HOW DOES MEDIA DESIGN FUNCTION IN AN ERA OF ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO PRINT?

response by nazarian

'we become what we behold'
Media design satisfies our increasing appetite for visual information, because we are aware of or are becoming increasingly aware of the world and events in it. Media must be 'designed' or rather 'treated' as a way of focusing it. This kind of sensory focus is actually crucial in a society glutted with printed matter. This 'glut' is purely the result of reproducability - therefore the media must be mediated and media design is the agency by which the affordances for mediation (flow control) are designed and implemented. Of course, this 'glut' is not limited to printed matter - in fact, 'glut' is exponentialized by the shift to a 'mosaic' mode of media consciousness.

'we shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us'
We have moved into a 'mosaic' mode of understanding or, rather, returned to that mode via our abandonment of the visual order of print in favor of nomadic media. The narrative grid offered by print media is insufficient to allow increasingly fragmented social identities a working perceptual mastery over the terrain of digital information, which is fundamentally a mobile or 'nomadic' medium, in both its content and its presentation. We are, as a society, ambivalent about the power of technology; it creates as much anxiety as it belays. The design of media has a direct impact on our ability to control and 'cognize' our environment - the natural environment and the technological environment. The relation ship between these two environments is complex and, in a way, media design is a narrative for describing that relationship. 'Culture' lives at the nexus of these environments and is described by the media it produces; culture is a point of departure for the human ability to grasp either environment. Interestingly, media design can be looked at as a form of 'midwifery' that helps bring into being the meta-cultures that have become necessary to the global harnessing of 'nomadic' media.

'the medium is the (sublime) message'
An almost sinisterial mnemonic spectacle (in at least one of the senses that Debord meant 'spectacle': as abstract accumulation of social relationships or ways of relating or 'a world view transformed into an objective force') has evolved out of the trend towards 'mosaic' representation. The spectacle, in this case, is the seeming impossibility of unassisted (mnemonic) mastery over fragmented experience input and the ability for individual action or response to that input, resulting in a pervasive cultural anxiety. As technological tools become less singular in their focus (the 'press') and more oriented towards 'global integrated systems' ('networks'), media design becomes fundamentally about combating 'the rhetorical threat posed by the sublime' or, put another way, 'infinite information overload'. As sensory information technologies continue to
evolve representations of the 'sublime', the human sensorium will need more and more complex aesthetic strategies for not only coping with but also manipulating multiple reference grids. Media design will describe the 'phantasmagoria' (‘sublime’) of this progress and make it accessible \(^2\) to an increasingly anxious local and global public while creating the tools of mastery and response for its revolution.

reference texts:

1 'Where is Forgetting Located?', by Norman Klein
2 'Understanding Media', by Marshal McLuhan
3 'Snap to Grid', by Peter Lunenfeld
4 'The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime', by Scott Bukatman
5 'The Society of the Spectacle', by Guy Debord