

Design-
book fabric for cover
research different stitches and will
they exist beyond the book spine
greyboard add on for back
summary/glossary- look into
letterpress and would it work or
thin laser cut?
overlapping greyboard for front
cover spelling graphics?- would it
work or distract?

Abstract

This dissertation will concentrate on the idea that the concepts; affordance, interaction and physicality are needed in graphic design as a fundamental. It will also explore the definitions of these terms and if they are applicable to this chosen field. The notion of how modern Graphic design can be used to create a stronger relation to the user will be explored, as well as multiple ways in which this has been explored through that of my case studies, examples and previous knowledge generated. This essay will also argue for or against what may be the best concept to apply as well the difficulty as to have multiple concepts at once in order to progress the work.

Contents

Introduction

Society is one of the biggest influencers towards the art world, they have the ability to engage or deny the concept of what art is and what it stands for. As the designer Kelly, quoting Mckoy, argues that society as whole likes to be challenged or engaged with on a new level beyond function (McCoy et al., 2002: 331. As Jakobsone (2017) suggests the notion and purpose of design is meant to challenge society and its day-to-day functions (Raby, 2007, p.94). This concept can often be seen throughout modern graphic design, which transpires that of simple digital media and has moved its way into packaging, products and even book design.

Some design field such as fine art, priorities Aesthetics, the exterior of something, someone, a look or form (Hartman, 2014). This is because traditional design used to made in order to sell, comics books for example was a mass produced item that anybody could be buy and as a result it could not become a luxury. A Ming vase however was such a rarity that it was considered a luxury and expensive item. Graphics however supports the theory of challenging the minds and broadening the horizon of pre-conceptual designs and art. It may not be an easy career to pick or side with but it yields the most infamous results alongside a few select other areas. Once you disregard the beauty of an object and then start to look for purpose in it, then its true nature may be revealed or even one that had previously not existed may start to develop and form.

As this essay progresses it will contextualize the three terms of affordance, interaction and physicality and place them respectively amongst the graphic design timeline and point out key areas in which these terms are used as a core concept or which may respectfully seen as a core concept due to the justification of doing so. It will also evaluate the work and address as to why something may not work well or why in fact it does work and whether the terms were what improved or whether they had no impact at all and are instead generated via the mind. Of course many artworks, pieces and objects may have a different meaning or solution to them that the creator themselves would not have provided, so some areas become speculation. It is however with an educated and informed opinion these areas of speculation actually instead become a working basis for an ongoing theory into the deeper understanding and meaning of the work or the terms that reside within the work. The main examples of graphic work used within this essay is that of graphic novels, animation or video, posters and packaging or product design which also sit within the field of graphic design.

cut



Fig. 1 'Fan'

Chapter 1: Affordance

Figure 1 depicts a fan sat on my desk. On closer inspection a small wheel can be turned on the back which rotate the blades. It is a die-cast metal object which appears to have little function beyond the rotasting blades. Which dosen't really create much air flow. In the language of design affordances (Norman, 2002), the object affords holding and turning so as to rotate the blades, and not much else. It is only until I pick up the object and turn it in space that another affordance is revealed. Hidden underneath is the blade of a pencil sharpner which leads to a hole within which a pencil can be placed. With this new interaction, another kind of affordane is revealed; one of sharpening a pencil. It is through this interaction that we could suggest the affordance of other kinds of obejcts may be altered or uncovered.



Fig. 2 'sharpener'

Within socially responsible design the artefact itself is understood as shaping beliefs, behaviour and perspectives. The belief that design has an ability to act in the world can be termed an “affordance” (Norman, 1990) which lies at the core of its practice. The term affordance in human computer interaction or “HCI” essentially means a good object has a single affordance to aid usability. A light switch for example is a good object as it has a simple switch that tells you if a light is on or off, nothing affects this way of being approached. Affordance effectively means in most scenarios, a singular effective purpose. A support of one concept is of Neldner who coins the phrase “affordance visibility” (Neldner, 2017, 335), the theory that a piece with a clear showing of its true affordance was the easiest to both understand and interoperate as an interactor which supports Normans original definition. As one may see from Fig. 2 ‘sharpener’ the fan itself is actually a sharpener and not a fan at its core concept, this is where the concept of affordance visibility becomes cloudy. Often the idea that it is a fan before it is a sharpener is one that could be debated as it is never initially known as to which one is the truth. Many people believe that the fan is the primary function and the sharpener a secondary, it affords the notion that it can be either or, despite initially being labelled as a sharpener. Once it is removed from the box then it becomes a free interpretable object, which is subjective to someone’s opinion. This supports a third concept of affordance coined by Gibson, “an action possibility available in the environment to an individual, independent of the individual’s ability to perceive this possibility” (McGrenere and Ho, 2000), this idea is that an objects use is based off of past experiences, goals and needs provided by the user.

