

# BOOK REVIEW

The best places to go for stretching your mind in the world of commercial editoiral magazine design...

## POSITONING A POSITION

I will interrogate deeply, rigorously and systematically female representation and patriarchy within commercial editorial magazine design, through hybrid editorial practices of print and digital commercial editorial magazine design. I will look to see how one informs the other in discipline, by investigating hybridisation through studio practice of print and digital commercial editorial magazine design. Exploring form, format and medium. I will further this positoin through studio practice of graphic communication design of commerical editorial magazine design, with a focus on affordance and perception to uncover new knowledge on female representation and underlying patriarchy within commercial editorial magazine design.

reviews | bibliography



## YOU DANCING? YOU ASKIN’?

DESIGN THEORY TO GO, Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl

THE MOST MUNDANE cover hides an array of treats. We loved the complexity of ‘affordance’ that Poggenpohl defines in the context of the psychologist Gibson, who coined the term through an ecological approach to “human-environment relationships, stating that they co-evolve; we work on the environment and the environment works on us”.

Say whaaaaat?

Although Poggenpohl’s examples are of objects designed to function, the theory can be applied to editorial design; in this instance the human-environment relationship and the co-evolution of the cover of the magazine. It makes you think about the human (art director/editor or reader), the environment (where and how magazines are published/distributed), and how one affects the other, something I would not have considered prior to reading this.

It really makes you think when she notes, “The natural and artificial environments are related yet people increasingly live in the artificial, created by design to serve human purpose and desire.” Questioning the environments we choose to live in and how greatly they permeate our space and ourselves is a spooky reflection, for self reflection, not only of our habits, but also how we live our lives, where and why. The focus on human desire is also a bit uncomfortable. It’s time to get the mirror out. Poggenpohl, S. H. (2018). Design theory to go. Estes Park, Colorado: Ligature Press.

ESTHER HUNZIKER



From left to right:

The very dry/dull cover of Design Theory to Go, Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl

Vogue Cover Creatures, a audio-visual collage by Swiss artist Esther Hunziker.

## VOGUE

VOGUE COVER CREATURES, Esther Hunziker

ESTHER HUNZIKER uses graphic communication design to visually and aurally comment on the magazine industry’s preoccupation with beauty and elegance. Through her project Vogue Cover Creatures Hunziker cleverly takes static Vogue magazine covers and injects aliens or monsters, with movement and sound, to alter the meaning and subvert the cover. The monster or alien is cleverly visually connected in texture, colour, shape or form to the cover models head/upper body. The quotes or sounds they exude provoke social and political contemplation on the entertainment industry and popular culture. Elevating the static cover to incorporate sound and language interestingly communicates far more than a static newsstand cover, and is an interesting provocation to digital magazine covers in general.

There is strong irony that lies within the ‘beautiful’ cover models being rendered ugly by the subversion of the image. Covering the face in all instances draws focus to what remains of the model, explicitly exposing the breasts, stick thin legs and/or couture.

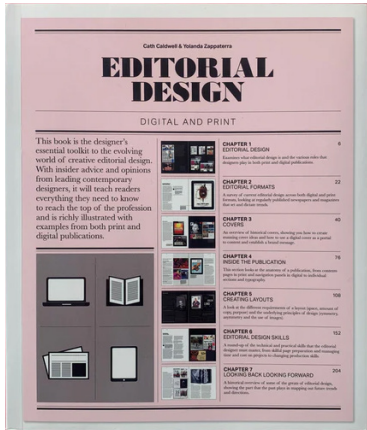
Further irony lies within the ‘fantasy’ monsters speaking lines that resonate deeply. They speak more ‘truth’ (and are more interesting and intriguing), than the cover lines, despite the cover lines being situated in the ‘real’ world.

Subverting popular culture through graphic communication design and satire are themes that have arisen before, Adbusters for example, as has the question of what is ‘real’. Both themes warrant further exploration.

Hunziker, E. (2022) Vogue Cover Creatures. Available at: <https://electrfd.net/vogue.html> (Accessed: 29th April 2024)



This page  
Left: Editorial Design by two lovely ladies, Cath Caldwell and Yolanda Zappaterra  
Right: Adbusters, issue 28, Desire, 2013. Read it. And all the others.



**LIKE THIS, YOU’LL LOVE THIS.**  
EDITORIAL DESIGN, Cath Caldwell and Yolanda Zappaterra

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in what every website you ever click on, every app you ever use and every interaction you ever have online really means, this is the book for you.

Caldwell and Zappaterra discuss digital editorial design in the chapter on Covers, (Editorial Design, 2017), where they summarise the digital ‘personalisation’ of content:

“Aggregated content was designed to flow into the reader’s choice of format... The idea was that the reader’s history of internet searches and data profile generated content pulled from various sources that was just right for him or her.”

