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
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
Professional practice
Projects of many different types and sizes
Commonalities of practice
Differences in posture
Challenge of “non-graphic” points of view
Research
Beginning to read
Discovering a lively dialogue
Making connections
LOOKING FOR DESIGN

Wanting more
Distinctiveness
Inclusiveness
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
Dennett

Explains Darwin’s evolutionary algorithm
Describes the universal design space
Shows how the algorithm operates in that space

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
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
FINDING DESIGN

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Disciplines
Collections of capacities we identify as useful and distinct in some way
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.
Imagine...
Design choices are fundamentally indeterminate
Must have large number of possible variables
(many permutations and combinations)
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At least one variable is without boundaries
(theoretical possibilities approach infinity)
Design choices are fundamentally indeterminate
Must have large number of possible variables
(many permutations and combinations)
At least one variable is without boundaries
(theoretical possibilities approach infinity)
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