devised of a new language to speak and be heard. For forms that will serve new uses and modes of expression. For design that will readily and regularly engage in multidirectional conversation with other fields so as to further shape creative and professional discourses, being then not only pandisciplinary and/or countermaterial, but *transdialogic*. It is hard to imagine what such work may look like or "be" beyond examples, even when it is demonstrated to have already occurred; but the realized pieces, like those we have hypothesized, will still and do stand on the fringe of design, cast as anti-normative offerings of perfunctory function and value. Some designers may intend this with their approach, but the point is that a designer should not so often feel compelled to professionally *other* themselves by engaging in unorthodox creative and rhetorical modes of expression.

It is important to note that we are arguing for the *force* of a change. If it so resonates, like a revolutionary proposition, a structuralist deconstruction, or an act of genre reengineering, it is only such as a whisper or a cry in the dark. It is an act that must be taken up with thought and precision and an indefatigable balance of independence with social workmanship. The age-old experiment of ingenuity. Then comes the push from our environment in response to the force we impose through Authorship, Identity, Truth, and so on. Maybe it is a pull — or maybe both; the push-pull of argument to action, response to reaction, leaving little more than a chicken-and-egg game for us to make of *context* and *work*. Context provides the stage for possibility as much as it can cast a shadow over and exclude new methods, but despite being an organic, time-induced force that informs the creative process, it is also human-made and in our control to affect workflows and their outcomes (*verum esse ipsum factum*, once again). The absence of Authors with Identities in much of design may then be for semantic reasons because we have failed to sufficiently craft the context to permit them. Those phantom, New-Age Hitchcocks, Woolfs, Bartheses, Eberts, *et al* may have been here with us the whole time, wandering namelessly through an ill-fitting, *acontextual* landscape. That the work of the post-Modern designers and those who follow them rings like a bell is to overcome the reverent silence afforded

37 "First Things First: A Manifesto — 2020 Edition," found via AIGA. *See Endnotes for* URL.

38 Meredith Davis, *Graphic Design Theory: Graphic Design in Context* (Thames & Hudson, 2012), 234.

39 Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 5.

40 Foucault, 300.

to image-art, literature, and film within the galleries, the museums, the libraries, and cinemas — spaces that contextualize their most famed opera in a way that contrasts with how we contextualize design. Design is a discipline whose prizes have no dedicated space to be so validated and which bear no plaques or onscreen credits giving their Author an Identity to "prove" their Truth. We may not need an exact duplication of Authorship as found in other fields, but what it could be has likely been unknowingly and paradoxically buried under convention, while we continue to operate, unaware of the possibilities that we let *temporal* creative and practical contexts overshadow. And that the question of design Authorship unveiled recent trends toward schematic new applications as well as only even newer challenges to the validity of those applications suggests transformative, unexplored frontiers for the field, even if those new landscapes will only be found as small peaks and valleys throughout a geography that may remain largely unchanged across coming periods. Those designers who alternate their steps along the division line between terrains of known and unknown contexts and who decide to ring the bell loudly enough for others to hear will be the ones who offer answers.

Opposite: PhillyBurbs.com.

Annotated bibliography spread, p. 50: Adobe Stock.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Two young men pose in costumes that conceal true identities at work: in Thomas Gainsborough's 1770 Blue Boy*, inset, it is more than likely a simple historical study using a young subject close to the artist, but Dustin Hoffman's character as Benjamin in 1967's* The Graduate *bears a much more serious cover-up to shield himself from adult expectations.*

Endnotes

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Annotated bibliography

Here is an annotated, alphabetical listing of all consulted research sources. This is to include primarily academic and literary sources, digital and physical, that I synthesized into my argument in "The Division Bell," but also into my critical approach as carried out in the documentation essay. Any material that I quoted or referenced humorously or anecdotally and which I did not critically engage is excluded.

In general, I evaluate each source's argument and relevance to my thesis and, where suitable, to design as a whole, as several sources fall well outside of design. For those non-design sources, I evaluate it from the perspective of its parent discipline while tying it back to design discourse.

1. Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." In *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard. Hill & Wang, 1986.

