



## *The Design of Emotion* gerald cupchik

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Good afternoon. What I've done is take seriously some of the issues that are of relevance to RGD Ontario. I'd like to thank Carmen von Richthofen, Hilary Ashworth, John Furneaux, Rod Nash, Paul Browning, and Scott Christie, who met with me at Ove Design two months ago to talk about the kind of issues that are relevant to people in the graphic design world. And what I try to do, in preparing my talk, is work out something more relevant for you in the context of the meeting this week.

Now, I go directly from the quote on the invitation card. It says: "Now more than ever effective design depends on establishing emotional connection with customers and delving into the corporate soul." Well, that's kind of a burden for a psychologist. My concern is not so much with confessions and guilt, what psychologists tend to deal with, my concern is more with how we relate with the world out there. I try to put myself in your shoes and try bringing some ideas in my world to you to help yourself in the way you do your work. If you want a title for my talk, it is something like Meaningful Feelings in Graphic Design.

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I want to talk about different emotional connections. I want to talk about five of them through the course of my lecture today. Emotional connection with your work. Emotional connection with your corporate clients. Emotional connection with your target audience. Emotional connection with yourself. And emotional connection with people in your workplace. Now I'm going to talk about emotional connections. The talk is going to start with the very notion of emotion itself. As a psychologist, I work in different areas, working with artists, working with industrial designers. This is my first time visit into the world of graphic design. And my concern is with the way we relate to our world, the way we understand our world, the way we create in our world. What is emotion? Now as you folks know, it's become fashionable to talk about emotional intelligence. And of course, emotions are fundamental connections with others and our selves. But one of the great pitfalls in western philosophy in the last 300 years has been to separate intellect from emotion. The separation of intellect from emotion is wrong. There is no emotion without cognition and vice versa. There's no cognition without emotion. Thought and feelings go hand in hand in an intimate way in the kind of work you people do. The big question then comes, what kind of emotion goes with what kind of cognition or thought? I'm going to talk about cognition and emotion and its relationship to graphic design. Now, we lay out some

issues in the area of emotion. I'm going to talk somewhat about artists. I'm going to have a bit of the cognitive recess. I'm going to show the slides and you're going to get somewhat of a break. Then I'm going to continue on with my story.

At some level, I'd like you, in your minds, to think of what musical instrument you most closely identify with. What musical instrument in your life, whether you listen to it or you play it, what do you identify with? Choose it, put somewhere in the back of your mind and we'll come back to it later.

Now why is there always cognition and emotion? Why is there always thought related to emotion? Is everything revolving around the issue of emotional connection? There's always cognition and emotion, that you understand it in a certain way. Sometimes, you're aiming to share it with others. Sometimes, you're just aiming at yourself. When we interpret situations, this stimulates memories, stimulates feelings, sometimes empathic responses.

All kinds of thoughts, all kinds of cognition, all kinds of means are stimulated spontaneously by emotional experiences. All kinds of emotional experiences. So when we interpret situations, when we deal with cognitions, we deal with meanings, and feelings ensue very quickly. When we talk about emotional connection with clients and the worlds they represent, our understanding

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has both intellectual and emotional components. When you deal with your clients, when you talk about emotional connection with your clients, it does not happen without an understanding of their worlds.

Another question: can I find a way to understand the world of the company, the person, and the event and then convey it in an emotionally engaging manner? There's a flip side. There's the understanding of the world out there. There is someone out there in the world who will engage in it and you want them to understand it. You want them to relate to it. You understand what you're trying to represent in your world. Then you'll be able more readily to recreate that experience with others. It's therefore crucial to understand the fact that you take a vantage point on what it is you're trying to understand and convey. I want to underscore that.

Not only do you each take the emotional and intellectual vantage point of your client, but you must also consider the viewpoint of the target group who will be the recipient of your graphic design. We have all these different emotional connections and intellectual connections that we juggle. This process of distilling meaning related to your clients' world, and the image they would like to depict, and then embodying it in the work that will have an impact on others is the challenge to be faced. Now we have a certain paradox here. You want to create a graphic design

work that comprises words and images, and have them embraced by people with no training in this process. In other words, somehow this process has to have an effect without any prior training. The message had therefore better be clear.

Now we have to get into the mind of creative graphic designer and see what's going on. I've worked in the university for 30 years, it happens, and I've worked closely with artists and I've worked with people of the Technical University of Delft in the Netherlands, on various kinds of problems that they deal with in the design engineering group. So I want you to argue for a certain kind of continuity that you would apply in a basic set of worlds, the world of the artist, the world of the industrial designer, and here the world of graphic designer. Unlike people in everyday life who focus on useful objects and discard the sensory qualities that make them up, these creative people are able to combine sensory qualities with representational meanings.

