Computers

in Art and Design

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SIGGRAPH '91
Art and Design Show

July-August 1991
Las Vegas, Nevada
The quotes presented here are representative of the varied—sometimes contradictory—feelings that artists, designers, programmers and engineers have towards using computer graphics technology in art and design. This is the framework in which many of the works shown here were produced.
For the Record

Artists who can grasp the new technology may have a much more direct opportunity to redefine our idea of nature than they did when their media were limited to painting and sculpture. [...] The natural world was never before overrun with the kind of artificiality that now permeates it, but one's conception of it has always been a man-made construct.


Women use computers at work more than men (41% versus 30%). 46% of all American children are using computers at school or at home. In 1984, 30% of kids between 3 and 17 years old used computers.

Census Bureau Data, Newsweek, April 8, 1991, p. 8.
Technological splendor did not always bring graphic progress.


I have a fine arts background and I enjoy putting my hand to a piece of paper. I don’t believe the computer will ever replace an original rough sketch. I cannot see myself just sitting at a computer and punching numbers. Luckily we have reached a point where almost all media are computer processed in some way or another—if not by electronic pre-press system then by a time base corrector.

Now everybody is a computer artist whether he or she wants to be one or not.


For us, the computer is a design tool.

It is really an extension of how we see and think, and of the traditional tools, such as pen, pencil, brush, grid and T-square, which we use to express and communicate our ideas. I'm not interested in the digital imagery of computers that has come to be associated with 'computer graphics.' It is not a look, or a style, or a trend that we're involved with here, but an engaging mental exercise as we solve communication problems.

One of the products of personal-computer design is the birth of a dense, furiously active look, the antithesis of the cool simplicity that has been considered model design in recent years. And all this visual cacophony is now acceptable because it is not the product of primitive cut and paste but the output of a sophisticated laser printer.

John Waters, "A Computer for All Reasons," by Susan Braybrooke, PRINT.
I have my hands and my mind

I don't need any equipment

Distressed artist (identity withheld at artist's request), 1991.

In the new computer age the proliferation of typefaces and type manipulations represents a new level of visual pollution threatening our culture. Out of thousands of typefaces, all we need are a few basic ones, and trash the rest.

No one understands the consequences of how computers are going to produce change. They are extremely clumsy instruments. As a tool—quite contrary to what people think of their flexibility and their aptitude—they are very poor substitutes for the archaic, old-time methodology. But they tend to dominate people’s abilities and imaginations, so that in response to that particular tool, they do things they would not do normally for any other reason. And as a result of that, there really is going to be a different aesthetic in the Nineties because of the computer. What the aesthetic will be I have no idea.

Milton Glaser, in “Goodbye to the Eighties, Quotes by Designers,” Metropolis, October 1989, p. 80.
People who work here have to know computers. Our working pace has changed now, so I can't bring in a designer who uses a drawing table—we don't even have a drawing table.


The important point is to recognize where handwork ends and machine work begins.

The technique I don't understand but want...
The level of work done today with microcomputers is quite

amazing if you compare it to what could be done three or four years ago.

Optimistic Art and Design Show Chair, 1991.

Without new design principles and concepts we will be faced with a multimedia Tower of Babel

I know very little about how this stuff actually works. And one probably doesn't need to know anymore than most of us really have to understand our automobiles or our television sets. We get by all right, so long as there is someone readily available to put them right when they go wrong. It may be partly this fear of having to really understand the technology that makes computers appear so hostile to the uninitiated.

John Waters, “A Computer for All Reasons,” by Susan Braybrooke, PRINT.

Computers are like another country. People who design computers and write software are like foreigners. They live there, in the computer country, and speak the language fluently. The rest of us visit, incorporating words from their language into ours, the way we incorporate words and phrases from French.

C'est la vie, we say.

Load that onto the hard drive, we say.

To produce books, ads or magazines with desktop technology often means that electronic files from designers, illustrators, photographers and writers are merged into one huge cauldron of digital data. There is ample opportunity for plagiarism-witting or unwitting-and the near certainty of going undetected.