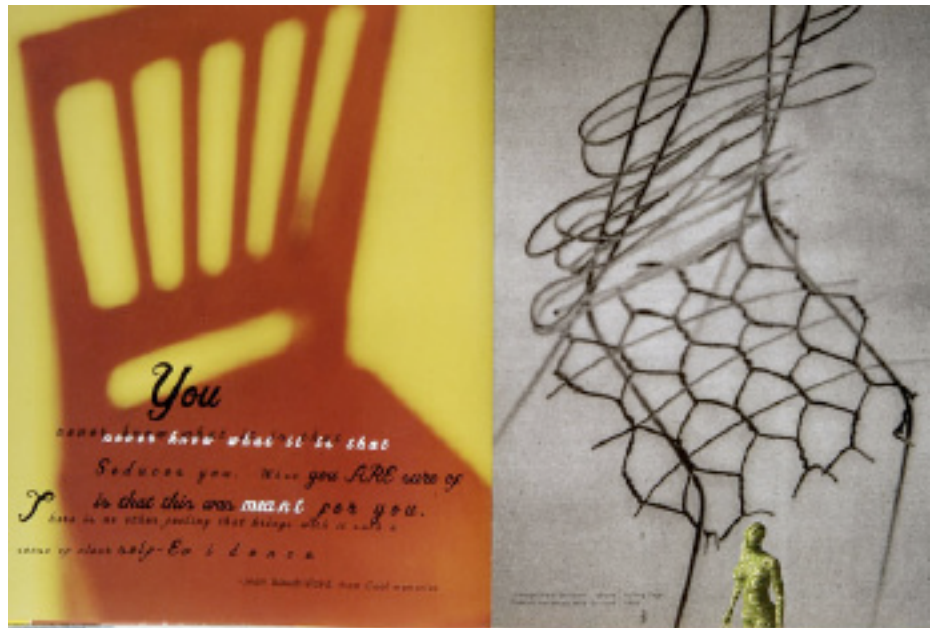


GR M10 Module 6: Are We Approaching the End of Print?



David Carson's book "The End of Print" (Chronicle Books, 1995) has been sold in over 150 000 copies so far, which makes it the best-selling graphic design book of all time. It has established Carson as the most influential graphic designer of the decade. This week we will focus on Carson's work. Discussion about his innovative editorial design will bridge our previous topic - abstract expressionism with our next topic - typography. Here is a brief selection of the comments to this book:

"During the 1990s, no designer has been lauded and damned more than David Carson. The reaction to him has split along generational lines, with students and young designers responsive to his work and imitating it, and many older designers and critics dismissing it. Unfortunately for the more rabid critics, Carson's work and influence just won't go away. He has moved from designing small-circulation cult



magazines, notably Beach Culture and Ray Gun, into mainstream mass media. Recent projects include print graphics for Levi's; ads for Nike and Pepsi; and television assignments..." Philip Meggs (Print magazine, 1996)

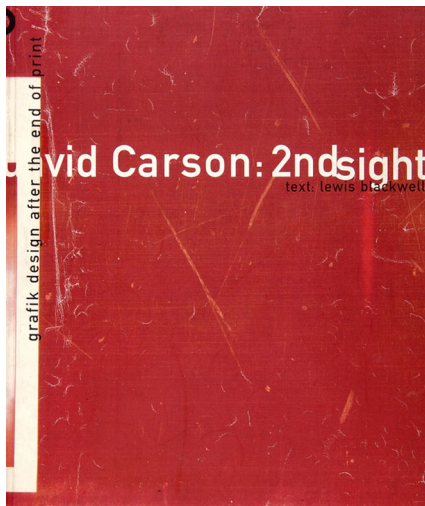
"David's work communicates. But on a level beyond words. On a level that bypasses the logical, rational centers of the brain and goes straight to the part that understands without thinking. In this way it works just like music does-slipping in there before anyone has a chance to stop it at the border and ask for papers.<< David Byrne - Introduction to The End of Print: The Graphic Design Of David Carson, Chronicle Books, 1995 (<http://www.davidcarsondesign.com/?dcdc=top/t>)



