Florian Brody & Sarah Anastasia Hahn

Tabula Rasa

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Tabula Rasa

Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo,
ponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.

The golden age was first; when Man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew,
And, with a native bent, did good pursue.
Unforc'd by punishment, un-aw'd by fear,
His words were simple, and his soul sincere.

— OVID, *Metamorphoses, book I, Ætas aurea*; translated into
English verse under the direction of Sir Samuel Garth, 1717.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF DESIGN is neither gone, nor has it arrived: observing the desktop-publishing disasters on one side and the incredible potential of digital design tools on the other, we investigate the relations between digital media-both as a creative tool and as delivery medium-and design. By combining the grids of the Golden Mean with the layering capabilities of digital design software, we aim to understand the way design communicates in new media and how the wisdom of traditional forms can be integrated into a dynamic non-linear form. We need to break up the old structures-as gently as possible-and to leave space for new forms to grow within both new and traditional media.

Being on the cutting edge is always somewhat unstable—one longs for it, like traces of a strange and sweet scent that is also repulsive like the smell of decay. One follows the scent unconsciously, embarrassed and not even admitting the attraction to oneself. Looking for the "other," the unknown, is necessarily an outside view, a view from abroad, a process of observing, never a state of being. Cutting-edge design is always an investigation into form, structure, and function-like children cutting open their favorite teddy bear to find the underlying structure beneath a perfect surface. There is something very aesthetically clean about surgery, about a perfect cut that reveals a fresh emotion glittering in the sunlight like seaweed on wet sand.

Are we advancing in design because of advances in technology? Is cutting-edge design necessarily connected to state-of-the-art technology? If yes, what is the state-of-the-art of design? It is not the computer that initiates cutting-edge design but the social and cultural shifts implied by its usage. Understand the technological implications of a new medium, work within the given limitations and at the same time break the rules that have not yet been fully established.

We need to go much further. SCHŒNGEIST™, a conceptual model for design, integrates old and new elements. "The image of man in the 21st century needs to be shown with enough clarity to allow man to recognize and learn about himself and life in the new century." (Wim Wenders, TOKYO-GA, A Filmed Diary, 1995) SCHŒNGEIST ™ as the Æsthete—the one, who longs for life, who wants to love, to be loved, creating the æsthetics of media and of this world—is the underlying concept for a design sensibility that integrates traditional and digital dynamic media, their grids, rules, and their potentials by offeringing emotional bandwidth: this yearning for something more that life may have to offer.

> Moreover, people want to feel and touch, to hold in their hands, to smell, to see, to leaf through, to experience with all their senses. Electronic publications must somehow rise to this challenge, bring content to life, perhaps even developing innovative sense-experiences in the new media, a kind of touching with the eyes. (F. Brody)

The cornucopia-phenomenon is very tempting: rather than making clear decisions and limiting for and content according to rules, everything is poured out at once and despite great ingredients, the result is unimpressive. We are confronted with an empty design sensation, which is similar to what we see when pressing our fingers on our eyelids to achieve that tingling firework in the dark, a kaleidoscopic vision of something vibrating and confusing. How would all the colors, multiple layers and type elements sound if they were suddenly transposed into an acoustic experience? We would hear a disharmonic piece of music whose seismic quality would reflect the visual layers as they tumble over each other like the surf on a windy summer day on the beach.

Looking at the graphic designs of the nineties, it seems as if "Cutting Edge Design" is fast becoming a particular, raw and improvised-looking style, but the true power of cutting-edge design to irritate, enchant, and mesmerize is always about daring to look beyond the world of established print and "new" media.

Despite promises made by hardware manufacturers, design is not as easy as point-and-click, and using new software tools for design is not necessarily easier than using the common and ubiquitous pencil, thus the many casualties at the cutting edge of design. — THE MEDIUM IS THE MEMORY™': No longer is the written word the only container of Memory—electronic media have closed the circle back to the classical ars memorativa, where images and spaces provided the grid for thoughts.

Drawing both from traditional design and the possibilities offered by technical development, digital design is burdened with implications and expectations. "... the language of the computer is the language of technology, not the language of design. Without a knowledge of design, the computer (like the pencil) is more than useless, for it is capable of producing enough superfluous

material to create the illusion, that one is inventing when, in fact one is merely producing variations of a theme, often of nothingness." (Paul Rand, Design, Form and Chaos, 1993)

Tabula Rasa™: pulling away the tablecloth with everything that's on it seems to be the only solution. However, the concept of white space—especially when it comes to white space in dynamic media— is no longer the idea of mere absence, but of an integral part of design in a digital and interactive environment.

(TABULA RASA BY FLORIAN BRODY & SIAH HAHN)

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sponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.

