Fluid Identity: History & Practice of Dynamic Visual Identity Design

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by

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  the Merry to my Pippin;

Josh—
  my comrade;
  the Legolas to my Strider;

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Chapter I

Introduction

The graphic design profession was born out of the second wave of the industrial revolution (ca. 1870–1914) when mass production separated the task of designing visual communication from the task of producing it (Dubberly, 2011; Eskilson, 2012; Jury, 2012). The concept of visual identity existed long before the industrial revolution, but visual identity design emerged during this time as a way for graphic designers to assist increasingly large and complex commercial organizations in visually communicating their personality and reason for existence to their public and their employees.

For much of the twentieth century, there existed a tension between visual identity design that overwhelmingly followed the industrial model of production, and a more organic, intuitive approach to visual identity design that sought to build on an existing house style or visual regime. The former approach began with the creation of a set of discrete yet wholly interdependent graphic devices—developed in sequential order—and ended with the production of a comprehensive manual that served to educate and instruct the client organization in how to use the graphic devices to project a carefully-crafted, consistent corporate image (Olins, 1978). The latter approach was more sought to establish a more decentralized confederation of modular elements, or visual vocabulary, to be applied based on a superordinate principle rather than specific dictates (Felsing, 2010).

Presently a transition is taking place in the developed world from an industrial to post-industrial economy, and leaders in the graphic design community have recognized the need to adapt to this new context. In 2011, leaders of the International Council of Design (Ico-D) asked a group of designers and design educators to respond to and re-evaluate the organization’s Design Education Manifesto (2000), and these responses were subsequently published as a collection of essays.

One common thread running through many of the essays published by Ico-D was the notion that the context in which and for which designers are working has fundamentally changed since the previous manifesto was written, but the methods designers are using and the way they are being
educated has not changed in kind. As evidence, Meredith Davis (2011) cites the fact that undergraduate design programs remain focused on teaching young designers to create "de-contextualized objects" in a process that has "fixed, ‘almost perfect’ results" as the end goal (p. 73). This is in spite of the fact that designers are currently practicing their profession in a context that is "multi-dimensional and dynamic" where the rate of change in the relationship between components of interconnected designed systems is accelerating (p. 73). Hugh Dubberly echoes these sentiments, and identifies the post-industrial information revolution as the impetus behind this paradigm shift. This revolution has led to a change in worldview from industrial mechanism to biological organism, as well as a change in framing metaphors from clockwork to ecosystem (p. 78). This, according to Dubberly, creates a requisite for change in both design education and practice,

In the new world of information and biology, design must change. Situations where designers design things will become less common. More common will be situations created by participants, during use, enabling multiple views. Today’s users will become designers; designers will become meta-designers, creating conditions in which others can design (p. 78–79).

Dynamic visual identity design exists as an alternative paradigm to industrial-era static visual identity design, and in many cases it more accurately reflects the post-industrial ethos and meets the needs of contemporary society. Rather than thinking of visual identity as a finite set of static elements with an instruction manual for their use, the dynamic approach understands visual identity to be a flexible, living system generated by an infinitely updatable database of elements with an algorithm that establishes constants and variables (Felsing, 2010). In this paradigm, designers become facilitators rather than authors, and clients become stewards of their identity rather than owners (Dubberly, 2008). Identity management becomes a collaborative process of incremental change. These developments run parallel to similar notions of responsive design and content management systems in web design and development.
Credit for the genesis of dynamic visual identity as a concept is often given to the designers of so-called kinetic identities of the postmodern period. MTV is often presented by graphic design historians as a case study in how young, rebellious graphic designers of the 1980s began tinkering with the static visual identity formula by animating logos and using them as containers for randomly generated color combinations and patterns (Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012). The roots of dynamic visual identity go much deeper than this, however, extending at least as far back as the Medieval period in Europe (Olins 1978).

Thus, the main aim of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, this investigation seeks to broaden the scope of graphic design history as it pertains to visual identity design by documenting the existence of an alternative paradigm which has developed alongside the prevailing visual identity design paradigm, but which is not currently well documented or understood. To this end, case studies will be provided to demonstrate that these two schools of thought have existed contemporaneously since the inception of visual identity design in the first decade of the twentieth century. Secondly, this investigation seeks to assist graphic design educators and practitioners in finding practical application of dynamic visual identity design in the classroom and professional practice by examining the mechanics of visual identity design and delineating three generative techniques for creating dynamic visual identity systems. Prototypes have been developed as part of this inquiry, and are presented as a way of demonstrating how these techniques are used to design functioning dynamic visual identity systems.

Promoting the hegemony of one visual identity paradigm over another is not a goal of this thesis, nor is it a goal of the author to suggest that one visual identity paradigm should supplant another. Rather, it is hoped that a pluralistic view of visual identity design has been advanced in order to allow designers the broadest possible landscape and greatest opportunity to modify and adapt their approach based on the specific needs of the stakeholders with whom they design.
Chapter II

Literature Review & Case Studies

Summary of Literature Review

There is general agreement—but no consensus—among graphic design historians regarding the origins of visual identity design. Contemporary histories tend to harmonize, placing the origin around 1907 in Germany at the Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG) under the creative direction of Peter Behrens (Drucker & McVarish, 2013; Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012). Some earlier writers, however suggest otherwise.

Rosen (1970, p. 124) makes the claim that visual identity design began in the northern Italian town of Ivrea with typewriter manufacturer Olivetti—under the leadership of Camillo Olivetti—around the same time that Behrens began his program at AEG. Olins (1978, p. 19), citing Betjeman, argues for an even earlier date, asserting that visual identity design, or “the age of corporate identity as we know it”, had arrived to London by as early as the 1850s. At that time four British railway companies—Midland, Great Eastern, Great Western, and Great Northern—were each seeking to separate themselves from the others in the minds of their traveling public, and, at the same time, were in need of a way to unite an ever-increasing, far-flung, and diversifying workforce behind a common purpose. Each railway company attempted to achieve these goals by unifying, through a common visual style, the architecture of stations, the design of the trains themselves, the employee uniforms, and the typography on signage and printed materials (Olins, 1978).

While these historians seem to agree on the purpose of visual identity design as described above by Olins, the lack of harmony among these historians regarding the origins of the discipline is further compounded by the conflation of all visual identities designed in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries into a single design paradigm, and the interpretation of these visual identities through a unified conceptual framework. For instance, Meggs & Purvis (2012) describe visual identity...
design as a “genre” that evolved over half a century from Behrens’s work at AEG to corporate identities of the 1950s and 60s (p. 247). In analyzing visual identities from the 1950s through the 1980s, Meggs & Purvis apply a consistent framework, only briefly mentioning that some identities were tightly controlled “closed” systems (p. 424) while others were more loosely managed and “flexible” (p. 419).

What seems to be overlooked or ignored by such an analysis is the fact that designers are driven by different theoretical underpinnings that often dramatically affect their approaches to solving problems. Thus, when contemporary graphic design historians such as Meggs & Purvis point to Behrens as the progenitor of visual identity design, and Rosen, writing nearly a half century earlier, points to Olivetti, in a sense, both are correct. What is happening is the identification of two discreet visual identity paradigms—one which has as its roots the modernist German concept of Gesamtkunstwerk whereas the other is rooted in a much older premodern tradition centered in Italy within the Roman Catholic Church.

With this in mind, the following survey of visual identity design history documents the origins of the discipline while attempting to acknowledge and distinguish between to discrete paradigms: static and dynamic visual identity design.

A Prehistory of Visual Identity Design

Despite arriving at the idea of a unified corporate image a half-century earlier than Behrens and AEG, not even the British railways can be credited with the discovery of visual identity: “Its history is ancient, curious and, for the most part, honorable” (Olins, 1978, p. 13). The concept of visual identity, and many of the elements—such as trademarks—that comprise visual identity systems have existed for at least 5,000 years (Mollerup, 2013),
The historical forerunners of modern trademarks evolved from the need and desire for social identification on the part of the individual or the group. They were a means of establishing the distinguishing character of something (p. 16).

According to Mollerup, early trademarks were used to establish identity in one of three ways: socially (i.e. who is this?), proprietarily (i.e. who owns this?), and/or progenitorially (i.e. who made this?).

Coupled with two types of motivation—need or desire—it is possible to categorize a number of premodern visual identity precedents into one of six categories (Figure 1). Of these precedents, heraldry was the most complex and the most similar to contemporary visual identity systems.

Heraldry in Europe had its roots in the Christian crusades of the late medieval period when elaborate suits of armor made it difficult for crusaders to identify the knight bearing the armor. Originally, markings on the exterior of these suits of armor helped crusaders identify each other (Mollerup, 2013), and, over time, this practice evolved into a complex system of identification in which particular shield shapes, color palettes, and various sets of graphic elements were assigned to entire families as a way to signify heritage and cadency. As more families became involved in the practice of heraldry, the number of elements and the rules for their combination grew increasingly complex. It was the job of a herald in medieval Europe to keep records of existing coats of arms, to create new ones when the need arose, and to establish general rules for their application (Mollerup, 2013). Thus, the medieval herald serves as a premodern prototype of the visual identity designer.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARKS</th>
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<td>monograms</td>
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<td>earmarks</td>
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**Figure 1 — Premodern Visual Identity Precedents.** Three ways of establishing identity and two motivations yield six categories.
In addition to sponsoring the military missions that spawned the medieval practice of heraldry, the Roman Catholic Church itself foreshadowed the advent of visual identity design in its intentional use of rituals, special clothing and titles, sophisticated buildings, and visual symbols in order to make an impression on a variety of stakeholders (Olins, 1978, p. 16). According to Olins, the Church has always intuitively recognized the power of identity and at different times, for different reasons and in different ways it has developed what we could call identity programs. It has rarely abandoned an existing style or pattern of behavior. When a new movement or activity becomes appropriate the Church simply adds it to the existing collection (p. 16–17).

If the Roman Catholic Church practiced a premodern form of visual identity design, as Olins suggests, his statement portrays a more decentralized, organic, and intuitive approach than the centralized, industrial, and rational approach practiced in the twentieth century by Peter Behrens and the modernist visual identity designers he inspired—which had as one of its primary goals the complete overthrow and replacement of old visual regimes with new ones—indicating the existence of at least two visual identity paradigms.

Between the late medieval period and Behrens’s work at AEG, visual identity became a formalized concept as guilds made proprietary marks compulsory. Ceramic marks, stonemasons’ marks, hallmarks, printers’ marks, watermarks, and furniture marks were used as a way to identify craftsmen and to regulate trade (Mollerup, 2013). By the eighteenth century trademarks were commonplace in Europe as a mercantile middle class emerged and ultimately gave rise to the industrial revolution (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

Origins & Development of Static Visual Identity Design

Peter Behrens’s beliefs regarding how a visual identity system should be constructed and maintained were driven by an emerging school of thought, known as the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen), that emerged in late-eighteenth century Germany. As a thought
leader in this movement, Behrens advanced the philosophy of Gesamtkultur, which posited the idea that the man-made environment could be totally reformed by synthesizing classical learning with modern technology and commonsense objectivity (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). This new society was to be known as the Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art.

When Behrens was appointed as artistic advisor at AEG in 1907, he set out to test these ideas by replacing the existing elements of AEG’s visual identity with completely new ones in an attempt to unify every aspect of the company’s visual identity. From the architecture of its factories, to the design of its products, and even its graphic design and printed promotional materials, Behrens sought to speak with one unified visual voice. In his own words,

As all products of society have a more or less close relationship to architecture, this design aim is of general significance. For the new approach will make it possible for the three-dimensional artist and the architect to reintegrate those objects whose technical character previously upset the artistic layout of a room into the all-embracing artistic order...In the logical application of these intentions, the company also attaches great importance to the artistic and typographic design of all its publications. The layout and arrangement of the exhibitions organized by the company will also be governed by the principles outlined here (29 August 1907).

The outcome of this effort was the first fully-fledged modern visual identity system, consisting of the three “linchpin” elements present in all corporate identity programs from that point on: a logo, a typeface, and a consistent art direction (Meggs & Purvis, 2012, p. 247). Behrens’s work at AEG provided not only the raw materials, but also the conceptual framework for a static approach to visual identity design—an approach that sought to institute a visual regime from the top down, and to enforce its implementation through explicit guidelines and strict “policing.”

Despite his success at AEG, Behrens’s desire to help in establishing a broader Gesamtkultur in Germany was cut short by the First World War. The possibility of realizing a modern German cultural
identity was further diminished with Germany’s defeat in that war and a two decades-long national economic struggle to recover. In the 1930s, however, Behrens’s framework for visual identity design—as well as his desire to establish a broader German cultural identity—was implemented with terrifying success by Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Worker’s (Nazi) Party.

Before becoming the leader of the Nazi Party, Hitler was an artist who subscribed to the idea of a German Gesamtkultur with its goal of a totally new, all-encompassing aesthetic ideal. Hitler admired Behrens’s work at AEG, and mingled the idea of a comprehensive visual identity design program with his own notions of “racial purification, nationalist regeneration, and world domination” (Heller, 2010, p. 14–16).