“To justify his typographic aerobics on the page, Carson often refers to the changing reading habits of the audience and borrows from the theory that if you engage the readers and make them work at decoding the text, they will better remember what they read. Granted, it did take me quite a bit of work to figure out that the sentences in the essay needed to be read from bottom to top. But what I end up remembering about the essay is not so much what I read, but how difficult it was to read it at all. This type of work, as Andrew Blauvelt suggests, has less to do with redefining the notion of readability or literacy than with creating product differentiation and establishing the expressive personal style of the designer.” Rudy VanderLans “Graphic Design and the Next Big Thing”, *Emigre* 39, 1996
(<http://www.emigre.com/Editorial.php?sect=1&id=15>)



“Desperate seekers of Carson’s philosophy will no doubt turn first to the interview with the book’s author, Lewis Blackwell, that is found at the book’s center and titled “The Venice Conversation.” While the title’s dim echo of “The Geneva Conventions” or “The Helsinki Accords” suggests historic import, in truth it resembles Carson’s now-notorious interview with Rudy Vanderlans in *Emigre* #27 in that the interviewer’s questions at times seem as long or longer than the subject’s responses. There, one learns in time that Carson’s ideology boils down to two simple convictions.



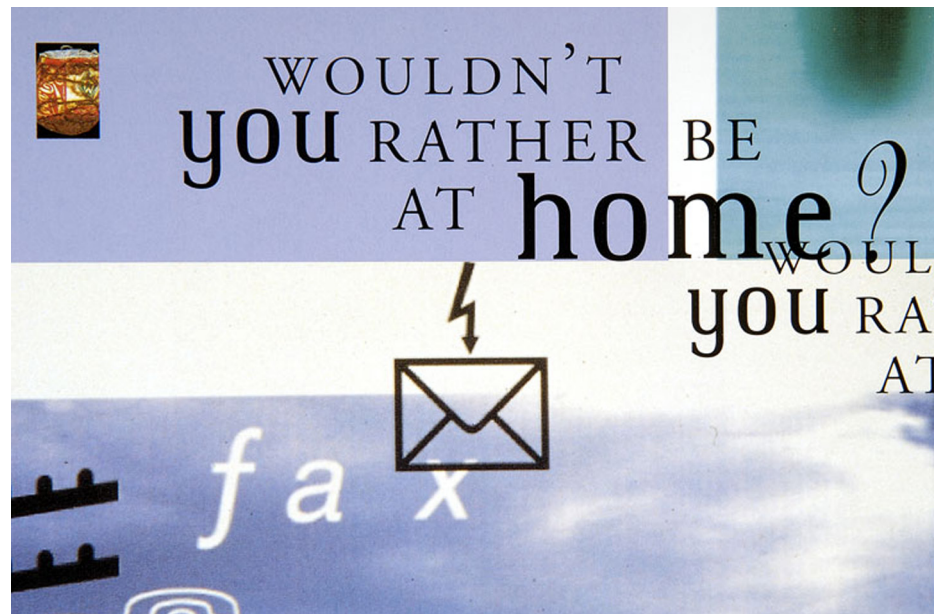
First, never do the same thing twice. “My big training,” Carson tells Blackwell, “was on Transworld Skateboarding magazine: 200 pages full-color every month, and I had this personal thing that told me that if I was going to get something out of it, grow in myself, then I couldn’t repeat myself. I always had to do something different. I never used the same approach for any two openers.” Indeed, a perusal of the captions in *The End of Print* (which on the whole are the best part of the book) finds Carson marking milestones with the pride of a parent recording an infant’s early steps: “First use of forced justification.” “This was the issue that first dropped page numbers.” “The first time in magazine history that an inside story jumped to continue on the front cover.” While the quest for novelty may constitute a questionable design approach, executed with Carson’s virtuosity it succeeds as an end in itself.



On the other hand, the second component of Carson’s approach would be reassuringly familiar to any designer from the “big idea” school: “Things are only done,” he says, “when they seem appropriate.” Surveyed as a whole, it’s surprising how many of the spreads have old-fashioned visual puns as their starting points: from the