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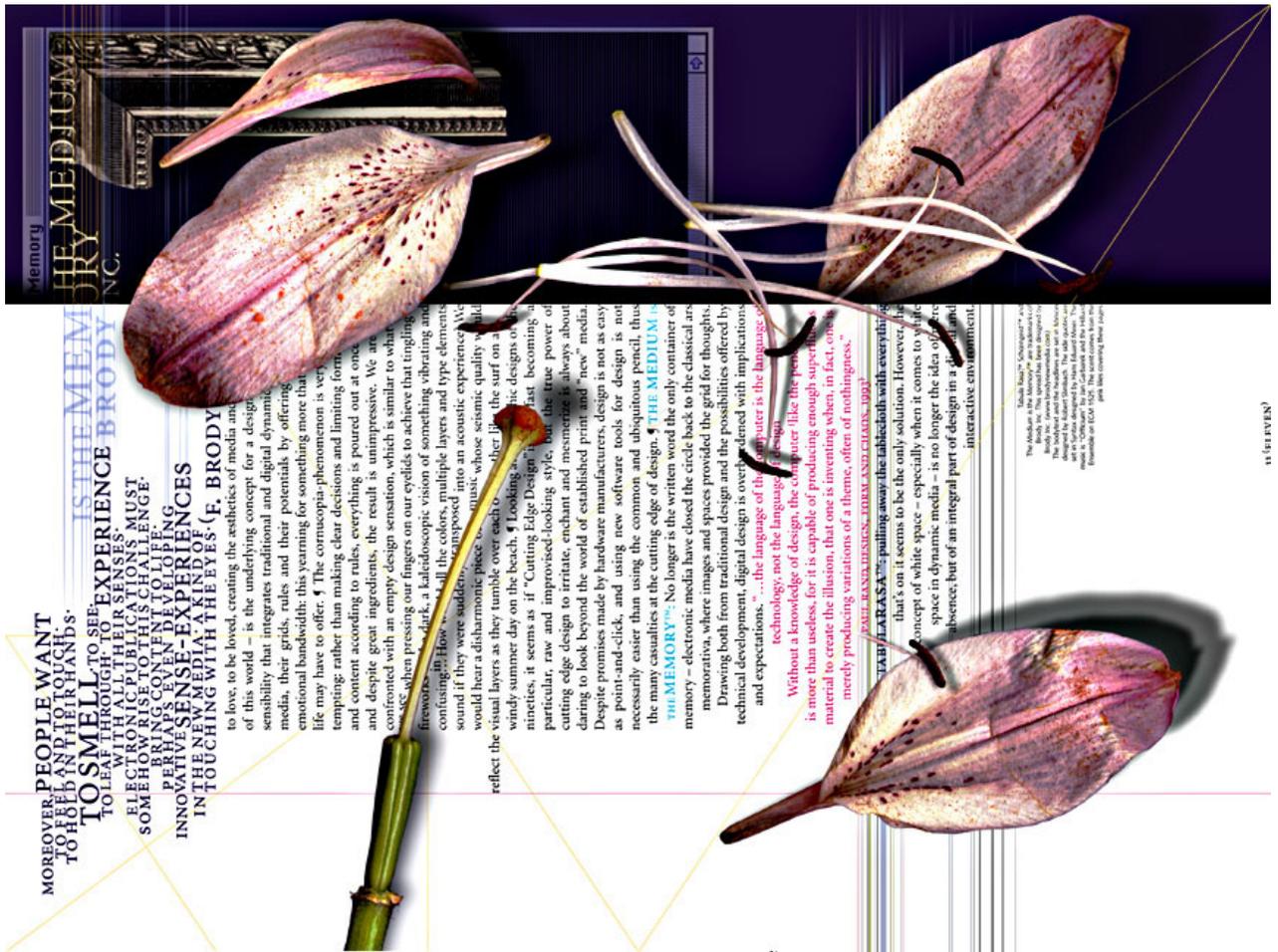
to love, to be loved, creating the aesthetics of media and of this world – is the underlying concept for a design sensibility that integrates traditional and digital dynamic media, their grids, rules and their potentials by offering emotional bandwidth: this yearning for something more than life may have to offer. ¶ The cornucopia-phenomenon is very tempting; rather than making clear decisions and limiting form, and content according to rules, everything is poured out at once, and despite great ingredients, the result is unimpressive. We are confronted with an empty design sensation, which is similar to white noise when pressing our fingers on our eyelids to achieve that tingling fireworks of... dark, a kaleidoscopic vision of something vibrating and confusing... How would... all the colors, multiple layers and type elements... sound if they were suddenly transposed into an acoustic experience? We would hear a disharmonic piece ... music, whose seismic quality would reflect the visual layers as they tumble over each... whether like the surf on a windy summer day on the beach. ¶ Looking at graphic designs of the nineties, it seems as if "Cutting Edge Design" is fast becoming a particular, raw and improvised-looking style, but the true power of cutting edge design to irritate, enchant and mesmerize is always about daring to look beyond the world of established print and "new" media. Despite promises made by hardware manufacturers, design is not as easy as point-and-click, and using new software tools for design is not necessarily easier than using the common and ubiquitous pencil, thus the many casualties at the cutting edge of design. ¶ THE MEDIUM is THE MEMORY™: No longer is the written word the only container of memory – electronic media have closed the circle back to the classical ars memorativa, where images and spaces provided the grid for thoughts.

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Without a knowledge of design, the computer "like the pen" is more than useless, for it is capable of producing enough superficial material to create the illusion, that one is inventing when, in fact, one is merely producing variations of a theme, often of nothingness."

TABULA RASA™: pulling away the tablecloth with everything that's on it seems to be the only solution. However, the concept of white space – especially when it comes to white space in dynamic media – is no longer the idea of a tabula rasa, but of an integral part of design in a dynamic and interactive environment.

PAUL RAND: DESIGN, FORM AND CHAOS, 1993?

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