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Nazi Party had a fully-fledged visual identity system complete with the three linchpin elements. The swastika served as the party’s logo, while the traditional Germanic type style known as blackletter (Figure 2) served as the typographic palette of the party. The Nazis also employed a two color palette of red and black, and a complex set of secondary graphic elements. The proper use of all of these identity elements was defined in great detail in the Organisationsbuch der NSDAP—a prototype of the contemporary visual identity standards manual. Furthermore, the Nazis carefully managed Hitler’s public image, and used public spectacles such as military parades and dramatically-lit nighttime rallies as a way to further distinguish themselves from the rival Communist Party and to unite the German people behind a common purpose.
Despite the defeat of the Nazi Party and its ideology in the Second World War, Hitler and his designers in the German Labor Front carried forward and refined the ideas posited by Peter Behrens in the first decade of the twentieth century, and left a dark yet indelible mark on the history of visual identity design. According to Olins (1978),

There is no more dramatic and truly horrific example of corporate identity at its most glittering, powerful and hypnotic than that of the Third Reich (p. 22).

Heller (2010) echoes this with his acknowledgement that,

The impact of the Nazis’ distinct visual language combined with a unique public relations rhetoric comes close to exemplifying how contemporary branding strategies operate... The legacy of the Nazis’ branding campaign is its diabolical durability. Even while being horrified by the regime, one must acknowledge the effectiveness of its propaganda (p. 75).

Just as there seems to be some general agreement among contemporary graphic design historians regarding the birth of visual identity design at AEG in the first decade of the twentieth century, there is even broader agreement regarding the coming of age of visual identity design in the decades following the Second World War (Drucker & McVarish, 2013; Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012; Olins, 1978). Divorced from the Nazi party’s extreme ideology and violent tactics, the model for visual identity design embraced by the Nazis proved nevertheless to be a viable framework that was easily transferrable to the design of visual identities for emerging multinational corporations. As a result this totalitarian approach was adopted and further refined by numerous European graphic designers during the 1960s. Otl Aicher in Germany, and Massimo Vignelli and Ivan Chermayeff—both Europeans who migrated to New York—were among those who demonstrated how the model could be applied to corporations.

In 1953, the Hochscule für Gestaltung (HfG Ulm) was founded by Inge Scholl and designer-educator Otl Aicher in memory of Hans and Sophie Scholl, who were executed by the Nazis during
the Second World War (Betts, 1998). The vision of the founders was to establish an institution of higher education that would produce designers with critical social and cultural awareness in celebration of a new, more democratic Germany (Lindinger, 1991). The school was arranged into four departments: Information, Architecture & City Planning, Visual Design, and Product Form. Students of HfG Ulm shared a common foundation year before choosing a specialization within one of the four departments (Betts, 1998).

In addition to working on hypothetical design problems within their chosen departments, studio groups were formed that allowed students from different departments to work in interdisciplinary teams with faculty on real world design problems. In 1962, Aicher led a group of students from the Visual Design department in the creation of a visual identity system for Germany’s national airline, Lufthansa (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). Along with the traditional linchpin elements, the design team for Lufthansa also developed modular grid systems and typographic specifications for the execution of printed materials. These specifications were so detailed that they included exact letterspacing guidelines for the logotype at various sizes and for different applications (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). It seems that Behrens’s idea of a transformative Gesamtkunstwerk was still alive and well at HfG Ulm, and, thanks to the contributions of the Nazi party, control over every aspect of this total work of art was considered a possibility through the production and dissemination of a visual identity standards manual. It is ironic that Aicher and his students applied the same model for visual identity design that the Nazis had developed two decades earlier given that the HfG Ulm was founded on the premise that a scientific approach to design could help to prevent the societal conditions that led to the rise of the Nazi party (Betts, 2014). Yet, according to Meggs & Purvis (2012), The Lufthansa corporate identity program became an international prototype for the closed identity system, with every detail and specification addressed for absolute uniformity (p. 424).
This closed, or static, approach visual identity design not only requires absolute uniformity, but, in many cases it also constitutes a revolution—the overthrow of an organization’s former visual regime and the installation of a newer, absolutist visual regime.

In 1964 the Socony Mobil Oil Company selected Eliot Noyes to study the design of Mobil’s service stations, and Noyes in turn suggested contracting Chermayeff & Geismar Associates to redesign the company’s packaging and graphics (Rosen, 1970). At the time, the Mobil visual identity—which included large scale signage, service station graphics, product packaging, and various stationery items—was deemed to be inconsistent, inefficient, and at times illegible.

Chermayeff & Geismar recommended a simplification of the company’s name and visual identity. The new name, Mobil, would also become the logotype and would replace the former visual regime which included both a logotype and red pegasus symbol enclosed in a circle. In order to accomplish this overthrow, the designers had to convince stakeholders that the price tag and loss of equity was worth the cost. For instance, replacing only the major signs at Mobil’s service stations would have cost $38.9 million, adjusting for inflation (Rosen, 1970). In addition to the cost, the designers would also need to produce a detailed standards manual similar to the one produced by Aicher for Lufthansa. Yet, as the Nazis discovered first during their reign in Germany, a manual alone would not ensure total compliance. Thus, according to Chermayeff (as cited in Rosen, 1970),

[W]e’ll remain on call for a great number of ongoing projects. We intend to stay with the program and to develop new designs wherever they’re required. Among other things, this should help to take care of the problem of maintaining or policing the program, since we’ll be present all along (p. 122).

Such a complete overthrow of a previous visual regime as is demonstrated by Chermayeff & Geismar’s work at Mobil does not always work, however, as Eskilson notes when discussing Massimo Vignelli’s redesign of the American Airlines visual identity in 1967. A “save the eagle” counter offensive was launched by employees of the Airline, and Vignelli was ultimately forced to capitulate on that
one point (Eskilson, 2012, p. 315). Despite this lost battle, Vignelli otherwise succeeded in establishing a new visual regime that lasted for nearly half a century. Vignelli boasted that this was because the visual identity system for American Airlines was “perfect” (Hustwit, 2007), however it is more likely a reflection of the power wielded by the design firm-as-police force and the cost associated with a comprehensive rebrand in the static visual identity paradigm.

Origins & Development of Dynamic Visual Identity Design

At about the same time that Peter Behrens was attempting to establish an all-encompassing totalitarian visual regime at AEG, an entirely different approach to visual identity design was in its infancy in the small northern Italian town of Ivrea. There, in 1908, Camillo Olivetti founded the Olivetti Corporation—an Italian typewriter manufacturer with a commitment to “humanist ideals and technological progress” (Meggs & Purvis, 2012, p. 413). From 1908 until 1938, Camillo served as president of Olivetti and set the vision for the company: to operate based on “the norm of the beautiful” (as cited in Rosen, 1970, p. 124). This ideal extended beyond the design of Olivetti typewriters to the setting in which Olivetti employees lived and worked.

Camillo’s son Adriano gradually took over the family business and attempted to realize the vision of his father. In the 1930s, as the events which led to the Second World War began to take a toll on the Italian economy, Adriano responded by providing a range of social services to employees. Nurseries, housing assistance, day camps, and recreational facilities were provided to Olivetti workers and their families in a setting of “startling beauty” (Rosen, 1970, p. 127). During this time a house style, defined by Olins (1978, p. 212) as the most superficial expression of corporate personality, began to develop at Olivetti. Rather than the top-down imposition of a visual regime, the Olivetti house style developed organically as Adriano contracted architects, product designers, and graphic designers to give form to “the norm of the beautiful”. It took at least a decade for the co-evolution of architecture, products, and graphics to cohere into a visual identity.
The primary graphic designer at work in Olivetti’s publicity department was Giovanni Pintori, who developed and maintained the visual identity from 1936 until 1967 (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). It was eleven years before Pintori designed a trademark for Olivetti—a simple logotype consisting of all lowercase sans serif letterforms, slightly letterspaced—and this trademark never played the central role of identification that trademarks often do in static visual identity systems. Olivetti’s visual identity system was not logo-centric; instead, the Olivetti trademark was one of a loosely connected constellation of elements that formed a dynamic and flexible visual identity system. According to Meggs & Purvis (2012),

Identity [at Olivetti] was achieved not through a systematic design program but through the general visual appearance of promotional graphics (p. 412).

This dynamic approach to visual identity design allowed Olivetti to evolve its corporate image organically when it acquired the New York-based Underwood Typewriter Company in 1959. In the static visual identity paradigm, such a merger would have precipitated a complete overhaul of the company’s visual identity system; however, because Olivetti’s identity was flexible, the change was incremental and barely noticeable. Initially the company’s publicity materials were changed to announce the merger to the American public. Over the next decade, the design of the products and the architecture of factories in America gradually changed to reflect the Olivetti “norm of the beautiful” ideal (Rosen, 1970).

This dynamic approach to visual identity design was welcome in America, where modernism was a great deal more expressive than its German and Swiss-derived “international” counterpart. America’s mix of egalitarianism, capitalism, and multiculturalism led to an approach to graphic design in general, and visual identity design specifically, that was more “pragmatic, intuitive, and less formal” than European International Style modernism (Meggs & Purvis, 2012, p. 390). Whereas International Style modernism was reductive and sought to simplify complexity and unify information within an all-encompassing visual style, American modernists remained open to “an eclectic range of
styles” (Eskilson, 2012, p. 304). According to Drucker & McVarish (2013), designers in the United States,

[A]bsorbed European approaches while preserving an American idiom and including vernacular imagery. Imaginative eclecticism and creative use of technology often went together in their projects (p.255).

During this phase of visual identity design history, American designers created identity systems that were more flexible, dynamic, and less tightly controlled than the static visual identities produced by International Style modernist designers such as Otl Aicher. Without the philosophical underpinnings of Behrens and the Deutscher Werkbund, American designers embraced the older traditions of premodern visual identity—adding to rather than overthrowing the existing visual regime—while also seeking to express the dynamism and freedom of postwar modern America. This flexible approach was important at a time of increasing globalization and diversification in the postwar economy.

One American designer who is well-documented in graphic design histories as having an influence on the development of visual identity design is Paul Rand; yet, these histories are not harmonious when describing the approach Rand took to designing visual identities such as the one he created for IBM. Drucker & McVarish (2013) classify Rand’s IBM identity among the static International Style identity programs that featured “flawless logotypes that projected a unified image” for a company committed to “uniformity across its many operations and offices” (p. 247). This analysis, however, belies a number of facts that would place the IBM visual identity system within the dynamic visual identity paradigm. For instance, when Rand was contracted to redesign the company’s visual identity, he chose to update the existing visual regime rather than overthrowing it. According to Eskilson (2012),

The resulting [IBM] logo was similar to, but much crisper looking than, the older one, with more elegantly proportioned lettering (p. 310).
Eskilson goes on to describe Rand’s continual updating of the IBM logo, yielding a total of six versions between 1956 and 1990. Each version added a new dimension to the overall visual identity system, and none of the older logos were deprecated. This account—along with the accounts of other design historians comparing it to Pintori’s work for Olivetti (Meggs & Purvis, 2012; Olins, 1978; Rosen, 1970)—places Rand’s work for IBM among the earliest examples of dynamic visual identity systems.

According to Meggs & Purvis,

The model developed by IBM, with design consultants such as Rand and internal staff design departments whose managers have the authority to maintain the corporate visual identity, produced an evolving design program of consistently high quality (p. 419).

Rosen (1970) describes the IBM visual identity system as a decentralized one that “runs itself to a certain extent” without the need for policing (p. 100). In fact, it wasn’t until the 1990s that Rand produced an identity standards manual for IBM (Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012). This loose confederation of elements, governed by a superordinate principle rather than a detailed manual of dictates, is another hallmark of contemporary dynamic visual identity systems (Felsing, 2010).

The lack of harmony—and, at times, apparent confusion—among graphic design historians regarding the nature of mid-twentieth century visual identity systems such as Rand’s IBM identity suggests that, perhaps, the conceptual framework being used to understand this history is too narrow. Forcing Rand’s work, and the work of other mid-century American modernists, into the same paradigm as designers working in the International Style is too simplistic. These visual identity systems differed not only in their appearance, but also their implementation, and the theoretical underpinnings that guided both appearance and implementation. This suggests the existence of two paradigms in operation at the same point in history.

This is not to say that contemporary graphic design historians don’t acknowledge the presence of dynamic visual identity at all—they do. Yet, their placement of its emergence in the early 1980s with the MTV visual identity designed by Manhattan Design (Drucker & McVarish, 2013;
Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012; Van Nes, 2012) is much later than the facts presented here indicate. In addition, these historians tend to use language that frames dynamic identity design more as a postmodernist trend—the experimentation of subversive designers—than an alternative paradigm. Eskilson, for instance, includes a description of the MTV identity under the subheading “Coopting the Counterculture” where he describes executives as seeking to establish a “unique, hip design identity” (p. 384).

