

Drucker, Johanna, and Emily McVarish. Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc. 2009.

One of the most impressive and over arching elements of Drucker and McVarish's book, *Graphic Design History* is the page layout, presentation of topics, organization of information and fantastic images that expand and visually enriched the intricate timeline. I counted at least five different formats for presenting information which skillfully detail the history of design from prehistoric stencils and 34,000 year old images to the present day transformation of graphic design to information design touching on the design aspects of the virtual environment, Second Life. The authors begin each chapter with bulleted points that address the characteristics and influences of each design epoch and follows with a general historical analysis of period influences and cultural occurrences which shaped the design of the time. Most pages contain one sentence that highlights in a bold, burnt orange colored text, the "big" idea of that page or pages and multiple images which support the relevant historical discussion with insightful vignettes. Finally, each chapter ends with a detailed timeline that places relevant events in chronological order and provides specific dates of events during the period explored in previous pages. The layout and information design are worth extra comment when describing a book that explores the evolution of graphic design, and the visual elements over time.

The authors meticulously walk the reader through the evolution of design and cultural and societal influences of the time. As I read the book I had two predominant thoughts, first ironically with all the attention to information design and multilayered display of details, I found the book slow and laborious to process the full-range of ideas and difficult to cross-reference all the data. To fully consume one concept, I might have to stop reading, view the supporting figure, read the paragraph below the image, and even double-check the exact date of the occurrence in the timeline at the end of the chapter. Usually the dates used in the chapters were ranges referring to an early or late period of a decade when the greatest impact was experienced as opposed to identifying when a technology was first introduced. For example, "Photography enjoyed wide public appeal from the moment it was marketed in the late 1830s." (147) More than once, I thought the Drucker and McVarish's book was impressively broad in its reach and disappointedly shallow in depth.

In fairness, I can see that my critique for this book is unrealistic and the authors have heightened my expectations with their expertise and expansive knowledge, leaving me wanting more. *Graphic Design History* is a design reference book or text book, best consumed in small

segments with detailed discussion and classroom projects built around a few pages. The details the authors are able to fold into 386 pages covering over 30,000 years of design are an impressive feat. I imagine this book will find a prominent place on my book shelf and the pages will become worn as I use the text to illustrate such design terms as simulacra, boustrophedon, pastiche, and WYSIWYG and concepts such as the move from oral culture to visual culture. I'm certain it will be difficult to find another book that more effectively describes the relationships between the development of the codex book in the medieval period and the expanding role of graphic artists to information designers. The book methodically associates cultural epochs with social trends and the zeitgeist of the time, detailing art movements from the early modern successionists to De Stijl experimental movement, and the post-human movement of the eighties. An evolution is clearly shown even when a jump in technology or relapse in styles occurs. Whether designers are reacting to, or expanding graphic expression, the authors of *Graphic Design History* clearly state that technology may have some influence or practically affect on design, but it is not the determinant. And like Alois Riegl, Drucker and McVarish make this point with historical facts and cultural details and no commentary, rhetoric or argument. The historical facts speak clearly and eloquently.