Retool: Modernism/Postmodernism/Vernacular/Digital

Readings

Norman F. Cantor, excerpts from The American Century
Robin Kinross, "The Rhetoric of Neutrality," from Design Discourse, 131-143
Robin Kinross, excerpts from Modern Typography
Katherine McCoy, "Rethinking Modernism, Revising Functionalism" from Looking Closer 1, pgs. 49 – 51.
Massimo Vignelli, "Long Live Modernism," from Looking Closer 1, 51-52
Lorraine Wilde, "On Overcoming Modernism" from Looking Closer 1, pg. 55 – 60

Late Modernism
The focus of the high–modernist is the rational, the structural, and pure objective functionalism. The objectivity of the message pervaded their utopian goals as reinforced through adages such as “less is more,” and “form equals function.” Developments and influences centered around perception theory, the Swiss International Style, Information Management, Highway Signs, and International Pictorial Symbols. Semiotics, the study of signs in visual language, imbued typography with a scientific approach to the analysis of meaning in communication. The grid was critically studied, developed and implemented as an organizational structure. The concepts and theories were codified by the writings of Josef Mueller–Brockman, Emil Ruder, Armin Hofmann, Jan Tschichold, and others.

Post–Modernism
Following WWII, the leading cultural theory was structuralism followed by deconstruction. Stemming from literary theory, “visual phenomena are analyzed as language encoded with meaning. In order to discover meaning, language is deconstructed, exposing its underlying power and the manipulation of form. The objectivity of the Modernists is thrown into question. Early Postmodernism (or late Modernism) was ecletic, borrowing from history and cultural vernaculars. Literary theories begin to inform architecture and then design. Designs provoke a range of interpretations, based on Deconstruction’s contention that meaning is inherently unstable and objectivity an impossibility. Theorists such as the Structuralist Saussure and Deconstructivists Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes influenced design and typography in the 1980/90s. The audience becomes the reader, with the added role of interpreter. The designer is also an interpreter through authoring of content and self–conscious critique of content. The computer revolution added its own effect on reading and typography as expressed through the notion of hyper–texts. Text within the amorphous world of the internet no longer depend on the words that proceed or follow. Each unit of text must present itself as a closed thought, a block, allowing reorganization and reshuffling at the reader’s whim. The open–ended quality of the text further removes the reader from the speaker or the author. Malleability of word and meaning increases in an environment that breaks down traditional reading patterns, links information, encourages reorganization by the reader and allows motion.

Vernacular
Vernacular specifically refers to the language or dialect spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region. Design in during the 1980s, this translated into using naive, undefined type and imagery; elements of bad taste borrowed from those without art and design backgrounds. Popular culture, history, folk, street forms and languages were co-opted and used by designers in a tongue–in–cheek manner. Vernacular also included the language of the street: grunge, new wave, techno, punk, beach culture, graffiti, and others. This pastiche, while shamelessly borrowing from others, offered a move away from the neutrality of the high–modernists toward a sensitivity to cultural diversity and context. It created an effective communication tool for a broad audience.

Digital Revolution
The digital revolution transformed the way people make and receive information in as dramatic a way as Gutenberg and print technology. Personal computers, growing ever more available and user friendly during the 1980s, were inevitably embraced by the design industry in the 1990s. Time consuming production and layout tasks were streamlined. New methodologies of manipulation in imagery, layering and typography created a whole new aesthetic. Typeface design, once an extremely arduous design process, was democratized by font software. This caused a proliferation of new typefaces, and thus a new voice for a generation. The introduction of the World Wide Web in the 1990s offered its own revolution that expedited yet another wave of new communication tools and design strategies that have permeated our culture.

Project

Intro
Modernist and PostModernist theories were the center of passionate design debates in the 1980s. The vernacular, which translates to high versus low culture in relation to design and art, was also hotly contested. During all these changes, the digital revolution strode into the fray in a way that could not be ignored. Its role has shifted, morphed and permeated the world of design and culture in extreme ways.

Project:
Based on your assigned design history section (Modernism, Postmodernism, Vernacular, Digital Revolution), design an educational teaching aid, a toolkit for college design students.

Each Kit contains:
1. Packaging (binder, folder) that contains:
   _ Poster
   _ Terminology Flashcards (10)
   _ Designer Flashcards (10)
2. Poster
   _size (11 x 34) folds to 8.5 x 11
   _Front: include title, introduction, theories, ideas
   _Back: selected article(s) or excerpts on the movement. Treat the back as a brochure
3. Significant designers (10)
   _cards, swatches
4. Terminology (10)
   _cards, swatches
Modernism in America
14. Lester Beall*
15. Alvin Lustig*
16. Paul Rand*
17. Bradbury Thompson (Westvaco)*
18. Ladislav Sutnar*
19. Charles and Roy Eames*
20. Herbert Bayer*
21. Saul Bass*

TEAM 2: Post modernism
22. What is Deconstructivism in relation to Graphic Design?
23. What is Postmodernism in relation to Graphic Design?
24. Wolfgang Weingart
25. Willi Kunz
26. Neville Brody*
27. Don Friedman (Radical Modernism)
28. Martin Venezky*
29. Cranbrook in the 1980s

TEAM 3: Vernacular
36. The Memphis School
37. Michael Graves/Philip Johnson /Frank Gehry/Daniel Libeskind
38. Ed Fella*
39. Paula Scher
40. Peter Saville
41. Charles Anderson, Joe Duffy
42. Jeffery Keedy
43. Elliot Earls*
44. Chip Kidd
45. Pushpin Studios (Group), Seymour Chwast* and Milton Glaser*
46. House Industries*
47. Postmodern Practice
48. Tomato (UK)*
49. Why Not Associates*
50. Plazm-Publisher
Posttools

Team 4: Digital Revolution
51. Apple
52. April Greiman*
53. New Typography/Fontographer
54. Jonathon Barnbrook*
55. Phil Baines
56. Tobias Frere-Jones
57. Zuzana Licko*
58. Susan Kare
59. Bitstream
60. John Maeda (technology)*
61. Muriel Cooper/MIT
62. World Wide Web

Meggs Readings
The Modern Movement in America, pages 336-352
The International Typographic Style, pages 356-373
The New York School, pages 374-398
Corporate ID; pages 399-423
American Conceptual Images, pages 428-440
Postmodern Design, pages 465-487
The Digital Revolution and Beyond, pages 488-530