These accounts also interpret dynamic visual identities through the lens of static visual identity design by focusing on the trademark rather than the system as a whole. Static visual identities as defined above are logo-centric, and the logo is seen as an unchanging signature. Thus, an ever-changing logo such as the one employed by MTV in the 1980s would have been considered a novelty by static visual identity designers. Dynamic visual identities, however, are often decentralized in their system architecture, and the logo—if one exists—plays no more important a role than any other element. Such identities tend to be ignored or classified by historians as something other than visual identity systems simply because the primary linchpin element of static identities is not present or its role has been diminished. The Walker Art Center visual identity system, designed in 1995 and recently expanded, is one example of this phenomenon. Eskilson (2012) and Meggs & Pruvis (2012) discuss the modular typeface system, created for the Walker Art Center by typeface designer Matthew Carter, but fail to fully discuss the visual identity system within which it operates. Likewise, these historians discuss the Walker typeface in the context of contemporary typography, not visual identity design, despite the fact that the typeface was created specifically for—and played an important role in—the Walker Art Center Visual identity system (Re, 2003).

This failure on the part of graphic design historians to recognize the existence of a dynamic visual identity paradigm, and to analyze dynamic visual identities through an appropriate conceptual framework has left the paradigm open to attack from those who operate within the static visual identity paradigm. The most common attack is to classify dynamic visual identity design as a trend or
a bandwagon, and then to question its sustainability (Johnson, 8 July 2013; Paget, 12 April 2016). Johnson compares dynamic visual identity design to a genie that needs to be put back in the bottle, while Paget suggests that the approach is only available to “bigger companies with bigger budgets” due to the time and effort involved in the development and maintenance of dynamic identities.

Based on the evidence presented above, it can be said that dynamic visual identity design is not a trend, that its theoretical underpinnings actually predate the modernist theoretical underpinnings of static visual identity design, and that it can be especially effective as part of a broader strategy to grow evolve a small, family-owned company like Olivetti into a competitor and peer of multi-national corporations like IBM. Thus, the remainder of this chapter consists of four case studies intended to reframe the discussion of dynamic visual identity design, and to situate it properly within a discrete paradigm separate from static visual identity design. In the following chapters, the mechanics of visual identity design will be discussed through a morphological analysis of the visual identity system as an abstract concept, and practical techniques for the creation of dynamic visual identities will be identified and discussed in the context of three prototypes created specifically for this investigation.

Case Study 1: La Fonda del Sol (1960)

The client and the problem. Restaurant Associates president, Jerome Brody and executive vice president, Joseph Baum sought to parlay their success with two theme restaurants—the Forum of The Twelve Caesars and The Four Seasons—into a new venture intended for the ground floor of the newly-opened Time & Life Building in Rockefeller Center, New York City in 1960 (Hauß, 2016; Rosen 1970). Restaurant Associates needed a name, a visual identity, and an interior design plan for their new venture—an Argentine-style steak house restaurant. Brody and Baum wanted the steak
house to be the first of its kind in the United States “to treat south-of-the-border food seriously” (as cited in Hauß, 2016, p. 249).

**The designer.** Alexander Girard, an American architect, interior designer, and graphic designer was chosen specifically for his expertise in Southwest American Folk art (Rosen, 1970). According to Rosen, the owners of Restaurant Associates were particularly impressed with Girard’s work on an unnamed building in San Francisco, however none of the biographies consulted for this investigation show Girard doing work on a building in San Francisco. Hauß states that it was renowned architect Philip Johnson who recommended Girard to Restaurant Associates president James Brody. Johnson was responsible for the design of The Four Seasons, another Restaurant Associates property in the Mies van der Rohe-designed Seagram’s Building (Hauß, 2016).

Alexander Girard was born in the United States in 1907, but spent the formative years of his life in Florence, Italy—just 300 miles south of Olivetti’s Ivrea plant—and studied architecture in London from 1924–1929 (Kries & Eisenbrand, 2016). It was in Italy during his childhood that Girard became interested in folk art. While visiting the churches of Florence during Advent, Girard admired the nativity scenes, and throughout the year he would receive gifts—so-called textile samplers—from all over Europe sent to him by his grandfather (Eisenbrand, 2016). This fascination with folk art continued when Girard relocated to the United States in the 1930s, and he became especially enamored with the art of the American Southwest. Girard particularly loved Santa Fe, New Mexico because, “it reminded us of the kind of light and buildings we loved so in Italy” (as cited in Eisenbrand, 2016, p. 143).

**The solution to the problem.** Girard, his wife Susan, and Lee Jaffe of Restaurant Associates traveled to a dozen Latin American countries in 1960 seeking inspiration and gathering folk art to use
for the restaurant (Hauß, 2016). The result of this research was a dynamic visual identity inspired by a fusion of Latin American influences. According to Girard,

La Fonda del Sol, in its totality, is an abstract symbol of Latin America, a special “stage world” and not a historically or realistically accurate reproduction of any given place or proto-type (as cited in Oldham & Coffee, 2015, p. 142).

The identity consisted of a logotype; a palette of vivid, Latin America-inspired colors that would oscillate between primary, secondary, and tertiary colors arranged in complementary and analogous schemes; a typographic palette comprised of a primary custom typeface and a wide range of additional typefaces and hand-lettered designs; and a smiling sun motif that was applied to everything from matchbooks and sugar packets to employee uniforms to sculptural wall hangings and restroom faucets (Hauß, 2016; Oldham & Coffee, 2015); yet the motif never appeared the same way twice.

Rather than a fixed trademark, Girard deployed the spirited, rough-hewn logotype and a sun motif (Figure 3) in a manner more akin to Pintori’s work at Olivetti than Behrens’s work at AEG.

**Figure 3 – La Fonda del Sol Logotype & Sun Motif, Alexander Girard (1960).** Girard used a finite set of facial features, sun rays, enclosing shapes and colors as variables to create an astonishingly large number of permutations of the graphic sun motif. The rough hewn, hand-lettered logotype served as the constant.
The sun motif, along with the vibrant color palette, became the primary actors of the visual identity system. The motif, however, was not treated as a trademark would be in a static visual identity system with the emphasis on consistency and legibility. Describing the use of the sun motif, Hauß (2016) claims that it “underwent an inconceivable number of mutations, appearing like an ever-changing but always recognizable logo” (p. 244).

The effects of the solution. The effects of Girard’s work for La Fonda del Sol is twofold: its immediate effect on the client and its customers, and its long-term effects on the practice of visual identity design. The immediate effect of the visual identity was summed up by a critic for Architectural Record in June, 1961, who wrote,

“All of these elements have been so handled by the architect that what might have been merely garish or quaint is in actuality restrained, yet joyful, highly controlled, yet free” (as cited in Hauß, 2016, p. 244).

At the time Girard began working with Restaurant Associates, theme restaurants were becoming popular in the United States, yet the weren’t taken seriously. Culinary historians credit Restaurant Associates for forcing critics change course and recognize the viability—and seriousness—of this genre of restaurants (Hauß, 2016). La Fonda del Sol was wildly popular—weekly Sunday “fiestas” would attract over a thousand guests (Hauß, 2016)—due, in part to Girard’s use of real artifacts made by real craftsmen and culled from Latin American countries.

Girard’s work for La Fonda del Sol also obviously influenced another, higher-profile project he would be involved with just five years later—an update to the Braniff Airlines visual identity. Girard’s use of a decentralized identity system for Braniff, consisting of typography, vivid colors, and patterns applied to every property, product, and package in the airline’s ecosystem reflects his work for La Fonda, but at a much larger scale. His dynamic visual identity design for Braniff led one critic to declare,
“The major contribution of this corporate image design, then, is not its decorative effect, but a broader dimension—the psychological benefits to the individual traveler that masterly decoration can, unexpectedly provide” (as cited in Oldham & Coffee, 2015, p. 226).

The long-term effect of Girard’s La Fonda del Sol visual identity on the practice of visual identity design are only now being fully understood. Of the graphic design histories reviewed for this investigation, only Rosen (1970) discusses the La Fonda del Sol project, and only mentions Girard by name once in a detailed, 24-paragraph analysis of the project. Additionally, Alexander Girard is not mentioned—for any reason—in any of the other design histories reviewed for this investigation (Drucker & McVarish, 2013; Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012; Olins, 1978), and is not considered first and foremost a graphic designer by design historians. Girard is perhaps most well-known for his textile designs done for Herman Miller, in collaboration with Charles Eames and George Nelson.

Despite this, two recent monographs written about Girard (Kries & Eisenbrand, 2016; Oldham & Coffee, 2015) as well as a suite of typefaces and products designed by the type foundry, House Industries, in honor of Girard’s graphic design work make a strong argument for his inclusion in the canon of graphic design history. Furthermore, both the New York and San Francisco museums of modern art have acquired ephemera produced as part of Girard’s La Fonda del Sol visual identity—indicating that this work has made a significant contribution to graphic design history.

On a practical level, Girard’s most significant contribution to the current practice of dynamic visual identity design is, perhaps, his demonstration that an identity system need not have a static trademark, a limited color palette, or a standards manual to successfully establish an organization’s visual identity. His permutable sun motif serves as a kind of logo, yet it never appeared the same way twice. Girard turned the motif into a modular subsystem of component parts—background, enclosing shape, sun rays, forehead, nose and eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and chin—combining and recombining them in a wide variety of combinations. If each part of the motif were allowed to change form and color independently, these few components could yield many millions of permutations.
The amount of variability Girard achieved with a relatively small number of components—what Pearce (1978) referred to as a minimum inventory, maximum diversity system—demonstrates one of the hallmarks of contemporary dynamic visual identity design (Felsing, 2010), looks forward to the work of generative designers working in the twenty-first century (Reas, McWilliams & Barendse, 2010), and hearkens back to premodern heraldic systems like the one Girard himself created as a child for the fictitious Republic of Fife (Eisenbrand, 2016).

Girard’s work for La Fonda del Sol clearly articulates the conceptual “linchpin elements” of dynamic visual identity design: modularity that allows for permutation and open form, and progressive ideals tempered by an appreciation for and desire to build upon past visual regimes in a process of accretion rather than supplanting them in a hostile overthrow.

Case Study 2: Columbus, Indiana (1965–1973)

The client and the problem. During the 1960s and 1970s, the small, rural community of Columbus, Indiana undertook an early exercise in what has since become known as place branding. Despite being an otherwise sleepy midwestern community with a population of around 20,000, Columbus was nicknamed the “Athens of The Prairie” in the March 21, 1964 issue of Saturday Evening Post and described by First Lady Johnson in 1967 as a “Symphony in Stone” for its mix of historic Victorian and Second Empire style architecture and high concentration of buildings designed by world-renowned mid-century modernist architects (Risting, 2012). A group of modernist designers from multiple disciplines—including, Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Charles and Ray Eames, Alexander Girard, and Paul Rand—converged on Columbus to participate in an number of high-profile projects brought about by the patronage of Cummins Engine president and CEO, J. Irwin Miller. Miller also established the Cummins Foundation Architecture Program, which promised to pay the architect fees for any new public building in Columbus with the stipulation that the city had to select an architect.
from the list provided by the foundation (Risting, 2012). The foundation has sponsored more than 50 projects designed by world-renowned architects such as Gunnar Birkerts, Richard Meier, Eliot Noyes, Kevin Roche & John Dinkeloo, Robert Venturi, and Harry Weese.

At a period in American history when the suburban landscape was being transformed, and malls and edge-of-town shopping centers were drawing shoppers out of small town centers, the Columbus Downtown Development Agency sought to revive the Washington Street downtown district and imbue it with a sense of place, at a human scale. A short time later, the Columbus Area Visitors Center sought to further solidify the community’s image by creating a visual identity system to use for promotional materials as well as wayfinding signage throughout the city.

The designers. Alexander Girard and Paul Rand—who both had connections to influential Columbus businessman, J. Irwin Miller—were invited to work on these two separate but related projects over a ten year period.

In 1960 Girard accepted a commission to clean up and beautify the architectural streetscape along Columbus’s main thoroughfare, Washington Street, which featured historic Victorian and Second Empire style architecture (Lange, 2016). Six years earlier, Girard had worked as the interior designer and co-architect with Eero Saarinen on Xenia and J. Irwin Miller’s residence just up the street from the downtown district (Kries & Eisenbrand, 2016). The collaboration between Saarinen and Girard was heralded as a hallmark of modernism, and the house is now a national historic landmark.

Girard and Miller maintained their relationship after the project had ended, and Girard eventually worked on numerous Miller-initiated interior office projects on Washington Street in addition to the commission to update the architectural streetscape (Lange, 2016). Due in part to his commitments to the La Fonda del Sol project, Girard’s work on the streetscape project didn’t actually get under way until 1965.
Less than ten years later, in 1972, graphic designer Paul Rand was asked to create a visual identity system for the Columbus Area Visitors Center, an organization dedicated to promoting the rural Indiana city’s unusually high concentration of mid-twentieth century modernist architecture. Rand had previously worked with J. Irwin Miller to design the visual identity system for Cummins Engine Company (1964). While Girard was focused on reviving the Victorian-era downtown district, Rand was tasked with establishing a visual identity that would represent and promote the modernist design that made Columbus a destination.