This strikes me as far from ‘just right’. This homogenisation of content renders multifaceted humans into pigeon holes of ‘types’. How can humans continue to grow and be rounded if they are spoon fed the same content about the same things. Who do you know who likes ‘just one thing’? Jencks and Silver support this view in their position of ‘pluralism’ and how “large corporations standardise and limit our choice” (Jencks and Silver, 2018). Equally algorithms “standardise and limit our choice”. I think we kind of all know this in the digital world, but we all do it anyway, which really questions humanity? Which leads me to ask (shocked face), do newsstand magazines also do this?

Caldwell, C. and Zappaterra, Y. (2014). Editorial Design. Laurence King Publishing.



**WHO YOU GONNA CALL... ADBUSTERS!**  
ADBUSTERS, Kalle Lasn

NOT A BOOK, but a magazine. Adbusters is a not-for-profit counter-culture magazine based in Canada that specialises in “culture-jamming”. It is a totality of its statement. As Zappaterra elegantly articulates, “While Adbusters’ incisive, intelligent and acerbic content, incorporating philosophical features and international activist news and commentary... its design ethos shows a complimentary strength and originality that makes it as compelling as the content” (Zappaterra, 2002). Visually challenging the ‘norms’ of editorial magazine design (words fall off the edges of pages, they “did away” with the contents page as it interrupted the “flow” and they “don’t pay much attention to the grid”(Dixon, 2002), which co-evolve with the content, that challenges the ‘norms’ of society, all presented in a pretty standard print format of a magazine. The standard format feels at odds with the content and the context, but is it this that holds the informal structure together as a ‘magazine’? As Jencks and Silver say, you need “enough of the old to accept the new” (Jencks and Silver, 2018) in their theory on Adhocism.

Editor Kalle Lasn describes Adbusters as “ an ecological magazine, dedicated to examining the relationship between human beings and their physical and mental environment” which is interestingly concurrent with Poggenpohls premise of affordance... Read it. Lots.

Lasn, K. (2000) ‘Letters’, Adbusters, Issue No. 28, Page 4-8.



**DESIRE-ABLE**  
TOWARDS A CRITICAL FACULTY, Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey

IN TOWARDS A CRITICAL FACULTY IT STATES:

“The role of designers has rotated 180° from solving problems to creating desires”.

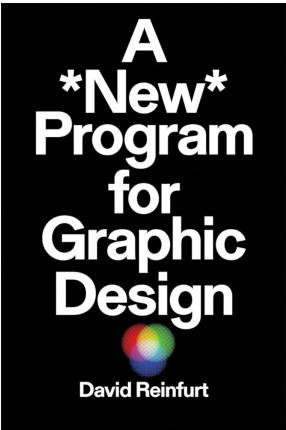
Whereas the role of designer was once to create a useful form, such as a chair, this quote suggests graphic communication design is often now seen as a deceptive tool to sell unneeded products to unfulfilled humans. It places blame with the designer who designs to make things desirable. This is a conflicting self-reflection and challenges all designer to what their purpose is.

It continues:

“Millennial culture is characterised by how it wants to project itself. How it wants to appear to be rather than just being what it is, and this gap between appearance and actuality is getting bigger”

Has our graphically communicated design world saturated humans so deeply that we are in part responsible for this façade/interface/translation/iteration of ourselves that we project. Are magazines in part responsible for iterating repeatedly flawless images of selves that we subconsciously strive to be? Has the digital space advanced this form through iteration through ‘real’ people making it appear like it’s the norm and indeed ‘real’? Do we know this is happening?

servinglibrary.org. (n.d.). ‘Towards a Critical Faculty’ The Serving Library. [online] Available at: <https://www.servinglibrary.org/> [Accessed 15 September 2023].



**FACE THE MUSIC**  
INTERFACE, A NEW PROGRAM FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN, David Reinfert

REINFERT TELLS the wonderful story of Adriano Olivetti and his approach to design of the typewriter. Within this critique I find challenges about commercial editorial design. Olivetti stated that design is for “social good” whilst computers are of “commercial good: Machines and humans are hostile to one another... Use a machine too long and adopt a mindset of it”

We use machines for everything now, are we adapting their mindset? How can we investigate this further? Olivetti’s humanistic approach to humans and environments carried through to his thinking on technology. He built a factory to “look at the alps” so the workforce would be happy. He believes in “creating things that will enrich society rather than feed off it”.

I love this ethos and value system, but it makes me question magazines content and context. Do commercial magazines enrich society, or does it feed off of it? How does graphic communication design play a part in this toxic and symbiotic relationship? How can graphic communication design address this toxicity and redress the balance?

Reinfurt, D. (2019). ‘I-N-T-E-R-F-A-C-E’, A \*new\* program for graphic design. Los Angeles: Inventory Press; New York, Ny.

This page:  
Left: Towards a Critical Faculty, a pamphlet, not a book at all.  
Right: A New Program for Graphic Design, David Reinfert. LOTS of ideas to ruminate on.