Like a few of the theorists I draw from, Barthes' argumentative points are highly philosophical and marked by a stream-of-consciousness expository style, rendering him perhaps too oblique for some. This also tends to be the case with Baudrillard and, at times, even Kristeva (I expound on this in the forthcoming entries). Barthes, in this essay taken from a larger collection, describes the relationship between the reader and a textual work as changeable if the latter is understood to be either *work* or *Text*: while a "work" represents a piece whose meaning is effectively imparted upon it by its maker, a "Text" (*capitalized*) is the same piece, but treated to deep critical analysis that may conflict with or depart from original artistic intention. This dichotomy manifests according to reading methods, genre, and the semiotic interpretation of language. Though requiring some participation to wrap your head around, I regard Barthes' general argument as more of a set of critical observations that can be applied to our consumption of design and how we might seek to understand unconventional or the proposed *pandisciplinary* and *countermaterial* design modes — why, how, and in what spaces, literal and figurative, they can exist, and what this ultimately says about the role and identity of a design work's Author, as well as that of the audience. Barthes, after all, speaks of language — which is not only an integral component of design, but a metaphorical corollary for the limits of conventional design exposition.

2. Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." In *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. University of Michigan Press, 1994.

In a conversation that touched briefly on Baudrillard, I once asked Natalia Ilyin what she thought of post-Modern critical theorists in general. Her waggish reply has always stuck with me. She preferred Modernist criticism, she said, her reason being: "I like to understand what I am reading." As with Barthes, this is fair, as greater theoretical objectivity — in particular as regards linguistics and literary genre studies — will likely never be outmoded. However, like Barthes, Baudrillard's sharp though impressionistic analysis in this excerpted chapter can be easily transposed to a design context (His argument in the neighboring chapters frequently loses me; in particular, the three-page entry titled "Holocaust," which, to me, demands further explanation of its assessment that the titular event was primarily a "televised object"). To Baudrillard, modern society is a consumerist playground fueled by *simulacra*, or ideas and narratives serving little to no practical purpose that we nevertheless cling to and chase. This is diametrically opposed to earlier societies, and what's more, capitalism only seems to increase the bounds of our fabricated environs with each generation. Design, in its dominant, commercial form, is a key piece to this sociocultural equation. These concepts also furthered my conception of creative identity that, in design especially, could be fashioned out of its inherent performative artifice in more expressive applications. And though Baudrillard is primarily known for the idea of *simulacra*, he lifted it from the Roman philosopher Lucretius, in whose doctrine of images it plays a key role. Baudrillard, however, gives a more nuanced and modern application of the idea for us to sink our teeth into.

3. Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict. Verso, 2020.

This work is a quasi-scientific, somewhat *proto-post-Modern* treatise on consumer culture that anticipates the author's preceding text. It is based on his 1968 doctoral thesis, and I can just see the Sorbonne faculty furrowing a collective brow over his meticulous cataloging and categorizing of the sundry items that fill our living and working spaces, all forming the

basis of a nascent critical theory to Western social and consumer culture. I chiefly rely on Baudrillard's concept of *simulacra* in my text and only momentarily pull from this work to deepen my critique of design commercialism. Additionally, while Baudrillard's previous source represents an especially compelling post-Modernist/post-Structuralist take on consumer culture, I view this second work as sort of an extended footnote with a less captivating and more pedantic argumentative approach. Nevertheless, its concern with art, décor, product design, and industrial design would make it a thought-provoking basis for a theoretical survey of the more commercial realms of design (or, the opposite of this thesis).

4. **Davis, Glyn. "Authorship." In *Far from Heaven*. Edinburgh University Press, 2011.**

One of a few texts from the fields of film theory and criticism examining either the auteur approach or its ramifications on our artistic understanding of cinema. Davis is primarily concerned with indie and queer film in the book from which this chapter is taken, but in this excerpt, he touches on the auteur approach to film in general — something that is typically ascribed to giants like Hitchcock in the context of critical film retrospectives. According to Davis, our understanding of the merit and artistry of film changes with prevailing rhetorical and aesthetic cultural values, and as such, he is astutely critical of auteurship. I apply this perspective in my exploration of the filmic Author within the larger discourse of creative authorship and identity and how we are to harmonize these ideas within design. Davis gives worthy depth to queer cinematic authorship, and his argument is elastic enough to facilitate applications outside of film.

5. **Davis, Meredith. *Graphic Design Theory: Graphic Design in Context*. Thames & Hudson, 2012.**

The versatile Meredith Davis gives us a survey of the historical and conceptual reaches of design that I just had to use for at least one argumentative point — and indeed, I only once directly cited her text. Davis' relation of other disciplines relevant to design in its various incarnations holds almost encyclopedic significance for the designer, in particular one

interested in postgraduate study. This and her willingness to address the somewhat uncharted territory that characterizes much of design's future were my primary reasons for synthesizing her research. My only criticism is that she could perhaps have been a bit more thorough and beefed up her history with more typography as well as her predictions to include speculative design and design futures — the latter of which were already established critical pathways in 2012, the year the book was published. However, that may have pushed things too far into the weeds, as Davis' writing tone suggests a more general design audience that includes everyone from the second-year college student to the seasoned university educator.