The solution to the problem. After four years of planning, Girard produced a plan to update the façades of the Victorian buildings along Washington Street by repainting them with a vibrant color palette intended to accentuate their intricate details. Additionally, the plan included the replacement of store signage with new ones that were better scaled to the size of the buildings and made better use of typographic hierarchy to emphasize the nature of businesses contained within. According to Lange (2016),

The scheme carefully modulated intense, Victorian gingerbread moments with more restful fields of color or tone-on-tone combinations, limiting the color palette and sign size to a narrow range...He treated the whole town as a composition to be organized, a flat surface over which complex and colorful elements might be gridded and arranged in individual white boxes like his textiles for Herman Miller” (p. 279–81).

While Girard’s plan was comprehensive, his approach was not dictatorial. According to one member of the Downtown Development Agency, Girard favored implementing his solution on only one of seventeen block fronts along Washington street hoping that it would “serve as a guide, as well as an inspiration in causing the community to go further” (as cited in Lange, 2016, p. 278). Over the ensuing years, eighty percent of the storefronts along Washington Street have been renovated according to Girard’s specifications (Risting, 2012).
Between 1973 and 1974, the Columbus Area Visitors Center worked with Paul Rand to design a graphic visual identity system to complement Girard’s architectural and environmental work on Washington Street. Rand developed a visual motif featuring a geometric sans serif “C” as an index of the word “Columbus”. A primary color palette was used—with the addition of green—and the geometric “C’s” were rotated and overlapped in a playful manner against a black or white background so as to make them appear as if they were floating. Rand did create a version of the motif that could serve as a logo (Figure 4), however, it was almost never used, in deference to the all-over pattern.

![Motif Images](image)

**Figure 4 — Columbus Area Visitors Center “Dancing ‘C’” Logo, Paul Rand (1973).** Enclosed in a circle, the repeated “C” appears to symbolize the high density of modernist architecture in Columbus. This logo form of Rand’s “Dancing ‘C’” motif was rarely used in deference to the all-over pattern.

The mix of geometric and neo-grotesque sans serif typography and the simple color palette symbolized the presence of modernist architecture in Columbus, and the repetition of the “C” within an enclosing square or circle suggested the high density of these modernist buildings within a small geographical area. Known affectionately by locals as the “Dancing ‘C’”, Rand’s motif was applied to printed materials and wayfinding signage throughout Columbus in such a manner and range of configurations that it appeared to be constantly in motion (Figure 5). The identity system was used by the Columbus Area Visitors Center for 32 years from 1974 until 2006 (Risting, 2012).
The effects of the solution. A reviewer for the December 1965 issue of Architectural Forum commented that Girard's effort to “preserve the commercial core against the competition of the edge-of-town shopping centers” was an encouraging sign that civic leaders recognized that “isolated
masterpieces may make a town famous, but never great”, and that Girard’s plan capitalized “on one of the big architectural assets of downtown Columbus, its wealth of Victorian detail” (as cited in Lange, 2016 and Risting, 2012). These comments mirror the tension between the static visual identity paradigm and its tendency toward overthrowing an replacing older forms, and the dynamic visual identity paradigm and its tendency toward accretion by embracing and building upon existing forms. Ultimately, though Girard’s plan was never fully implemented, it influenced a project for Detroit’s Greektown neighborhood, and was cited in a 1975 *Washington Post* editorial as a model for a similar project to revitalize G Street in Washington D.C. (Lange, 2016).

The visual identity Rand produced for Columbus lends credence to the assertion that he tended to work within the dynamic visual identity paradigm, yet, despite Rand’s prominence as an American graphic designer working during the modernist period, the “Dancing ‘C’” identity does not appear in any of the graphic design histories reviewed for this investigation. Perhaps, if more attention were given to this visual identity system, it would reframe the way Rand’s other identities—such as IBM—are understood by graphic design historians.

After the city of Columbus replaced Rand’s identity system in 2006, it seemed as though this opportunity had been lost. Led by the graphic designer and Columbus native, Cody Thompson, however, the “Dancing ‘C’” has been revived for the newly formed Columbus Arts District. With plans to use the identity with an expanded the color palette when new districts are added, this revival of Rand’s dynamic visual identity system is both a testament to its venerable position in the minds of community members—it is seen as part of their personal identity—and a renewed opportunity to evaluate Rand’s body of visual identity design work in light of the dynamic “Dancing ‘C’”.

The client and the problem. In 1977, Los Angeles (LA) won a bid to host the games of the twenty-third olympiad to be held in the summer of 1984. One of the first decisions made by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) chose to use twenty-six existing athletic venues rather than build new ones. According to the Official Report of the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad (1985), this decision was predicated on “the Montreal experience of significant construction cost overruns” referring to the financial difficulties surrounding the 1976 games hosted by Montreal (p. 17). Because of the LAOOC’s decision to use existing venues, an visual identity system was needed that could temporarily transform and unify these facilities under pressure of a short time frame and limited budget (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). Additional pressure was placed upon the committee to engender a joyous atmosphere for the games in the wake of the terrorist activities that marred the Munich games in 1972, and the Soviet Union’s decision to boycott the LA games in retaliation for the US boycott of the 1980 summer games in Moscow (Meggs, 1998). Finally, the LAOOC quickly realized that prior host cities had access to significantly more public funds than it would have access to, and thus sought ways to implement a visual identity system for the games on a limited budget (Official Report, 1985).

The designers. For the task of designing the visual identity system of the LA games, the LAOOC enlisted the services of architectural firm, The Jerde Partnership directed by Jon Jerde and David Meckel, and environmental graphic design firm, Sussman/Prejza & Company directed by Deborah Sussman and Paul Prejza.

Sussman’s career as an environmental graphic designer began in the office of Charles & Ray Eames in the 1950s where she collaborated with Alexander Girard on the film, Día de los Muertos in 1957. Sussman later studied under Otl Aicher at the HfG Ulm in Germany on a Fulbright scholarship, and described her experience there as one of shock at the lack of freedom and the culture of
conformity (Designboom, 11 December 2013). This further underscores the differences between American and International Style modernism discussed above. If one compares Aicher’s solution for the visual identity system of the Munich games in 1972 to Sussman’s solution for the LA games these differences in approach are clearly evident.

The solution to the problem. The architectural design team for the LA games produced a modular kit of parts that included sonotubes—typically used as molds for casting concrete—to be used as columns and structural elements at entrances and gateways, brightly colored scaffolding, prefabricated environmental graphics, special attachments and adapters to lend a custom appearance to rented tents, among other ephemeral materials (Meggs & Purvis, 2012; Official Report, 1985).

**Figure 6 – LA84 Visual Identity Guidelines Poster, Sussman/Prejza & Co. (1984).** This poster created by the team behind the LA84 visual identity demonstrates the decentralized “kit of parts” approach taken and the diminished role played by the original “Star-in-Motion” logo.
Sussman’s visual identity also served as a modular system of elements that could be applied to the two- and three-dimensional materials in a variety of ways. A poster was produced by Sussman/Prejza & Company to display the range of identity elements available and provide loose guidelines for their application (Figure 6). The “Star-in-Motion” logo designed for the games in 1980 played a significantly diminished role in the overall identity system when compared to past games. Instead, it served as a template from which the geometric motif of the broader visual identity system was derived. The modular nature if the identity was further emphasized when the stencil typeface, Charrette (Figure 7), was added to the existing typographic palette of Univers—a neutral sans serif typeface—and Garamond—an old style serif typeface. The breaks in the letterforms of the stencil typeface not only expressed the concept of modularity, but also formally resembled the set of pictograms developed in 1980 by Keith Bright and Associates (Official Report, 1985).

The effects of the solution. The visual identity system for the LA games engendered a festive atmosphere, provided a ground-breaking visual statement that placed dynamic visual identity design in front of an international audience, and, according to Meggs (1998) helped to “restore the Olympics as an international celebration after political boycotts and terrorist activities (1972) had tainted the games” (p. 358). Furthermore, the LA84 identity serves as a rebuttal to current critics of dynamic visual identity design who have asserted that it is an approach that is only available to big companies with big budgets (Paget, 12 April 2016). The 1984 summer olympics in Los Angeles
suggest the opposite is true: a flexible, modular, decentralized system of components are more easily deployed across a vast area on a tight budget than a static, centralized, tightly controlled visual identity system. Finally, the refrain that dynamic visual identity design is predicated on a respect for that which already exists is reinforced by the LA84 design team’s use of a modular kit of parts to augment currently existing structures—temporarily transforming a far-flung collection of facilities into a unified, celebratory whole (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

Case Study 4: Walker Art Center (1995–2012)

The client and the problem. The Walker Art Center (The Walker) was founded by lumber baron Thomas Barlow Walker in Minneapolis in 1927, and the center “takes a global, multidisciplinary, and diverse approach to the creation, presentation, interpretation, collection, and preservation of art” (Mission & History). The Walker’s design director in 1993, Laurie Haycock Makela, wanted to create a visual identity for the organization that was “flexible, expressive, and pluralistic” to articulate the Walker’s mission, and suggested the idea of creating a typeface rather than a logo as the primary element of the visual identity system (Re, 2003, p. 24). In 2005, after The Walker was renovated and expanded by architectural studio Herzog & de Meuron, new design director, Andrew Blauvelt sought to update and expand the system implemented by Makela rather than throwing it out and starting from scratch (Felsing, 2010). According to Blauvelt (2006),

The previous identity, commissioned by then-design director Laurie Haycock Makela, was implemented in 1995. That was 10 years ago, and it seemed timely for us to create something new. But just as the architecture of our expansion does not ignore what already exists, a new identity must acknowledge what has come before (Walker Expanded).
The designers. Renowned typeface designer Matthew Carter worked with Makela and The Walker’s in-house design team from 1993 to 1995. Carter, known for his ability to produce typefaces that are both forward looking and reference earlier typographic models, sought to push the boundaries of the fairly new discipline of digital typeface design. His typeface Bell Centennial, designed in the late 1970s, was a landmark in typeface design both as an early example of what emerging digital technology was capable of, and, from a design standpoint, in the idea of compensating for low quality printing by including notches at the junctions of letterforms to allow for ink to spread without compromising legibility. With the Walker project, Carter relished the opportunity to continue pushing boundaries of digital typeface design while also pursuing the typeface-as-logo concept Makela had put forth (Re, 2003).

In 2005, new director, Andrew Blauvelt worked with the in-house team consisting of Chad Kloepfer and Emmet Byrne, as well as Eric Olson, founder of the Process Type Foundry, to expand the identity. Olson’s work includes a number of typefaces—both custom and commercially available—that explore the idea of creating letterforms from a low-resolution matrix and simple geometric

![Figure 8](image)

**Figure 8** — **FIG Typeface Family, Eric Olson (2002).** Olson’s idea of identity-as-modular typeface system for *Walker Extended* was informed—at least in part—by previous typeface explorations such as FIG Serif and FIG Sans, which use grids of asterisks and plus signs respectively to produce letterforms.
shapes. For instance, two typefaces in his FIG type family designed in 2002 (Figure 8) are constructed from a grid of plus signs and six-pointed asterisks.

The solution to the problem. Carter developed, Walker, a custom typeface system to be used as the primary element of the visual identity system in collaboration with The Walker’s in-house design team (Figure 9). The base typefaces—what Carter described as the “vanilla state” (as cited in Re, 2003, p. 25)—was an all caps sans-serif in roman and italic variants. Six styles of “snap-on” serifs—bracketed, wedge, hairline, and two lengths of slab serifs—could be added interchangeably to each letterform. These serifs could be used to modify individual letterforms or to extended horizontal strokes from one letter to the next—allowing them to be fused in to ligatures. In addition, so-called “wash lines” were created that served as over and underlines (Re, 2003). To round out the typeface system, a set of alternate characters was designed, including a custom “W” often used to set the word “Walker”. The system was completed and began to be implemented by the in-house design team in 1995.

**WALKER**

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

HHHHH          WALKER-UNDER
EE EH EH EH WALKER-BOTH
EE EH EH EH WALKER-OVER

**Figure 9 – Walker Custom Typeface System, Matthew Carter (1995).** The Walker typeface system included a base typeface (uppercase only), five styles of “snap-on” serifs, extending strokes to create unusual ligatures, and over and underlines called “wash lines.”
Walker Expanded, spearheaded by Blauvelt and Olson in 2005, used Carter’s Walker to create logotypes for the various departments within the art center, and then added a set of patterns to the system. As Blauvelt himself describes it, “the Carter identity is embedded in the graphic DNA of the Walker” (Walker Expanded, 2006). The words and patterns are locked together in strips, or “tape” that are applied to printed materials and environmental graphics (Figure 10). Further variation is created within the system through the use of scale and color. Unity is established through the limited number of patterns and colors available to the designers deploying the system. According to in-house designer Chad Kloepfer (2006),

This flexibility allows for many different looks and feels that can be controlled and adapted by the designer to either stand out or blend in, depending on the usage (Walker Expanded).