An example of this would be that of a chair, in its basic form it is a seat that someone use to rest upon and relieve oneself, but to a cat it then becomes a source of shade as it lays underneath it; this is where the chair now has an affordance.

Affordance is a concept that is not often applied to graphic design. Yet when looked at, it becomes apparent that it has existed all along and is now only started to become a part of it. Product design, illustration, print and all other aspects of design courses now incorporate themselves into modern graphic design, so it makes sense affordance, a term often only used towards product design, now applies itself to graphic design and can become a part of a foundation for that course.

Graphics is a prime source of affordance as it has its intention to improve society and the concept of affordance reinforces and applies this. Most graphic designs in traditional western society has more than one intention whether it be that of the ability to do multiple things at once or the ability to linger in one's mind past the viewing of said design. It exists past the first use of being considered 'good' objects, and exists somewhat in the middle of the second and third term between Gibson and Neldner.

Graphics is a form of art that is subjective like any other art form and can be interpreted in many different ways. An affordance visibility perfectly exists well within this world as many designs that work are often simple and effective as well as require minimal actions in order to respond to them. Take the famous New York City logo/slogan "I 'heart' New York", this is a form of graphic design that is simple and reflects exactly what it is meant to be, it does not need to be interpreted any other way and its result of being simple is enough that people understand and enjoy it as well as buy anything in relation to it such as merchandise, it has an "affordance visibility".

An opposing form of this is leaflets, booklets, books or anything involving paper architecture, this is no longer reliant on "affordance visibility" and instead reliant on the people themselves. For anyone who has used these in a graphical dominion, they would know that they never seem to open like a regular item does and instead relies on you to understand how it works and make your own opinions and judgements based off of this, the folds were made to be difficult and challenging and yet it does not often phase us. The artist and designer Barbara Visser created a new form of seats and tables that exist as one, as you can see from Fig. 3 'designboom', while the work is not aesthetically pleasing as most forms of art its purpose is not to be 'pretty' but instead to serve purpose and put that first and foremost. Each segment and area can be used as a makeshift bed, bench or workspace for the employee. This example of affordance in action is used not only to show affordance in a new context but also to help companies to save money and time without the need to buy new chairs. This concept applied to product design, interior design or architectural design could prove to be more beneficial as you solve a larger scale of problems that was never attempted before instead of solving one directly focused area such as cost or size. This work as contemporary art actually creates a basis for development from either the artists or the user. Now picture if you will an entire building that looks like this, while it may be awful to the eye, once purpose overthrows the need for looks then it becomes a productive workspace in which work can be done easier and with less back pain.



Fig. 3 'Designboom' ,Vesser, 2014, concept, accessed November 2019

Affordance is a tricky term as when situated within graphic design, aesthetics and usability still play a part in this. This is where 'critical design' takes place, critical design as Malpass (2017), uses Moline (2008) and Maze (2007) make the point that intervening with design at an earlier stage can help not only save it but stop it from becoming superficially perceived as the previous example may be taken. Critical design is merely design that uses speculative design and conceptions to challenge proposals and assumptions. This while originates mainly in product design can be moved towards commercial design or other fields of design. It focuses on the awareness of the designer and how impactful their work is to the community, whether it be social, political cultural or religious. This should form of design and the questions, issues and comment it presents should be used throughout graphics as often it is seen that we challenge not only society but also the power that we have to change it. If we apply critical design to graphics as well as affordance then the idea of what should be made starts to form, the constant bombardment of questions and ideas that situate within graphics now appear. However the 'affordance' in graphics is also challenged, as many pieces such as booklets for example rely on paper engineering in order to appear 'wacky' and 'weird', they stand out. It then becomes debate as to what would be the best form for these pieces as simplicity makes it the easiest to understand but also the simplest. A standard black and white book works the best for reading but is not appealing.