6. **Elkins, James. "What Is an Image?" In *The Stone Art Theory Institutes* 2. Penn State University Press, 2011.**

This is an excerpted text from a much larger work based on seminars on theories of image, content which overlaps with another, earlier work by Elkins titled *The Domain of Images*. It is included not so much for its larger argument, but for Elkins' quick summary of image theories as they presently exist (as far as image theory goes, 2011 — the year this work was published — does not yet, in my view, denote a passé era) and how this supplements my Baudrillardian handling of commercial design. His notion of the "visuality" of late-capitalistic culture was especially valuable here. He applies the concept in depth in his *Domain of Images* treatise to engender in art history and various visual-aesthetic theories a more pluralistic conceptual purview, though I did not end up extracting much from that work for use in my thesis. It was quite an involved read, and I was, at the very least, influenced by Elkins' agile though heavily academic writing style.

7. **Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, translated by Donald F. Bouchard & Sherry Simon. Cornell University Press, 1977.**

Foucault, like Baudrillard and Barthes, represents a key player behind my thesis writing. This text was delivered as a lecture in 1969, and several works I incorporate into my research appeared at or around this cultural moment (and are all the offspring of French post-Modern scholars). In this writing,

Foucault theorizes an external arena in which he viewed authors (or "Authors," as in my formulation) as having begun to occupy in the West by the late sixties, an arena where the meaning of their work took shape more so from the critical interpretations of others than from what could be viewed as the author's "intent." This work is popularly viewed as a response to Barthes' 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," and Foucault even equates the act of writing with death in this work as a metaphor for the "exterior deployment" that he views modern reading practices require of an author's writing subject. I find it to be a somewhat brilliant interpretation of a creative act, and I directly borrowed it in my fractionation of the *Author* when considered as a designer who suffers death by anonymity in most commercial work, losing their identity and becoming instead an *author* in discoursal lowercase. Both Barthes and Foucault are primarily concerned with literature, but as their ideas reach such "deconstructive" heights, I find it easy to apply them to design, especially in what I term a "deconstructivist" context. I also can't help but wonder if Barthes' "From Work to Text" was influenced by this work by Foucault, as Barthes' deconstruction of literary analysis rests so easily next to Foucault's deconstruction of the sociocontextual "function" of the author.

8. **Hitchcock, Alfred. *Hitchcock/Truffaut*. Interview by François Truffaut. Faber & Faber Ltd., 1966, 2017 printing.**

   In this in-depth interview with director Alfred Hitchcock, contemporary director François Truffaut draws out some fascinating firsthand critical opinions from his subject. This source is mainly interesting to film buffs and those wishing to steep themselves in film theory, and I draw from it as a loose inspirational referent which led to the filmic component of my thesis. Hitchcock's auteur approach to filmmaking rested on a highly efficient methodology in which all visual and aural elements were to be essential to the plot. In Hitchcock's view, silent cinema thrived on such an idea, as it was not bogged down by needless dialogue or trivial visual exposition that did little to advance the plot. I attempt to apply this idea in my thesis film, where I present "essential" visual-communicative elements to express ideas of identity, artifice, and creative self-determination, among others.

9. **Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection." In the *Oxford Literary Review*, translated by John Lechte. Edinburgh University Press, 1982.**

   This text, which I made use of only in my first-semester work in the program, represents ideas that resurfaced to a small degree in my later work, including my thesis. I also wish to mention it out of its conceptual adjacency to the texts that became integral to the development of my thesis. It is an excerpted portion from Kristeva's fascinating, book-length exploration of the rhetorical function of the abject and themes of horror in the arts, titled *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (*Powers of Horror*). Kristeva studied under Barthes in the sixties, and her writing at times parallels his thinking, most directly in her focus on literature and semiotics. Her approach to the "signified" comprises a symbolic root that echoes my own interest in deliberate rhetorical ambiguity as a creative tool, and this aspect factors into my filmic approach, though taken as it also is from the opposite sort of intentionalist creative method of Hitchcock. Kristeva, importantly, can very much be described as a post-Modernist or post-Structuralist; Hitchcock, by contrast, is the absolute pinnacle of Modernism. I have not fully explored her philosophy as deeply as I would like; I feel that her challenging and dissecting of the creative subject could be valuable in applications of design in which the designer seeks to similarly challenge the role and identity of the audience as the "user" of the design work.