Years ago, when I was a graduate student and a friend of mine brought an art book for me . . . he said something to me that will always remain with me: "Gerry, when you walk down the street, you see buildings and people, you recognize them you don't recognize them, you like them, you don't like them. I see colours and shapes. It never crosses my mind as an object, I just see colours and shapes." And that helped me begin to enter that different world, the world where sensation is as important as meaning. Where you just don't rush to find this and that as you go on in your daily life. But you slow down, you experience, you smell the roses and you'll see them and feel. In all these cases, the artist, industrial designer, the graphic designer, the emotional and intellectual sides of their work are interrelated. I just want to talk briefly about artists, because all

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of you have artistic training or artistic disposition in your world. I don't see boundaries between the disciplines. I know that various psychologists may see themselves of different breeds, the graphic designers may see themselves very different from industrial designers, or very different from the artists.

Artists are sensitive to and aware of the process of perception itself - sensitive to and aware of the process of perception itself. The way I can describe it best from my own life is to describe myself feeling like Monet in a canoe at sunset. You're out there in your canoe, the sun is setting, you take a look at that water and you see the rippling colour of that water and you see an impressionist painting. And you realize that the impressionist vision is a practical aspect of the world slowed down enough to just see visual qualities and hear its sonorous qualities. Now that's a shift we make in the practical world of the everyday life to the aesthetic world. But artists do something more, not just sitting in a canoe. They manipulate meaning until they recreate the experience for others. Once people catch the vision, once people learn the language they will be able to see through the surface to structure and meaning. The successful artistic work is one with sensory

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or stylistic qualities combined by the subject matter to create a unified whole.

Now industrial designers and engineers. Industrial designers and engineers look at the purpose of a tool, with its look and the experience of actually using it. They enter the manipulation of the object. What we see. What is felt. They're merging the sensory and the motor. The actual act of using it. They're aware of the technical properties of the tool; here we have purpose of properties and style.

In a successful industrial design object, the sensory, the functional, the emotional are engaged simultaneously and here we have another kind of metaphor. Just as is in a successful painting, your subject matter and your style become unified, play off against each other as counter points and rhythms. In a successful industrial design object, function disappears into form. It's echoed in it, resonates with it. The object can be manipulated into material level. You can take it, you can use it. You can open the bottle, you can open the door. You can do whatever you need with the tool. This is the way you engage with the consumer and develop a bond with the consumer and the product. When you have a successful industrial design object, it's something that you can use, it's user friendly. But the person sees it, or the person feels it. The feeling, the seeing, the sensing of the texture, they are what it's about, they are what the tool is. I'm arguing that when those two are together, you have again a metaphor. People spontaneously feel the metaphor. They don't think about it—whether I like this two or not—they know. It's not an object of reflection. Why? Because intellectual feelings are combined. Because function and form are combined.

So now I slide into the world of graphic design, which is a new domain of pleasure for me, as a professor in psychology who does research. As I visit each community, I'm awake to the dilemmas and problems of this community. Like I said, seeing where they're the same, seeing where they're different. As a psychologist coming into your community, I learn from your community. I don't have the pretensions to tell your community how to be, how to do better design. My role in general is to help people relate to themselves better in a creative way so they can realize what their goals are. That's my purpose here. I don't come with this specific answer. I come in a kind of consciousness awakening or feeling one's relationship with one's self as a graphic designer. From my view point, there's a lot of things going on here, that distinguish a graphic designer from the studio artist and from industrial designer. Graphic design develops a layout and comprises images and words that effectively represents something, be it a corporation, a product, a person, or event. Graphic designers have their feet in two distinct worlds. And this is something of a very special moment for me, to come to terms with what I understood as the distinct world that you live in as professionals. On the one hand, you have the iconic image, but on the other hand, you have the symbolic image. Early pictographs for example look like they were what they were meant to represent. Whereas the later alphabet became early symbolic. Interestingly, type fonts possess this duality. The symbolic function and the expressive function. The symbolic and the expressive. The graphic designer therefore juggles two worlds, two things. Symbolic meaning that arbitrarily represents something, describes something. So there's symbolic on one hand and

the connotative and the expressive on the other. So you have letters that are both symbolic and expressive forming words which evoke symbolic expressions.

Now this is why I've built in a little bit of a recess. What I'm going to do is show you is for me is like a learning encounter. Feeling the experience, always intellect and emotion. Seeing the layout, but feeling the experience and the movement of the letters. Feeling that it's very accessible, but sometimes so difficult to see. An artist said to me: "You know what I do Gerry, when I paint? I see the darkest dark and the brightest bright. I see it in the scene I'm working on. I feel it, and then I let my feeling guide my work." So I asked myself the question: How am I going to sense that tension, this new symbolism? Is it easy to enter into? Is it difficult to enter into? What is my subjectivity? My subjective response, my emotional response...that bounces you around, plays with you. And feeling myself being bounced around, feeling the diagonal and its implication for myself. Now for you folks, it's natural to what you do. But for me, it helps me enter into the world.

As a psychologist, I see this, this gave me a headache. There's that beautiful interplay between the image the word and now the compositional technique that gives that kind of metaphor, a kind of sense where the product is from. I just do this because I find this so beautiful, a certain elegance, a certain delicacy and the formalism of the interplay of words and again this diagonal kind of motif.