Figure 10 — Application of Walker Expanded Visual Motif, Andrew Blauvelt, Chad Kloepfer, Emmet Byrne, & Eric Olson (2005). The original Walker typeface is embedded into strips of brightly colored patterns and applied to any surface. A secondary sans serif typeface was also added to the typographic palette.
The effects of the solution. The original Walker identity designed by Makela and Carter had no logo to speak of, and, as a result it does not fit easily within the logo-centric static visual identity paradigm. Thus, when Walker is discussed by graphic design historians it is done so primarily in the context of contemporary typeface design and only secondarily as a visual identity system (Eskilson, 2012; Meggs & Purvis, 2012). According to Meggs & Purvis, “[t]he typeface, as it functions through various permutation, becomes the corporate identity” (p. 545). Typeface first, identity second. Despite not having a static logo, however, Walker is the visual identity of the Walker Art Center, and Blauvelt’s idea of expanding system rather than replacing it is a demonstration of the flexibility of dynamic visual identity systems.

With the rise of Walker Expanded, Carter’s Walker typeface system has taken on a diminished role, and, perhaps, someday it will be deprecated all together in favor of a new typeface. This gradual, organic evolution of a visual identity system fits within Dubberly’s idea of an organic-systems ethos (2008), and could herald the coming of visual identity management systems in which clients become the stewards of their own identity. For Walker and Walker Expanded, the clients were graphic designers who knew how to carefully maintain a dynamic yet consistent visual “look and feel”. In the coming years, however, the assertion of Walker Expanded designer Eric Olson that the limited number of variables allowed within the system makes it tamper proof may prove to be prescient, and visual identity designers could begin to embrace the “kit of parts” concept that allows clients to manage their own identities.
Chapter III

Visual Identity Systems: A Morphological Analysis

Introduction to General Morphological Analysis

In order to better understand the mechanics of visual identity design, it is helpful to examine visual identity at a systems level—to define the component parts common to all visual identities, and to establish the relationships that exist between these parts. General Morphological Analysis (GMA) is a method for “structuring and investigating the total set of relationships contained within multi-dimensional, non-quantifiable problem complexes” (Ritchey, 2011, p. 8). Because visual identity systems involve multiple components, the relationships between which happen to be qualitative rather than quantitative, it is possible to use GMA for such an examination.

Morphological analysis was developed in the 1940s by Swiss physicist Fritz Zwicky, and was first introduced into the graphic design discourse in 1964 by Swiss graphic designer Karl Gerstner. Gerstner saw morphological analysis as a permutation engine, useful for quickly and objectively generating a large number of solution-prototypes for visual identity design-related projects. Insisting intellectual criteria to be more important than emotional feelings when making design decisions, Gerstner believed that morphological analysis made designing a process of selection and discovery rather than a process of creation by giving the graphic designer a total view of the possible solution space of a given problem (1964, p. 9). Gerstner demonstrated the usefulness of morphological analysis in graphic design by applying the method to the design a logotype for the Swiss furniture company Intermöbel.

Specifically speaking, GMA involves isolating each dimension of a multi-dimensional system or problem complex, defining these dimensions as parameters, and describing all of the possible ways in which each parameter could vary. A morphological field is then constructed by placing each parameter, with its range of variables, in columns next to one another (Figure 11). Morphotypes—
also known as “field configurations” or “formal configurations”—are designated by selecting—at random or based on some predetermined criteria—a variable from each column of the morphological field (Ritchey, 2011). In order to find the total possible number of morphotypes, the number of variables in a column is multiplied by the number of variables in every other column. For instance, in a morphological field consisting of 4 columns where each column has 4 variables, a total of 256 \((4 \times 4 \times 4 \times 4)\) formal configurations are possible (Ritchey, 2015).

Gerstner believed his morphological field (Figure 12) contained “thousands of solutions” (1964, p. 9), when in fact it contains nearly 154 million possible formal configurations. Despite this underestimation, Gerstner recognized the need to refine and simplify his particular approach if it was to become a useful program for other graphic designers, stating, “[t]he inadequacy of this box is my own and not inherent in the method” (Gerstner, 1964 p. 9). The need to simplify this morphological field becomes even more apparent when one considers that Gerstner was working with only one element of a visual identity system—the logo, or trademark—at a time when computers were not yet capable of assisting in the analysis of such a large problem complex.

Building upon Gerstner’s pioneering work, a simplified morphological field has been developed for this investigation to demonstrate the total number of possible formal configurations between the elements common to all visual identity systems (Figure 13). This morphological field contains 648 possible formal configurations for an entire visual identity system compared to Gerstner’s nearly 154 million for a logo alone. While the effort to simplify has resulted in a loss of

![Figure 11 - Example Morphological Field](image-url) Parameters sit along the top as column heads. The range of variability is listed below each parameter.
resolution, recent developments in the field of GMA demonstrate that a process of simplification is the first step toward making the task more manageable (Ritchey, 2011). This suggests that a high-resolution morphological field is not a primary concern when using GMA. Additionally, in the process of designing each element of a visual identity system, the graphic designer can create new morphological fields that are more specific to the elements being developed. This makes up for any loss of resolution in the overall morphology of the system.

Visual Identity System – A Definition & Morphological Analysis

A visual identity system is defined as a constellation of interconnected graphic signs used to visually communicate the identity or intangible essence of an entity. The basic components of any static or dynamic visual identity system are: a trademark, often consisting of a picture mark and

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### FIGURE 12 – MORPHOLOGICAL BOX OF THE TYPOGRAM, KARL GERSTNER (1964).

Gerstner set up his morphological field with parameters running down the side rather than across the top, but the concept is the same. With 13 parameters, each with 3–5 variables each, there are nearly 154 million possible formal configurations.

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<td>33. Composed</td>
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### B. COLOR

|-------------|-----------|------------|----------|--------------|

### C. APPEARANCE

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<td>41. Upright</td>
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### C. EXPRESSION

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<td>32. Modified</td>
<td>33. Projected</td>
<td>34. Other</td>
<td>35. Combined</td>
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<td>42. Omission</td>
<td>43. Replacement</td>
<td>44. Addition</td>
<td>45. Combined</td>
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</table>
a letter mark; a color palette containing one or more colors; a typographic palette containing one or more typefaces; and a visual motif, such as a pattern, used as a decorative “fifth element” (Mollerup, 2013).

**Trademarks.** The first component mentioned in the definition of visual identity systems, the trademark, is defined by Mollerup as,

Any letter or combination of letters, pictorial sign, or non-graphic, even non-visual, sign, or any combination of these used by an organization or by its members to identify communications, property and products or to certify products and to distinguish them from those of others (p. 99).

In a morphological analysis of visual identity systems, there are two parameters that correspond to the trademark: the picture mark and the letter mark (Figure 13, col. 1–2). These parameters are taken directly from Mollerup’s taxonomy of trademarks (Figure 14).

Of the two initial branches in this taxonomy, graphic marks are most commonly used as trademarks in visual identity systems. In fact, Mollerup states that non-graphic marks are synonymous with the decorative fifth element of visual identity systems, and, as such, are not really trademarks at all (2013, p. 124). Within the graphic marks branch of the taxonomy, two further
subdivisions are identified as picture marks and letter marks. Picture marks are further subdivided into figurative and non-figurative marks, while letter marks are further subdivided into name marks and abbreviations. These subdivisions of picture marks and letter marks become variables in the morphological field of visual identity systems.

While it may seem redundant to include both trademark categories as separate parameters in the morphological field, it is necessary due to the fact that many trademarks contain both a picture mark and a letter mark. When both a picture mark and a letter mark are composed together into a single trademark, the resulting sign can be described as a combination mark or emblem (Landa, 2014). The AEG trademark designed by Peter Behrens in

**FIGURE 14 – TAXONOMY OF TRADEMARKS, PER MOLLERUP (2013).** Mollerup’s taxonomy of trademarks is a Porphyrian tree that begins with a stem (sumnum genus), branches into intermediate classes (differentiae), and ends with the final classes (infima species).

**FIGURE 15 – AEG TRADEMARK, PETER BEHRENS (1907).** A combination mark that combines a non-figurative picture mark with an abbreviation letter mark.
1907 is an early example of a combination mark (Figure 15). In this combination mark, the abbreviation letter mark, AEG, is placed within a non-figurative picture mark consisting of three hexagons nested inside of a larger hexagon.

The existence of combination marks, however, does not exclude the possibility that a visual identity system may contain only a picture mark or letter mark. Thus, a “none” variable has been placed in both the picture mark and letter mark columns within the morphological field. Gerstner’s Interöbel logotype is an example of a letter mark which has no accompanying picture mark. In fact, Gerstner’s morphological field contained no specific parameter for picture marks—a fact he alluded to by naming it the morphological box of the typogram (1964, p. 9).

**Color palettes.** In addition to a trademark, a fully-fledged visual identity system also includes a palette of one or more colors used in a specific way. Color is most often used in visual identity design as a means of further differentiating an entity from its peers and competitors. According to Landa (2014, p. 263), “Color contributes to distinction and influences people’s brand perception.” A graphic designer may choose one hue as the main color for a visual identity system, and one or more hues to serve as supporting colors. Color theory serves as a basis for choosing a color palette that achieves the desired effect, and graphic designers attempt to choose colors that will resonate with a specific entity’s audience. Again, according to Landa, “People are greatly affected by color, and cultural and psychological color associations influence them” (p. 263).
The twelve hues of the color wheel (Itten, 1961), with their accompanying tints and shades, serve as the chromatic scale used by graphic designers to define specific color schemes (Figure 16). A color palette may consist of primary colors (yellow, red, blue), secondary colors (green, orange, violet), and/or tertiary colors (yellow-green, yellow-orange, red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green), with the addition of black, white, and/or gray. It is important to note that the number of hues on Itten’s color wheel is somewhat arbitrary, as the visible spectrum of light can be divided into billions of hues and many reproduction methods—such as process and spot color printing—can have a gamut of millions of hues. The principle discussed with Gerstner’s morphological box, however, holds true with color as well: higher resolution does not always lead to better results. Likewise, a hue will always “lean” toward one of the twelve hues of Itten’s color wheel. For instance a color that lies between blue-green and blue will appear to either “lean” blue or “lean” green. Thus, for the purposes of this investigation, it is both unnecessary and undesirable to extend beyond the twelve hues of Itten’s color wheel.

In a morphological analysis of visual identity systems, the color palette parameter (Figure 13, col. 3) has six possible variations: monochromatic, complimentary, analogous, split complementary, triadic, and quadratic. According to Fraser & Banks (2004), monochromatic color palettes consist of a single color where variations in saturation and value are used instead of variations in hue. Complementary color palettes consist of two colors that sit opposite of one another on the color wheel (e.g. blue and orange). Analogous palettes consist of two or more colors that sit adjacent to one another on the color wheel (e.g. blue, blue-green, and green). Split-complementary palettes consist of any color with the addition of two of it’s complement’s analogous colors (e.g. blue, yellow-orange, and red-orange). Triadic color palettes are comprised of three colors spaced evenly around the color wheel (e.g. blue, yellow, and red). Quadratic or double-complementary color palettes consist of any two sets of complimentary pairs of colors (e.g. blue/orange and violet/yellow).
Designers choose colors for visual identity systems based on a number of criteria, and the psychological effect of different colors is a primary criterion. In 1810, Johann Wolfgang Goethe published *Zur Farbenlehre (Theory of Colors)* in an attempt to articulate how humans perceive color and what effect that perception has on our psychological state (Fraser & Banks, 2004). Goethe’s color wheel (1809) contains only six hues on the outer ring, and on an inner ring each hue is labeled with an associated qualifier: red (beautiful), orange (noble), yellow (good), green (useful), blue (common), violet (unnecessary). These qualities were, in turn, assigned to one of four categories: rational (red/beautiful, orange/noble), intellectual (yellow/good, green/useful), sensual (green/useful, blue/common), and imaginative (purple/unnecessary, red/beautiful).

Twentieth-century psychologist Max Lüscher developed a color card test whereby aspects of a subject’s personality can be determined by the order in which the subject chooses his favorite colors from among a set of eight color cards. Each color is assigned positive and negative emotional qualities. For instance, red is associated with the positive qualities of physical courage, strength, warmth, energy, basic survival, stimulation, masculinity, and excitement while it is associated with the negative qualities of defiance, aggression, visual impact, and strain (Fraser & Banks, 2004).

Unlike Itten’s color theory, both Goethe’s and Lüscher’s theories are based on Western philosophical and psychological foundations, are subjective in nature, and cannot be applied universally to all people. It is important for designers of visual identities to be aware of culturally-specific color associations, particularly when crossing cultural or ethnic boundaries. To this end, data journalist David McCandless has published *Colours in Cultures* (April 2009), an information graphic (Figure 17) articulating how ten different cultures interpret twelve different colors. One example of cross-cultural differences in color meaning is the color blue, which may be interpreted by Native Americans and South Americans as “trouble” or “unhappiness”, and by Western Europeans and Americans as “health” or “freedom”. These interpretations are almost exact opposites of one another,
underscoring the need for a designer to account for both quantitative and qualitative aspects of color when choosing a color palette.