This is why the middle ground of affordance is needed, it needs to go beyond being simple but also simple enough to understand for the user. This may be something as simple as posters on cloth in order to remain longer whilst also advertising the event or even how a flyer turns into a paper aeroplane once it becomes part of that idea. The main issue is when the term 'affordance' becomes based off of memories and past experiences. Graphics is well known for creating new and unknown pieces, so how can we expect someone to understand what it is or what we are trying to show? Simple, we cannot. The best we can do is push them in the general direction and let them figure it out, a trial and error method which works well for testing the designs but also can work well for being part of the design process as the finished piece.

As the use of the term 'Affordance' expands as well as the possibilities of it, it also looks into what new experiences are developed because of it. Experiences are what governs us and our future actions and reactions towards new concepts and idea presented towards us. An interest of a 'false affordance' comes to mind. A piece or even individual if say robotics were to be implied that gives false hope and impressions on us. The intension of a piece becomes muddled and murky and hidden within itself. A book is opened and split in half along the middle of it, but if we invert this and make it so that it slides out like a deck of cards then it becomes something else, something new and more interactive than a regular book. Another such example of a confusing and obscure affordance is that of Fig. 4 'playing card 1', as you can see beneath the playing card is that of a plastic card designed to withstand more games and become more durable than other predecessors. However Fig. 5 'playing card 2' reveals that once it is exposed to light it becomes invisible and impossible to see, this may be a design flaw or rather to prevent against cheating in card games as opponents can read your hands. If neither player can see the cards they own or the others then a stalemate begins and ensures a hope of luck is needed, skill is removed to make way for error and confusion. This may be seen as the original intention within the work itself but its original definition cannot be figured out. It is a fluid piece of art, whilst also practical, that changes and morphs to the user and surrounding situation and environment. This is a form of graphic design that is not often made due to its inability to be solved and remain simple. Yet it stretches the mind of the interactor. It changes what you think an object or piece should be and instead reveals what it is.

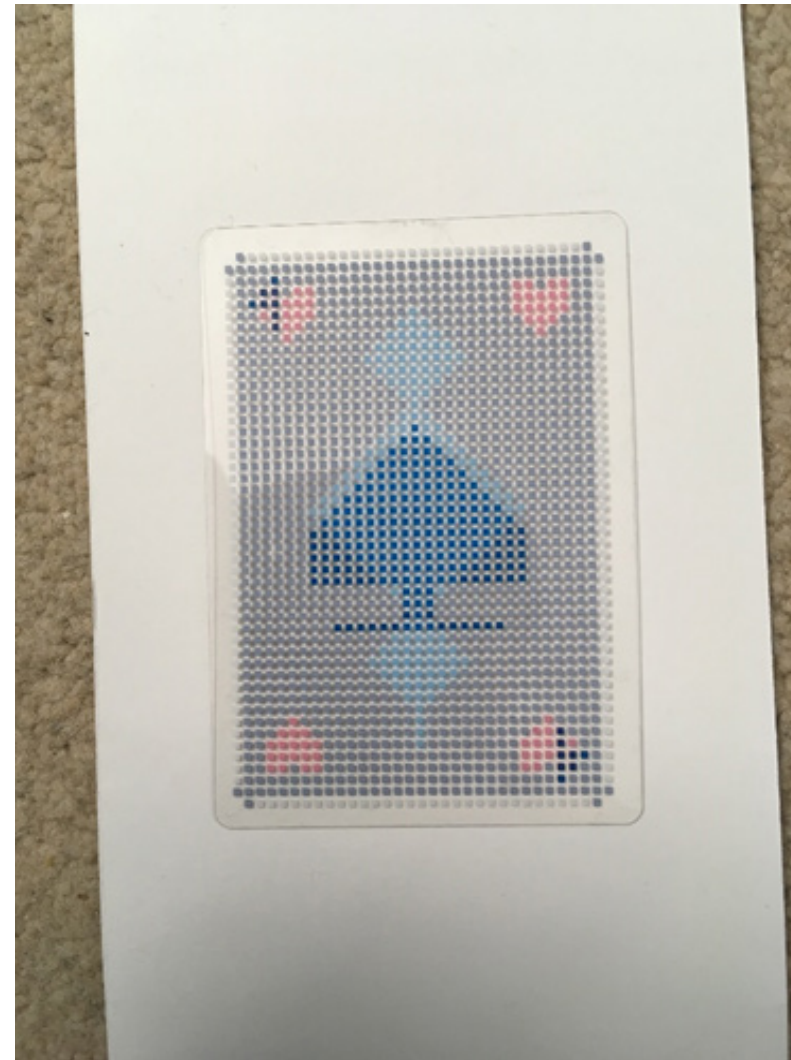


Fig. 4 'Playing card 1'