10. **Lewis, C.S. *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 1961.**

    Lewis, for better or for worse, anticipated methodologies like those of Barthes, Foucault, and Kristeva in his own critical writing. While his classification of readers as either "literary" or "unliterary" begs questions of a false dichotomy at work, his criticism of separating art into the "high-" and "lowbrow" as creative oversimplification still holds weight. This is especially true regarding design and the place it seemingly continues to occupy below the other creative fields in the artistic hierarchy, and for the increasingly elevated role that I theorize it could assume more widely

in society and in culture as its conceptual and rhetorical shape continues to transform. Lewis' argument about the importance of interpretive measurement in literary analysis and criticism also factored into my historical study of the literary Author in relation to that of design.

11. **Lin, Szu-Yen. "Art and Interpretation." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, 2024.**

    Lin gives an accessible outline of the dominant critical approaches in the visual arts to interpreting meaning, and it is quite useful if one desires a dearth of information but does not want to read a book or book-length essay. I could not use this source on its own, as it was a little too lean, so I used it along with another source cited later to cull complementary information to my sources of *literary* interpretive meaning. I would ultimately find the ideas from the latter field more compelling as a shell for my own theorized role of the design Author than those I discovered in art historical criticism, as critical texts seem to profess more passionate, biting deductions on the literary Author than in the same sort of writing concerning the visual artist, or Author of *image-art*. This may be because interpretive semantics is more controversial in literature than in image-art, where it is sort of an expected activity in the "externalization" of a piece. I meditate briefly on this difference in my writing.

12. **Pater, Ruben. *Caps Lock: How Capitalism Took Hold of Graphic Design, and How to Escape from It*. Valiz, 2021.**

    Ruben's book eviscerates design's commercialist ethos from a dutifully researched though agenda-driven perspective. Ruben gives a disclaimer to this effect at the outset, so anyone who finds his writing to be overly biased missed the introduction and the point of his work. His was among the few texts I found that offered an array of solutions on how designers can break free from the profit-driven standards of their field. This partly inspired the solutions that I propose in my own text while serving as a basis for the critique of design's social function that I also advance. And though Ruben's book had great use in this regard, the text's myriad typographical errors somewhat impugn his credibility as a design researcher.

13. **Poynor, Rick. "The Evolving Legacy of Ken Garland's First Things First Manifesto." In *AIGA*, 2021**
    & "First Things First: A Manifesto — 2020 Edition," found via *AIGA*.

    Garland's original 1963–4 "First Things First" manifesto has gone through a handful of iterations over the years, with the most recent version appearing in 2020. This latest version was linked in this source, and I also drew from it, but the later text is billed as a "living document" and given no direct writing credit. The original manifesto is very much a product of its times in the general trends it chides, while some of the more ethical undertakings it suggests for designers, while not only being slightly vague, have also grown quaint with age (it encourages "signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogues, instructional manuals, industrial photography"). The 2020 manifesto updates the situation with buzz phrases like "fast fashion" and "social justice," and though this suggests that such a call-to-arms can still be relevant, it, like its earlier incarnation, is almost insultingly short, inadvertently reinforcing the stereotype that design practice is a shallow business. I suppose my thesis is something of a "smart" version of the manifesto (I chuckle as I write this). The inclusion of both is, as can be guessed, for good measure with respect to the socioethical and philosophical design debates already taking place. Additionally, the first manifesto's significance mirrors the Sontag source, cited at the end of this bibliography as another "time-capsule" piece.

14. **Rafalko, Jessica. "'Auteur, Schmauteur,' and Other Such Eloquent Musings on the Different Critical Frameworks Offered by Pauline Kael and Peter Wollen." *The Ohio State University*, 2016.**

    One of the other texts concerned with the auteur theory in filmmaking; and a highly critical one at that, prioritizing the opinions of the late, great Pauline Kael, among cinema's most exacting critics (seek out her writing, especially for how it contrasted with the likes of Ebert). Here, Rafalko celebrates Kael's more "artful" approach, arguing that Kael's enthusiastic brand of criticism was (*is*) a necessary adjunct to the dissemination of a director's vision. This dynamic renders the auteur approach, in Rafalko's words, "impossible." I drew from this source mainly to give brief context

to the history of film auteurship in the larger conversation of creative authorship and identity. Rafalko's article clocks in at 1,200 words, but her effective synthesis of her own thoughts with those of Kael and Wollen, her other person of interest, left me yearning for a more involved work on auteur theory and film criticism. Further research uncovered that she is currently a PHD candidate in English at Penn State.