**FIGURE 17 – COLORS IN CULTURE, DAVID MCCANDLESS (2009).** Information graphic documenting cross-cultural differences in color meaning. Such differences present challenges for the designers of visual identities that cross cultural or ethnic boundaries.

**Typographic palettes.** The next parameter common to all visual identity systems is the typographic palette. A typeface is defined as the design of a set of letterforms unified by consistent visual properties, and a typeface family is the complete range of variations of a typeface design (Carter, Day, Meggs, Maxa & Sanders, 2015). Typeface families often include multiple weights such as regular, medium, semibold, and bold, as well as variants such as italics or obliques for each weight. Adrian Frutiger’s schematic diagram for his typeface family *Univers* (1954) demonstrates both of
these concepts together (Figure 18). Each rectangle within the schematic represents a single typeface, while the full schematic demonstrates the full range possible within the typeface family. The schematic also represents a kind of stylized morphological field, and could indicate that morphological analysis had permeated the typeface design discourse at least ten years earlier than Gerstner’s introducing it into the graphic design discourse.

A typographic palette can thus be defined as the typeface, typeface family, or combination thereof specified by the designer for use within the visual identity system. A typeface palette often includes a primary typeface used for the letter mark—if one exists—as well as any secondary typefaces used within the broader identity system for textual communication. In visual identity design, it is seen as desirable if at least one of the typefaces within the palette is a proprietary typeface, designed specifically for the entity using it (Landa, 2014). Again, Peter Behrens’s visual identity system for AEG proves to be a useful early model of this principle. Much of his work on the identity program at AEG centered around the company’s lettering. In his own words, Behrens stated,

One of the most eloquent means of expressing the style of any epoch is through letterforms. After architecture, they probably give the most characteristic picture of a time and the best evidence of the state of a nation’s spiritual development. Just as architecture fully reflects the whole movement of a time and the physical life of a nation, written characters symbolize
inner life; they betray the pride and humility, the faith and doubt of a race (as cited in Burke, 1992, p. 35).

An uppercase alphabet (Figure 19) was developed by Behrens around 1907 to be used exclusively within the AEG visual identity system as the abbreviation letter mark and as a display typeface for printed materials (Buddensieg, 1984). This alphabet was later fleshed out as a complete set of upper and lowercase letterforms and released to the public as Behrens Antiqua around 1908. His primary goal with the typeface, however, was not its commercial success, but rather to provide better consistency for the visual identity. Graphic designers and lettering artists were often employed by Behrens to execute his visual concepts, and without a proprietary typeface, he could only control the appearance of the lettering to a certain extent. These freelance artists would often add their own flair to the lettering of advertisements. Behrens Antiqua was intended to make the statement that the typography should be consistent regardless of who was executing the design (Buddensieg, 1984).

In the general morphological analysis of visual identity systems, three variables define the range of variation for typeface palettes (Figure 13, col. 4): singular, homologous sets, and heterogeneous sets. A singular typographic palette consists of a typeface without any additional weights or variants. An homologous set consists of more than one typeface from the same typeface family. A heterogeneous set consists of two or more typefaces from different typeface families that share some formal qualities, but which are also sufficiently distinct from one another to establish a certain degree of formal contrast.
Unlike color selection for color palettes, no typographic theory exists to dictate the selection and combination of typefaces. Numerous taxonomies do exist which classify typefaces based on their formal qualities, historical development, country of origin, intended use, or a combination of these. Childers, Griscti & Leben (2015) analyzed 25 different typeface taxonomies and synthesized these into a single phylogenetic tree (Figure 20). Like Mollerup’s taxonomy of trademarks, the phylogenetic tree of typefaces aids in understanding the inter-relationships between categories of typefaces. Unlike Itten’s color wheel, the phylogenetic tree of typefaces does little to aid in the selection of individual typefaces or harmonious combinations.

There are numerous principles that do exist to be taken into consideration by the graphic designer when selecting individual typefaces for visual identity systems. Legibility, level of formal expressiveness, range and flexibility, and differentiation from peers and competitors are all considerations when developing a typographic palette for a specific visual identity system (Landa, 2014). When combining typefaces for heterogeneous sets, additional principles apply. According to Samara (2007),

Contrast among typefaces that are juxtaposed is critical. The only reason to change typefaces is to gain an effect of contrast, and so the contrast achieved by the combination should be clearly recognizable. Otherwise, why bother? Opposing the extremes of weight (light against
bold), of width (regular against condensed or expanded), or style (neutral sans serif against slab serif or script) is a natural starting point (p. 130).

This suggests that selecting typefaces from different branches of the phylogenetic tree is preferable to selecting typefaces that are of the same branch. For instance, an old style serif mixed with a geometric sans serif might make a more harmonious combination than the same mixed with a transitional serif. Samara insists that, to balance this, some formal relationship should exist between contrasting typefaces (2007, p. 130). One way graphic designers address this by ensuring that the weight of strokes or proportion of letterforms in contrasting typefaces are similar. For instance, the geometric sans serif typeface Futura and the old style serif typeface Garamond might pair well in a heterogeneous typographic palette because they come from different branches of the phylogenetic tree yet the uppercase letterforms of both typefaces possess similar proportions based on classical Roman monumental capitals such as those found on Trajan’s Column.

**Visual motif or “fifth element.”** The final parameter common to all visual identity systems is the visual motif, referred to by Mollerup (2013) alternately as the fifth element (p. 59) and the non-graphic mark (p. 124). The term non-graphic mark is somewhat problematic due to the fact that it is, in many cases cited by Mollerup, a graphic mark. Thus, for the purposes of this investigation, the term fifth element is used exclusively.

Under certain conditions, Mollerup suggests that the fifth element is better suited to fast identification than any other component of a visual identity system (2013, p. 250). As a parameter in the general morphological analysis of visual identity systems, the visual motif includes four possible variables: pattern, texture, pictorial sign family, and geometry. A pattern is the consistent repetition of a graphic element (e.g. line, shape) or combination of elements, whereas a texture is the irregular repetition of a graphic element or combination of elements in such away that the suggestion of 3-dimensional tactility is achieved on a 2-dimensional plane. A pictorial sign family is a set of additional
graphic marks that operate independently from the trademark, but that often share formal qualities with the trademark. Geometry refers to the consistent use of a shape or set of shapes in the application of a visual identity system.

The visual identity system developed by Sussman, Prezja & Co. in the Jerde Partnership for the 1984 summer olympics in Los Angeles (discussed in-depth in a case study in Chapter II) is a potent example of the use of the fifth elements. Classical geometry was referenced in the creation of the five-pointed “star-in-motion” picture mark for the games, as well as in the design of environmental graphics such as the cylindrical “sonotube” columns and pediments used for wayfinding. Numerous patterns were developed based on the “star-in-motion” picture mark, and these patterns were applied to printed promotional materials as well as environmental graphics. These patterns were complemented by an irregular pattern derived from the same geometric shapes but applied in a way that suggested tactility and depth. Finally, a set of pictographic signs was developed for use as a graphic wayfinding system. The pictorial sign family operated independently from the picture mark and numeric abbreviation letter mark while maintaining formal connections through the use of stencil-like breaks in the pictographic icons and classical proportions (Official Report, 1985).

Chapter IV

Dynamic Visual Identity Design Techniques

Summary of Differences between Static & Dynamic Visual Identity Design

A thorough review of the literature documenting the history of graphic design reveals that two distinct visual identity design paradigms emerged in Europe at about the same time, just following the birth of the graphic design profession during the second wave of the industrial
revolution. It has been demonstrated above that these two paradigms—static and dynamic—differ both in their results and in the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that lead to these results.

Static visual identity design was born out of and embraces the processes of the industrial revolution, and the progenitors of this approach were driven by the idea of employing commonsense objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) to create a totalizing visual aesthetic (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) through the dismantling of existing visual regimes and the manufacturing of new ones. The geometric simplicity of trademarks produced by twentieth century designers such as Peter Behrens and Otl Aicher, who were working within the static visual identity paradigm, is both a testament to the need this approach has for industrial standardization and for a symbol conceptually abstract enough to represent the ideals of the client organization.

Dynamic visual identity design, on the other hand, carries forward the traditions of premodern society, and those who have practiced it have been driven by a desire to build upon and improve existing visual regimes through the creation of open systems that are able accumulate new forms and to adapt to different contexts and new situations. According to Felsing (2010), in dynamic visual identity design, rather than “ideal or symbolic values, the actual context determines the questions”, and, through a process of abstraction, “actual conditions are translated into a visual principle” (p. 24). Many of the examples given in Chapter II—Olivetti, La Fonda del Sol, Columbus, Walker Extended—demonstrate the notion that dynamic visual identities are derived from factors “on the ground” rather than imposed from the top down, and the results often tend toward complexity rather than simplicity.

This dichotomy is described by Dubberly (2008) in terms of a “mechanical-object ethos” and an “organic-systems ethos” (Figure 21), and it could be said that the beliefs of the former are manifest in the static visual identity design paradigm while the beliefs of the latter are manifest in the dynamic visual identity paradigm. Top-down, simplified, externally assembled, completed, almost perfect editions are hallmarks of the mechanical-object ethos and accurately describe the process and results
of static visual identity design. Likewise, bottom-up, complex, self-organizing, adapting and continuously updating versions are hallmarks of the organic-systems ethos and accurately describe the process and results of dynamic visual identity design. For Dubberly this dichotomy is not only philosophical, but historical. In the “new world of information and biology” situations where a static approach is appropriate will diminish while situations that call for a dynamic approach will increase (2011, p. 78–79).

While this analysis of history provides context for the emergence and development of static and dynamic visual identity design, the morphological analysis conducted in Chapter III of this investigation reveals the architecture of visual identity systems. With this in view, it is possible to not only know intellectually but also to understand practically the differences between these two 

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**Principles of Organization**

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<td>End-state</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Adapting or evolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>Editions</td>
<td>Continuous updating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 21 — COMPARISON OF THE MECHANICAL-OBJECT ETHOS & ORGANIC-SYSTEMS ETHOS, DUBBERLY (2008).** The mechanical-object ethos aligns with the static visual identity paradigm whereas the organic systems ethos aligns with the dynamic visual identity paradigm.
approaches. Simply put, static visual identity design is *convergent* while dynamic visual identity design is *divergent*.

Working within the static visual identity paradigm, the goal is to maximize the number of *constants* by fixing (i.e. arresting) as many of the parametric *variables* within the morphological field as possible. This is done in order to eliminate variability within the system, producing a visual identity that is also fixed—appearing consistent through time and across all format applications. Landa (2014) has referred to this approach as “the creation of a strategic, unified, and transmedia program” (p. 240). As mentioned above, this need for standardization often leads designers working within this paradigm toward the sort of geometric simplicity that typifies International Style modernist visual identity design.

Alternatively, working within the dynamic visual identity design paradigm, the goal is to balance the number of constants and variables within the morphological field. This is done in order to create a visual identity system that is consistent enough to be recognizable yet open and flexible enough to adapt to new situations and contexts. For the designer working within this paradigm, the emphasis is on establishing a repeatable process, or algorithm, by which identity elements may be generated. These elements are allowed to vary to a certain degree based on the kind of data that is used as input. Felsing (2010) has described this as the creation of “situational-based variations” that allow a dynamic visual identity to become narrative in nature, often presenting “intermediate stages within a certain variation spectrum” (p. 23).

Anticipating this approach, in the early 1960s Karl Gerstner declared, “instead of solutions to problems, programs for solutions” (1964, p. 9). He went on to state that, for any problem, “there is always a group of solutions, one of which works best under certain conditions” (p. 9), and offered morphological analysis as his “program for solutions”. *Modularity* and *permutation* are two principles upon which morphological analysis is based, and these two principles are described in the next section as techniques for creating dynamic visual identity systems. A third technique, identified by
Felsing (2010) as *open form* takes Gerstner’s ideas one step further by suggesting that the designer give up even more control over the final form of visual identity elements by incorporating “real-time processes or data in a dynamic manner” (p. 189). The very idea of “final form” is brought into question with the open form technique as data is allowed to flow through the system as a current, constantly changing the form of elements within the visual identity. According to Dubberly (2011, p. 78), this condition could be described as “perpetual beta” and, he argues, in the twenty-first century, this could surpass industrial-era methods to become the preferred approach:

> With network-based applications, change becomes continuous. We enter perpetual beta. (For designers who acknowledge that improvement comes from iteration and that ending conditions are arbitrary, perpetual beta may be more comfortable than mass production.)

**Three Techniques for Designing Dynamic Visual Identities**

The three techniques for designing dynamic visual identities that are presented in this investigation sit on a continuum from simple to complex. The first of these, modularity, is the simplest approach that allows the designer the highest level of control over the outcomes of the design process. Modularity then forms the foundation of the other two techniques, permutation and open form, yet differs from them in the level complexity and of control exerted by the designer over the final outcomes of the process. Whereas modularity gives the designer a high level of control, permutation requires the designer to give up some of that control and increases the level of variability in the outcomes. Open form continues this trend, requiring the designer to give up almost all control over the final forms generated, and, in fact calls into question the very notion of “final form.”