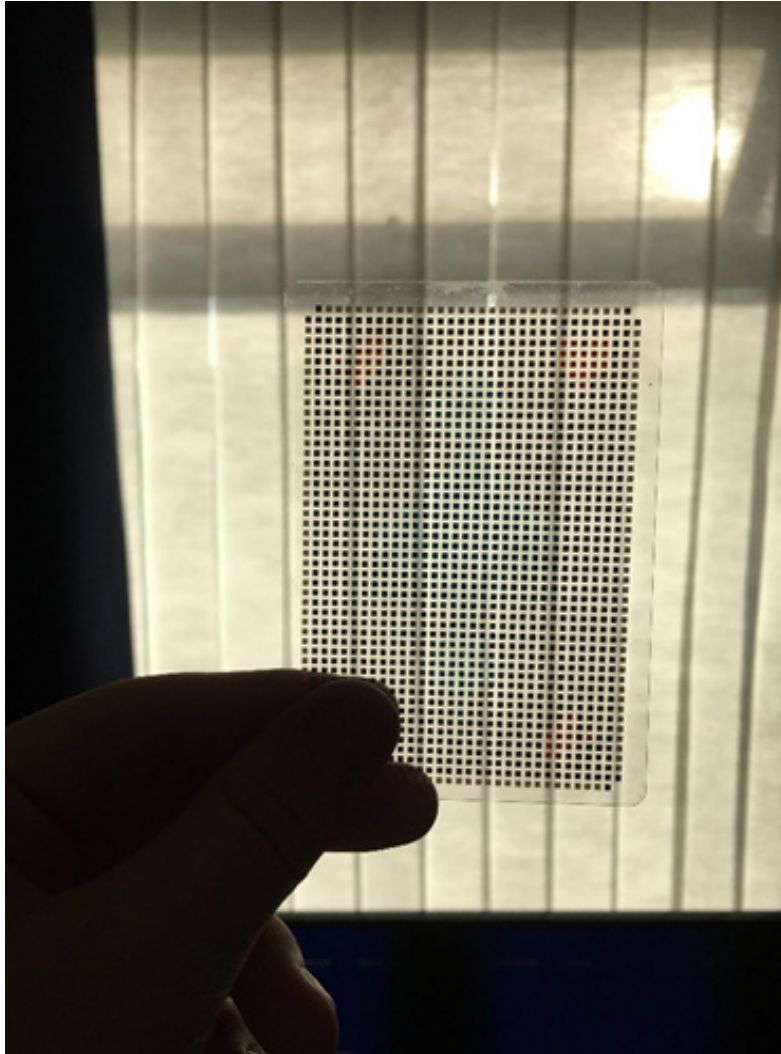


Fig. 5 'Playing card 2'

It is through these unobserved or often misinformed concepts that judge as to how graphics is perceived. Birthday cards are a form of graphic design, whether it be the illustrations on them or in fact the way they are made through the designs or folds. Everything to some way, shape or form is affected by graphics, graphics is affected by affordance, so the leap that affordance affects everything as well may not be the biggest leap made. The only issue with the concept of affordance is how it defines 'good' or 'bad' works, instead if you look at it through an open mind then that still relies entirely on the user and not art critic sitting in the corner. The biggest critics of art is ourselves, the biggest users of art are ourselves and each experience with art is unique and personally related. It is with this that we are 'people who use affordance as not only part of our everyday lives but also as part of our way of understanding. Neldners concept of experience is perhaps the most applicable to evolving art that no longer can sit in one area or another. While the other definitions of this term apply to perhaps more product or packaging design. It cannot be safely said as to what should go where or why in graphics. Each choice and accusation is based off a conceived theory or idea from within us. If this is then extracted and grown then perhaps the work shown becomes something which all work can come under. A new category for art that cannot be defined as of yet.