15. **Ramanathan, Geetha. "Ambiguities of Auteurship." In *Kathleen Collins: The Black Essai Film*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.**

In this excerpted chapter of a highly focused book spotlighting the positive contributions of filmmaker Kathleen Collins to African American cinema, Ramanathan explores the practice of auteurship in a new context informed by race and gender identity. I reference her assessment of her titular subject's vision to act as counterpoint to the better-known, old-hat conceptions of auteur cinema and to illustrate that perhaps the paradigm can work in service of different, more relevant authorial intentions in modern creative contexts. Ramanathan snappily covers swaths of intellectual ground in analyzing only two films in well over a hundred pages; like with Rafalko, I was interested to read more on similar subjects.

16. **Rock, Michael. "Designer as Author." In *2x4 Studio*. Originally published 1996.**

I found Rock's article to be quite thought-provoking, so much so that I framed my written thesis largely according to the paradigm of creative authorship as he introduces it. I frequently synthesize his argumentative points in my writing, engaging his thoughts extensively despite the brevity of his text. Ultimately, however, I disagree with Rock for his dismissal of the design Author as something incongruous to the field for how he feels it to be bound by outmoded, Modernist conceptions. I view the design Author as something that very much can exist, and according to recent and emerging trends in defining authorship as well as in the more traditional form that Rock decries. I think it mostly depends on how one views the significance of the Author and related ideas of creative identity in the making and understanding of a work; and as this relationship is still tenuous in design (and of course I feel that it is — otherwise, I wouldn't have put this thesis together), I view my disagreement with Rock as somewhat subjective. His writing, though, holds great critical value to me for how intricately it worked its way into my own argument. I think designers would benefit from reading it as they develop their own critical perceptions of authorship and authorial identity, and I have Silas Munro to thank for introducing me to it, along with a bevy of other design works and texts.

17. **Silverman, Hugh. "Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art: Aesthetics — Then and Now." In the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, NO. 2. Penn State University Press, 2012.**

I used this text to provide additional context to the history of interpretive methodologies in the visual arts — chiefly to supplement Lin's writing, which, while precise, lacked that unique theoretical voice. Silverman investigates how deriving meaning in art has changed since the sixties, unpacking how each decade delivers new influences from old disciplines, in particular several linguistic and philosophical schools (indeed, he does not avoid mentioning Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, or *simulacra*). The result is a reference-heavy work that parallels the line drawn from Barthes to Foucault, to Kristeva, and to Baudrillard (in an only slightly particular order) that further fleshed out my investigation into design authorship and identity as tied to externalized meaning. While reading this, I was also reminded of Charles Jenck's essay, "What Then Is Post-Modernism?" that so casually synthesizes the pluralism of critical theories within architecture. That piece was one text of many that I picked up, pored over, even drafted notes on — but which never made it into my thesis.

18. **Skinner, Quentin. "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas." In *History and Theory* 8, NO. 1. Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1969.**

Though I spent three or four work lunches reading this entire essay, it was only marginally useful as an echo of Foucault and Barthes in how the role of the author — in this case, a distinctly *literary* author — changed in the twentieth century. Skinner's methodology, though important, is unlike

many of the thinkers I synthesized into my thesis, as it cannot be easily detached from its parent disciplines of literary theory and historiography. Despite this, he leaves almost no stone unturned in examining our collective and individual biases that tend to invade the practice of reading and so often complicate notions of *context*.

19. Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp.'" In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject — A Reader*. University of Michigan Press, 1999.

I love pieces like Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'" — witty, pithy, and intelligently concerned with pop culture. All things that, to me, get better with age (she penned the text in 1964). While writing my thesis, it was initially only a peripheral source of interest; in dull moments, it would revive my creativity after I would research one thing or another that Sontag had casually labeled as "camp" but the immediacy of which had been lost to time. Later, however, it came to contribute — much like Baudrillard's writing did — to my understanding of a cyclical, performative artifice in design that stems from its parent social culture, a concept that I think can be harnessed to extract exciting results pertaining to authorship and creative identity in design. Sontag's writing also enforces a related and cherished notion of mine: that there really is nothing new under the sun.