As an approach to process, modularity is defined as reducing a problem complex to a set of parameters, specifying the range of variation possible for each parameter, and then fixing a single variable for each parameter. If this definition sounds familiar, it is because this process of parameterization is the first phase in General Morphological Analysis (GMA) described in Chapter III.
As a form-giving technique, modularity involves the use of a standardized unit or set of units for the purpose of building components of a visual identity system. Architect Peter Jon Pearce (1978) described a system built in this way as a “minimum inventory/maximum diversity” system (p. xii).

Karl Gerstner’s morphological analysis of logotypes (1964), what he referred to as “the morphological box of the typogram” (p. 9) is an example of using modularity in the process of designing a trademark. Gerstner reduced the problem to a set of parameters (typeface, size, boldness, etc.) with a range of variables (sans-serif, large, bold, etc.) that could be explored at random. His goal, was to ultimately isolate a single variable from each parameter, fixing them as constants in a finalized solution. Because Gerstner was working toward a logotype, he chose to take as his standardized unit a currently existing typeface family, Akzidenz-Grotesk by Berthold Type Foundry—ultimately arriving at the bold weight of this typeface family for his finished logotype for the Swiss furniture company, Intermöbel.

Pearce (1978) presented an even simpler approach to modularity than Gerstner’s that could be used to build nearly all of the components of a visual identity system rather than just the typographic component of the trademark. Pearce describes this approach as a “kit of parts” with “rubrics” for their combination (p. xii). In his diagram of a minimum inventory/maximum diversity system (Figure 22),

**Figure 22 — Diagram of Minimum Inventory/Maximum Diversity System, Peter Pearce (1978).** Demonstrating the large number of structures possible with just four initial units.
Pearce demonstrates how four units (i.e. shapes), each with four sides of equal length, could be used to create twenty-one different super units. These super units were then used to construct a wide range of structures by simply combining them in different ways.

As a technique for designing components of a visual identity system, Pearce’s minimum inventory/maximum diversity approach could be used to create the graphic and typographic components of the trademark, a typeface to be used as part of the typographic palette, and a visual motif such as a pattern. This use of Pearce’s approach to modularity is demonstrated in the first prototype discussed in the next section of this chapter.

It should be noted that, due to the tendency toward fixing a single variable for each parameter, modularity does not produce fully dynamic visual identity systems. Rather, the modularity technique serves as a bridge between static and dynamic visual identity design. The outcomes are static, yet the units can be rearranged at any time to form new configurations. Likewise, new units can be added and old ones removed to broaden the range of possible configurations or to change the appearance of configurations without the need for a total redesign of the visual identity system. In these ways, modularity favors dynamic visual identity design.

The second technique for designing dynamic visual identity systems, permutation, is similar in many respects to modularity. The main difference between the two is that modularity seeks to fix all parametric variables as constants whereas permutation only fixes some variables while leaving others in play, creating a situation in which constants and variables interact to generate form within a “variation spectrum” (Felsing, 2010, p. 23). Depending on the rubric, or algorithm, used by the designer, this variability is present in only one of the elements of a visual identity system—such as the trademark—and, in other cases, it can extend to all elements of the system. This increases complexity in both the design process and the results yielded by the process. Furthermore, by letting the algorithm run its course, permutation forces the designer to relinquish some of the control over the appearance of the resulting forms.
Alexander Girard's visual identity system for La Fonda del Sol discussed in Chapter II is an early example of the use of permutation as a technique in visual identity design. While the custom logotype he created represented a constant element within the system, the typographic palette contained an unusually high number of typefaces, the color palette contained an unusually high number of colors, and the sun motif possessed a high degree of variability—all of the facial features were subject to a change of form and color, as were the sun rays.

It is not clear from any of the sources consulted for this investigation how Girard made decisions about the range of variation allowed for certain parameters, and, through careful observation of the sun motif used on matchbooks specifically, it doesn’t appear that there was a strict rubric for decision making. For instance, there are numerous matchbooks documented showing versions of the sun motif that appear to be missing sun rays, facial features, or the entire face is missing due to a lack of contrast between the color of these elements and the other elements within the motif. Normally, these unexpected results would have been considered “mistakes” and eliminated from the set. Girard, however, permitted these permutations to be printed, suggesting that he was combining elements at random and allowing for a wide range of variation. It is even possible that Girard left the decision-making up to the printer of the matchboxes, using a rubric that contained only three criteria: the sun had to look like a sun, it must contain at least two different colors from the color palette, and it must be surrounded by the name and address of the restaurant in either a circular or square configuration.

The second prototype discussed in the next section is inspired by Girard’s La Fonda del Sol visual identity system, and demonstrates how the permutation technique can be similarly applied to new problems. Other recent examples of dynamic visual identities that have employed the permutation technique are the LA84 and Walker/Walker Extended identity systems discussed in the case studies section of Chapter II.
Permutation is the first true dynamic visual identity technique presented in this investigation, and it allows for an open system—one that is coherent though never quite complete—and holds, perhaps, the most potential for near-future application. According to Felsing (2010),

Future design potential lies in interdisciplinary workgroups benefitting from the possibilities offered by perpetually updatable databases and generative archives, and in custom-designed computer programs and sub-programs....In the future, programs developed to control and design ongoing processes will take the place of closed visual identities. (p. 159)

The third technique for designing dynamic visual identity systems, open form, takes the idea of permutation one step further by incorporating real-time data input by external processes. Rather than certain elements the visual identity system changing based on a rubric worked by a designer, the designer ties these variables to a natural cycle or process that determines when and how these elements change. As a technique open form produces results that are constantly in flux, animated by the current of data running through the system. Due to the highly sophisticated nature of this technique, and the use of real-time data gathered by sensors, open form is a fairly recent development.

Perhaps the best example of the open form technique used in dynamic visual identity design is the Visit Nordkyn identity by Norwegian design firm, Neue. Representatives from two municipalities on the Nordkyn peninsula in the northernmost region of Norway sought to project a unified image that would attract tourists to the area (Visit Nordkyn, 13 October 2010). The region's striking natural beauty is balanced by harsh weather conditions, and designers at Neue decided to move forward with the idea “where nature rules”, stating that on the Nordkyn peninsula, “everything exists at the mercy of the elements, even its visual identity” (Natural Selection, 21 November 2014).

The solution is a visual identity that is constantly in flux, animated by data from the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. The graphic component of the trademark (Figure 23) begins as a
The logo is a colorless gray hexagon—inspired by the six-sided geometry of snowflakes—and is constantly reshaped based on wind direction and wind speed fed live into the logo application. The color palette runs for the identity the entire gamut of the visible light spectrum, and these colors represent the range of temperature in the region, from -13°F to 77°F. The color of the logo changes from cooler to warmer hues based on the current temperature in Nordkyn region.

**FIGURE 23 – VISIT NORDKYN TRADEMARK, NEUE DESIGN (2010).** The constants in the system are the logotype and the relative position of the elements, while the variables—controlled by live weather data—are the shape of the graphic mark, the readout underneath the logotype, and the color of the entire trademark.

Because the weather in Nordkyn is constantly changing, and this weather data is being fed into the logo application through a live network connection, the logo is never actually fully resolved—it is in perpetual beta. Any static application of the logo constitutes merely one instance of the logo. The colors used for printed materials such as stationery, signage, and promotional materials are selected based on the specific instance of the logo captured by the designer at the time the materials
are being designed. Thus, once the algorithm is determined and set in motion, to a certain extent, the
designer is at the mercy of the natural processes at work in the region. Furthermore, the system not
only functions as a sort of weathervane-cum-visual identity for the Nordkyn peninsula, but also acts
as a long-term documentary record of the region’s climate.

In this way, the Visit Nordkyn identity embraces the organic-systems ethos by mimicking
natural systems such as glaciers and trees which capture and store climatological information. In fact,
the open form technique itself seems to be a fulfillment of Dubberly’s idea that designers of the
future—so called “meta-designers”—will create “conditions in which others can design” (2011, p. 79).
In the case of Visit Nordkyn, the “others” Dubberly speaks of is extended from human participants to
the natural environment. The use of algorithms and the near total relinquishing of decision-making to
natural cycles and processes appears to diminish the role of the designer as form-maker and seems to
have the potential to lead to formulaic, uninteresting results. Felsing (2010) suggests the opposite is
ture:

The determinate-indeterminate nature of results generates enormous freedom for designers
if they have confidence in the unpredictable nature and if they ally themselves with chance—
the results can be richer than ever thought imaginable. (p. 215)

The third prototype presented in the next section demonstrates the use of the open form technique
in the design of a logotype, the features of which are modified based on aspects of human life
expectancy as well as lunar and solar cycles.

Dynamic Visual Identity Prototypes

Development of project briefs. Each prototype developed as part of this investigation was
created to demonstrate one of the three dynamic visual identity design techniques described in the
previous section. In order to facilitate the creation of each prototype, design briefs were produced for
three hypothetical clients in need of visual identities. Solutions were then developed to satisfy these
briefs while employing the three dynamic visual identity design techniques. This process is consistent with the studio model of learning—common to architecture and design education—in which hypothetical design “problems” are assigned by instructors by way of a creative brief, and students demonstrate their understanding of certain design methods by developing appropriate solutions to the brief through a series of iterative prototyping phases and periodic critical evaluations.

The initial discovery period that led to the creation of the three design briefs for this investigation began with a simple idea that can be repeated as part of any similar investigation, or used as part of a dynamic visual identity design assignment for students in a design studio class. First, using two numbers chosen at random or based on some significance those numbers have to the designer, a third number is generated by obtaining the sum of the first two numbers. For this investigation, the numbers twelve and seven were chosen based on their significance to the author, and the third number obtained by addition was nineteen. Research was then conducted to discover whether or not there was any significant connection between these numbers—outside of the personal significance they hold for the author—that could be used as content for the design briefs. In this case, the research did in fact uncover a process that connected all three numbers and provided sufficient content for the creation of the creative briefs and subsequent prototypes. Had the research not uncovered any significant connection between the numbers on the first attempt, the preceding steps could have been repeated as many times as necessary to generate a set of numbers that did have some significant connection between them.

The research in this case uncovered an astronomical cycle discovered by Greek astronomer Meton of Athens (ca. 440 BC) that links all three numbers (twelve, seven, and nineteen). Meton discovered that the lunar and solar calendars—each used by the ancient Greeks for different purposes—could be synchronized over a period of nineteen solar years, or two hundred and thirty-five lunar cycles. The lunar calendar was an accurate way for ancient cultures to track shorter periods of time such as weeks and months; however, using the lunar calendar alone would cause the seasons
to rapidly slip backward through the months of the year due to the 11-day difference between a lunar year (354 days) and a solar year (365 days). Periodically adding a month to the end of the lunar year can slow down the backward slippage of seasons, and Meton nailed down a period of nineteen years—twelve “normal” twelve-month years and seven thirteen-month “leap” years—that would cause lunar and solar calendars to synchronize within a half of an hour by the end of the cycle. Furthermore, if these seven “leap” years were added at strategic points within the nineteen-year cycle—specifically at years three, six, eight, eleven, fourteen, seventeen, and nineteen—the lunar and solar calendars would stay aligned with little variation from year to year. The Metonic cycle gave the ancient Greeks the ability to predict longer-term astronomical events—such as seasons for planting and harvesting, and lunar eclipses—with renewed accuracy, and they made use of it until the Julian calendar was introduced by the Romans in 46 BC.

Because the Metonic cycle links all three numbers chosen in the initial phase of the prototyping process, it served as the basis for all three creative briefs developed for this investigation. The content of each brief diverged from the Metonic cycle in ways that made sense for the dynamic visual identity design technique being explored. The brief for modularity, for instance, explored connections between the geology of the earth and moon in order to discover a structure from which modular units could be derived. The brief for permutation focused on the sequence of “normal” and “leap” years in the Metonic cycle as a way to generate visual identity elements that change in their relationship to one another. Finally, the brief for open form explored the passage of time through multiple Metonic cycles as a way to create a visual identity that changes gradually over a long periods by linking parameters of identity elements to solar and lunar cycles.
Prototype 1 – Modularity. The first prototype was developed for the hypothetical client, Zircon Alternative Dwellings (Zircon). Zircon has been modeled after existing companies that offer shelters and housing options—such as geodesic domes, polar zonohedral structures (zomes), and other polyhedral building methods—that fall outside of what is considered to be “normal” residential architecture. Despite being outside of the norm, the methods used to build these structures can be standardized, and the structures themselves are modular in nature. Alterhabitat, established in France by Jean-François His at the turn of the twenty-first century is one example of a company that has successfully standardized the building methods require to construct these alternative dwellings.