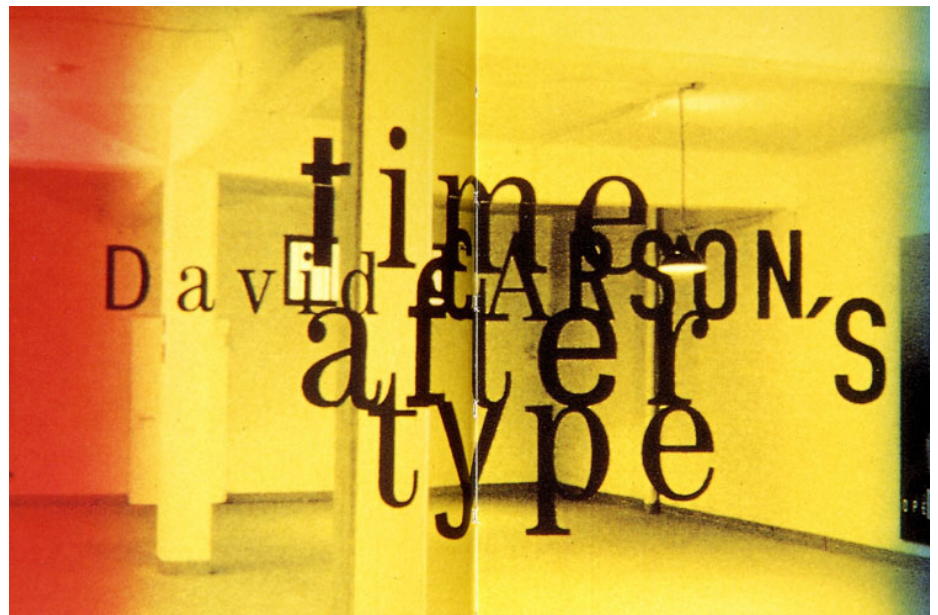
early all-black spread that opened the story “Surfing Blind” in Beach Culture to the three-point body copy used in Ray Gun for a story on the band Extra Large. Contrary to the book’s title, these are literate strategies that one senses wouldn’t seem all that foreign to the likes of Robert Brownjohn.” Michael Bierut “Reports of Its End Have Been Exaggerated”, Eye Magazine, 1996 (<http://www.typotheque.com/site/article.php?id=22>)



“David Carson is the only original designer since the Bauhaus. His work breaks the mold of the ever increasingly boring grids. Enough can’t be said for his contributions to print, type, and web design. He is in a class by himself. Yes, there alot of wannabes now. But it all started with Carson. It is seldom that there is a true original, especially in the tight laced world of graphics. He is the singular, groundbreaking designer that changed the face of things.” Michael Trossman (Forget about the Bauhaus, Amazon. com Spotlight Reviews, 2004)



“Adobe.com: You mentioned “The End of Print.” How is the second edition going?
 Carson: I had a standing joke when the book first came out: If I had any idea it was going to sell, I would have made a much better book. I really had no idea. Even so, I think it’s held up pretty well. However, I wanted to add some work to the new edition that was good but didn’t get in the first edition. So I went back and revisited my old issues of Raygun and Beach Culture and I was struck with how many bad pages there were, especially in Raygun. I’m not too surprised in a sense, because for me the more successful magazine (and the one that holds up better) is Beach Culture. I think I’m happier with those six issues as a complete work, probably more than any single issue of Raygun. It’s also all I was doing at that time. So Beach Culture holds up pretty well, but with Raygun, god, there were a lot of really bad pages.” Joe Shepter’s interview with David Carson, 2006 (<http://www.adobe.com/ap/web/features/carson>)



I would also like to recommend the article “Sticks and Stones Can Break My Bones but Print Can Never Hurt Me: A Letter to Fiona on First Reading The End of Print” by Jessica Helfand (http://www.typeculture.com/academic_resource/articles_essays/pdfs/tc_article_10.pdf)



*Visual examples are from David Carson’s books The End of Print, 2nd Sight (http://www.typogabor.com/David_Carson/index.html) and Fotografiks (http://www.gingko-press.com/_zine/carson/0gal0.htm).

EXERCISE:

In the following exercise you will discuss aesthetics, message, meaning, and expressive value of one of the Carson’s spreads.

1. Visit http://www.typogabor.com/David_Carson/index.html and select one David Carson’s spread (2 page layout) from the book “2nd Sight”
2. In this Module you will find the quotes from the articles about David Carson written by Philip Meggs, David Byrne, Rudy VanderLans, Michael Bierut, and Jessica Helfand,

as well as the links to these articles. Read the articles/interviews.

3. Use the Modules One-Six and the articles from Module Six, as your reference and answer the following questions:

1. Is this spread an example of art or graphic design and why?
2. Why do you find it beautiful or ugly?
3. How does it communicate and what does it say?
4. Is it abstract or realistic?
5. What kind of emotions does it express or convey?
6. Present one statement about Carson's work from the articles that you agree with, and one that you disagree with. and explain your choice.