

# What About the *Design* in Graphic Design?

A Cognitive Evolutionary Approach

*Design is the process by which new objects, actions, arrangements, and relationships are identified (or “created”) and then considered for viability in their environment.*

*Its purpose, in human terms, is to allow us to make conscious choices in situations that are fundamentally indeterminate.*



## LOOKING FOR DESIGN

### Teaching

Always asking what is “good design” and why?

Leads to a bigger question: what is design?

Conventional answers have been unsatisfying

## LOOKING FOR DESIGN

### Professional practice

Projects of many different types and sizes

Commonalities of practice

Differences in posture

Challenge of “non-graphic” points of view

# LOOKING FOR DESIGN

## Research

Beginning to read

Discovering a lively dialogue

Making connections

LOOKING FOR DESIGN

Wanting more

Distinctiveness

Inclusiveness





## FINDING DESIGN

### Two important starting points

Daniel Dennet: *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*

Steven Pinker: *How the Mind Works*

*“There is a single, unified design space in which the processes of both biological and human creativity make their tracks, using similar methods.”*

DANIEL DENNETT

## FINDING DESIGN

### Dennett

Explains Darwin's evolutionary algorithm

Describes the universal design space

Shows how the algorithm operates in that space

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Intentionality: relationship of mind to meaning

Intentional stance: understanding by knowing what something is for, not just by its description

*“The mind is a system of organs of computation designed by natural selection to solve the problems faced by our ancestors in their foraging way of life.”*

STEVEN PINKER

## FINDING DESIGN

### Pinker

A theory of mind built from smaller components  
Components designed by evolution

## FINDING DESIGN

### Our capacities

Many skills and traits

All built from smaller components

Expressed in differing combinations and degrees

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### Disciplines

Collections of capacities we identify as useful  
and distinct in some way



## FINDING DESIGN

*Design can be seen as the discipline of thinking that allows us to make choices in situations where we are confronted with an infinite number of possibilities.*

FINDING DESIGN

*Imagine...*

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Must be conscious or “explicit” choices



## USING DESIGN

### **Benefits of any consistent theory**

Frames disparate elements

Explains existing conditions

Predicts new conditions or information

Informs teaching and practice

## USING DESIGN

Teaching graphic design with this consistent theory

Makes process explicit

Same process for all levels of the work

Values the process in all kinds of work

Connects various levels of the process



Graphic *Design*