And so we have the wisdom of the heart, which almost becomes the metaphor for my lecture. We have the heart, the feeling in the place of the intellect. But we feel it in ourselves. It's a very important aspect of a psychologist that you set up the structure of the engagement, and then you invite the person enter in. What do you provide? What elements have you selected very carefully that lead us to create a metaphor. So we have letters that are both symbolic and expressive, forming words that are both symbolic and expressive, combined with visual or sound images which are both symbolic and expressive in an overall visual context. Guided by principles and conventions. And now with new media even the edge of the frame is disappearing. We see that emotion and intellect lie in the center of your creative work. Emotional connections and intellectual connections are friends and relatives, so to speak. In your case there is a manipulation of the meaning plus a sensitivity to language. The two domains become fused in a unique hardware that conveys meanings and shapes experience.

I want to suggest that a successful graphic design work is one with words and images, a kind of metaphor combining with both meaning and feeling. The viewer experience of this unity completes the relationship. It cannot work until that viewer grasps it. And it was an insight to me to realize that people grasp it if it works. It's a successful metaphor. As in a painting, design engineering or a piece of graphic design, the person will get it immediately but they can't tell you why. That's why the artist shifts back and forth between seeing the work as an artist but turning around and seeing the work from the view point of the audience.

Now how can psychologists help graphic designers create these kinds of rich symbolic

works? Creative graphic design comes from the integration of what we call top down and bottom up processes. I'm going to contrast top down and bottom up processes, but I want to do it in a way so that you can feel it. The reason I asked you to select what kind of musical instrument you identify with is because I want you to imagine yourselves as that instrument, through which meaning and feeling are distilled together. Each person in a different way makes a different signature to meaning and feeling.

Top down processes have to do with how to understand a problem. I want you to imagine the following: we're giving you a brief, now your task is to go out and take the company, the person, the event and depict it in such a way that is elegant and effective, as I described it. They want to be there. How do you do that? You can do that by developing an understanding and by engaging our feelings together. Emotional connections require intellectual connections. It ap-

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preciates the world that you are trying to represent in your work. My point is the richness that you can bring to vary your understanding will provide you part of the palette that becomes part of your graphic design work. So we want to increase that top down richness. We want to increase that understanding, we want to increase that cognition.

Now bottom up has to do with spontaneous experience with images and sensation. Spontaneous experience of images and sensation. I open up a jar and say “Smell this”. BOOM! Right away, yes, I like it, I don't like it. They're not sitting back thinking, I wonder what I think about this. Why? Because their brain does not have to sit back and reflect. It's not switching channel, folks. So we have a kind of interplay between the purposeful top down, the spontaneous bottom up. The bottom up includes the visual and the sensory. This is where emotion and connotation are expressed. So in our top down, we have our intellect. We're analyzers. We figure things out. We're understanding the brief. We're understanding our target. We're understanding our audience. We're reflecting. It's accessing the child-like qualities that you saw in the letters that turned into playful words. Both of these are fundamentals to being a successful artist, design engineer, and graphic designer. processing.

Think about the top down, think about the problems. What are the issues? And I'm going to talk about that in a moment. But you open yourself from the bottom up sense, the feelings, the sensations of becoming part of this experience, that's just the stage of unity. It's almost like you want to shovel the stuff in, shovel the understanding in, and mix that soup and let it simmer. And from that simmering comes a more elegant design. So, I want to talk about setting up that process for you.

Now, I go back to my very first quote, Now more than ever, effective design establishes emotional connections with customers.” Like I said, emotion and cognition go hand in hand. And

then they'll "delve in to the corporate soul." How does one delve into the corporate soul?

Now I want to talk about critical episodes in life. By critical episodes, I mean those special moments, that could be in anybody's life, when a company reveals itself from the view point for those who work in it. So it's crucial to experience all the levels of the corporate structure during episodes that are most revealing. This will give you an understanding. What's the point here? Imagine you have a particular task - you have to create a graphic design work that's going to represent something. And I'm dealing with the intellect part, the connections of the intellect. But what are you going to depict? The richer your understanding in how the people in that world see it, the consumer in that world sees it, that understanding becomes the framework from where you can select just that right word, just that right combination of letters, that distills and expresses that which it gives. At the same time, by observing a corporation as a working structure, by examining how people feel and how other people view the company, you get a feel of the company, and this feeling will serve as a functional code that keeps you on track as you develop just the right images, which convey thoughts and feelings about the company. So richness of understanding from the new point of view of the other. By slipping into their skin, we both understand and feel together. My point about critical episodes therefore is that we ask people to tell us what this company means to them. Tell me an event in your life that shows me what that company means to you. What this identity means to you. What this person means to you.

What is it that you create? You create images with words. And they come spontaneously from the feelings. I'm talking about the richness of the stew. And I'm saying that that stew needs some preparation. This corporate soul, the place where you work, is a very complex issue. It has to do with the complexity of the company, it has to do with the hierarchy of the company.

So, before I summarize, I just want to put my concepts back on the table. I say: "You know what, there's no emotion without thinking, no thinking without emotion. That's number one." And I want to argue that the richness of this comes from engaging the world out there as a particular world, not as an abstract world, but real people in real situations, real feelings that are relevant to that which you are trying to distill in your world. So that your selection of words and selection of images, your selection of ideas, your expression of feelings are harmonized together.