Businesses offering alternative dwelling structures began to emerge in the United States at least as early as the 1960s and 1970s, when the ideas of the environmental movement were cross-pollinating with the Cold War “space race.” In 1968, a year or so before the Apollo 11 mission landed humans on the moon for the first time, R. Buckminster Fuller published the book, Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth, and a year earlier he introduced the geodesic dome to the world at Expo ’67 in Montreal. Fuller became a cult hero to so-called “hippie modernists” who preferred the geodesic dome due to its inherent strength, ease of construction, and efficient use of building materials. Fuller’s notion of a “spaceship earth” and advocacy for alternative dwelling structures provided the inspiration for the Zircon theme line, “Moon Bases for Spaceship Earth”. Likewise, the Zircon name is derived from zirconium, a chemical element commonly found on earth that was also discovered in lunar geological samples brought to earth by the Apollo 11 astronauts.

Geodesic domes, zomes, and coordination geometry in the study of chemical elements share a common trait in that they all prove that complex three-dimensional structures can be built based on simple geometric principles. For instance, the primary coordination polyhedron of zircon (ZrSiO₄) is the snub disphenoid, a twelve-sided polyhedron built from a single base unit: the equilateral triangle. Likewise, a zome is constructed using a single base unit, the rhombus, and Fuller’s geodesic dome can be constructed using a simple strut-and-hub technique where struts of three different
lengths are connected to hubs to produce the triangular skeleton of the dome. This notion of building structures from a single unit or small set of base units is at the foundation of Pearce’s theory of minimum inventory/maximum diversity systems. In fact, before publishing his theory Pearce worked for R. Buckminster Fuller “preparing text and illustrations for Fuller’s book, Synergetics” (Biography).

The modular technique described by Pearce in his own book, *Structure in Nature Is a Strategy for Design* (1978) was used to design a logotype and a set of patterns for Zircon Alternative Dwellings (Figure 24). The patterns were developed first, based on two-dimensional, idealized renderings of the coordination polyhedra of two forms of zirconium: zircon (ZrSiO₄) and cubic zirconia (ZrO₂). Using the modular minimum inventory/maximum diversity technique, a set of units was isolated from the patterns, and, through a process of discovery by combination (Figure 25), specific units were fused together to form super units. These super units were, in turn, used to build structural letterform components (Figure 26), and, through an additional process of discovery by combination (Figure 27), the logotype for Zircon was built from these structural components. Once the logotype was created, it was then placed back into the pattern matrix in order to further refine and properly kern, or optically space, the letterforms.

**FIGURE 24 – ZIRCON LOGOTYPE & PATTERNS.**
Derived from two-dimensional renderings of the chemical structure of cubic zirconia (ZrO₂) and zircon (ZrSiO₄).
FIGURE 25 – ISOLATING & COMBINING UNITS TO FORM SUPER UNITS. Shapes were isolated from the two-dimensional rendering of the cubic zirconia (ZrO₂) matrix. These shapes were fused together in a process of discovery by combination to form super units.

FIGURE 26 – STRUCTURAL LETTERFORM COMPONENTS. Super units combined to form structural components of the letterforms, such as the primary strokes (stems) seen above.
In visual identity design, it is often necessary to produce a three-dimensional version of the trademark or other identity element for use as an environmental graphic, or as part of a signage system. Thus, in addition to the two-dimensional logotype and pattern motifs, a three-dimensional exploration of the Zircon identity was conducted using paper models (Figure 28). Two units were used for these three-dimensional explorations, the twelve-sided snub disphenoid—the primary coordination polyhedron of zircon (ZrSiO$_4$)—and the seven-sided capped octahedron—the primary coordination polyhedron of cubic zirconia (ZrO$_2$). Just as in the two-dimensional exploration, these three-dimensional units were used to build super units, which were, in turn, used to build larger structures (Figure 29). What is remarkable about this use of the modularity technique is that a three-dimensional “logo” was produced, not just as a standalone object, but as a building block whereby new alternative dwelling structures could be built. This brings the visual identity full-circle and ties it back into the original purpose of the organization: an alternative dwelling built from the logo itself.
As elements of a dynamic visual identity system, the two-dimensional patterns and logotype, and the three-dimensional “logo” are all distinct yet they work together because they are derived from the same modular units. Likewise, additional identity elements—such as a typeface for the typographic palette—could be constructed for Zircon using the same base units. If Zircon expanded its product offerings beyond just alternative dwellings, additional identity elements could be generated from the same units or from the coordination polyhedron of any number of other zirconium derivatives. As a process, this use of the modularity technique for the design of a visual identity system echoes Gerstner’s early attempts using morphological analysis in that it makes identity design into a process of discovery as much as it is a process of creation.

**FIGURE 28 — PAPER MODELS OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL LOGO.** Coordination polyhedra for zircon (snub disphenoid, top) and cubic zirconia (capped octahedron, bottom).
Prototype 2 – Permutation. The brief for the second prototype calls for the development of a dynamic visual identity system for the hypothetical resort, Hotel Meton. The resort—speculatively located on the Saronic Gulf coast in Glyfada, a chic suburb of Athens, Greece—is named in honor of ancient Greek astronomer, Meton of Athens, who discovered the lunisolar cycle described above in detail. Specifically, as a demonstration of the permutation technique for dynamic visual identity design, the sequence of twelve “normal” years and seven “leap” years that forms the basis of the Metonic cycle was used to create letterforms that change proportions from normal to wide based on their position within a word. Additionally, a fusion of sources—from ancient Greek art and symbolism to Alexander Girard’s mid-twentieth century La Fonda del Sol visual identity system—served as inspiration for the creation of Meton the owl mascot and graphic component of the Hotel Meton trademark.

In the nineteen-year Metonic cycle, years three, six, eight, eleven, fourteen, seventeen, and nineteen are “leap” years that contain an extra lunar month. This sequence was encoded into the typeface, Meton Sans, designed to be used exclusively for Hotel Meton’s visual identity system.
**Figure 30 — Meton Sans Typeface Features.** In accordance with the normal and leap years of the Metonic Cycle, Meton Sans is designed so that seven out of nineteen letters are wide to every twelve out of nineteen that are normal in width.

**Figure 31 — Meton Sans Typeface Features.** Based on the rules of the algorithm, the ten letters in the words “Hotel Meton” create ten different permutations.
Meton Sans contains two widths (normal & wide), and, when a string of letters is typed using the typeface, seven of every nineteen letters are wide while the other twelve are normal (Figure 30). This feature can be turned on or off using OpenType stylistic sets. For the logotype component of the trademark for Hotel Meton, which contains ten letters, there are ten possible permutations using this sequence of wide and narrow letters (Figure 31).

In addition to the typeface and logotype, the owl mascot serving as the graphic component of the trademark, also has permutable features. The owl has six possible eye configurations—sleeping, half-awake, wide awake, grinning, smiling, and meditating (Figure 32)—as well as seven wing patterns (Figure 33), themselves derived from the seven unique letters in the name Hotel Meton (h, o, t, e, l, m, n). Between the logotype permutations, and the two sets of permutable features in the graphic mark, there are a total of four hundred and sixty-two possible unique permutations of the Hotel Meton combination trademark.

The monochrome color palette for Hotel Meton serves as a constant and, as such, doesn’t increase the total number of possible permutations. In this way, the rubric used for Hotel Meton differs from the one used by Girard for the La Fonda del Sol sun motif, which relied on a diverse color palette and a constant logotype. What is common among these two

**FIGURE 32 – HOTEL METON COMBINATION MARK.**
Six eye configurations, combined with eleven logotypes and seven wing patterns yields a total of four hundred and sixty-two possible permutations of the word mark.
dynamic visual identity systems—and all of those that make use of the permutation technique—is the designation of constants and variables as a means of establishing and/or modifying the system. At any time, any one of the variables in the Hotel Meton identity could become a constant, and any constant could become a variable—sending the system in an entirely different visual direction without completely starting from scratch. For instance, if the number of wing patterns or eye configurations for Meton the owl was reduced to one, and three additional colors were added to the color palette, these subtle changes would have a remarkable affect on the system as a whole, yet the system would remain in tact.

Prototype 3 – Open form. The Metonic cycle was an accurate way for the ancient Greeks to synchronize the lunar and solar calendars, however it was only accurate to within approximately one half of one hour, meaning, eventually, the system would fail. In fact, after four Metonic cycles, or seventy-six years, the system would be off by a full twenty-four hours. Callippus, another ancient Greek astronomer working about a century after Meton, suggested omitting one day from the last year of the fourth Metonic cycle as a way of improving the accuracy of the system, and this seventy-six year cycle ultimately became known as the Callippic cycle.
The seventy-six year Callippic cycle also happens to be the approximate life expectancy of people in many developed countries of the world, and many of life’s milestones tend to happen at the turning of each Metonic cycle within the larger Callippic cycle. Thus, the brief for the third prototype poses questions such as: What if a dynamic visual identity had a life expectancy? What would a baby visual identity system look like? How would it age? What would happen to the visual identity system after it dies? Could compromise between the static and dynamic visual identity design paradigms be reached where dynamic identities ultimately die and something completely new is required to take its place? The hypothetical entity for which these questions have been explored using the open form technique is the Callippus Foundation, an organization dedicated to health and ancestry-related genetic services. Existing companies such as 23andMe and AncestryDNA provide similar services but both of these organizations employ static rather than dynamic visual identity systems.

Typefaces are often anthropomorphized—i.e. assigned human qualifiers such as “friendly” or “mature”—making a typographic solution a likely choice for a genetic services company that has a visual identity with a human lifespan. The Callippus typeface family has been developed to demonstrate the open form technique, a technique that is similar to permutation in that parameters are identified as either unchanging constants or as dynamic variables, but different in the sense that open form requires the designer and client organization to give up a great deal of control over the visual form of a given variable parameter by linking that parameter’s appearance to input from an external—often natural—system. For Callippus, this means certain aspects of the typeface are linked to lunar cycles, while others are linked to solar cycles, and yet others are linked to the position of the typeface within the Callippic cycle. Once the algorithm is encoded into the system and set loose to run its course, there’s little the designer can do—short of modifying the code—to control the appearance of the system.

The parameter of the Callippus typeface family that is linked to the lunar cycle is its boldness. At new moon, Callippus is light in weight. As the moon waxes toward full, Callippus waxes toward a
bold weight. As the moon wanes back toward the next new moon, Callippus wanes back toward the lightest weight again. However, the typeface won’t look the same as it did a month prior, because the solar cycle as been working on another parameter: the width of the letterforms. Callippus begins the year as a narrow typeface, but, as the sun moves toward the summer solstice, Callippus gets wider. Then, as the sun moves back toward the winter solstice, Callippus becomes narrow once again (Figure 34). Because the lunar and solar rhythms are slightly off, even in a Metonic cycle, it would take nineteen years before Callippus looked exactly the same as it did when the system was set loose to run its course.

No human looks the same after a nineteen year cycle, however, and neither will Callippus. This is because the Metonic cycles act upon the terminals of the typeface. Callippus is born with soft, rounded terminals, lending it a friendly cherub-like appearance. By the end of the first Metonic cycle, these terminals have squared off and Callippus becomes a straightforward geometric sans serif typeface. By the end of the second Metonic cycle Callippus is middle-aged and has sprouted slab serifs. By the end of the third Metonic cycle, Callippus has developed brackets that smooth the transition between the main stems of the letterforms and the serifs. Finally, by the end of the fourth Metonic cycle, the thick serifs Callippus developed in midlife have worn down to skeletal hairline serifs (Figure 35).
Three factors working somewhat independently on different parameters of one element of a dynamic visual identity, over time, have a dramatic affect on the overall appearance of the system. Likewise, as discussed above in the context of the Visit Nordkyn identity system, the open form technique is synonymous with Dubberly's concept of "perpetual beta" (2011, p. 2). Once the algorithm is set loose to run its course, Callippus will never look the same; but, because the changes happen so gradually, the overall effect is less noticeable in Callippus than it is in the Visit Nordkyn identity. Because the Visit Nordkyn logo is affected by non-linear climatological factors, however, it is possible for two instances of the logo to look identical to a previous instance. Therefore, which parameters are affected, and how, are two of the most important decisions to be made when applying the open form technique to a dynamic visual identity design.
Chapter V
Conclusion

Dynamic visual identity design is not currently recognized as a discrete paradigm, distinct from static visual identity design, and its history is not well documented. It is hoped that the evidence presented in this investigation will help to broaden the scope of graphic design history as it relates to visual identity design and prompt a re-evaluation by design historians that might lead to the inclusion of more examples of dynamic visual identity design in the canon of graphic design history.

Rooted in a humanist tradition and embracing the organic-systems ethos, dynamic visual identity design is progressive, and in some cases, it is a more appropriate approach to twenty-first century identity design problems than static visual identity design—which is rooted in a specific interpretation of twentieth-century modernist ideals. Thus, it is also the author’s hope that a practical, pragmatic path has been laid for the inclusion of dynamic visual identity design in the practice of professional designers as well as in the classroom.

Further research is needed to uncover additional examples of twentieth-century dynamic visual identity design like those documented in the case studies in Chapter II, to record for posterity current examples of dynamic visual identity design, and to validate claims such as those made by Olins (1978) that visual identity design in general is at least half a century older than graphic design historians currently recognize. In addition, more work needs to be done to refine the three dynamic visual identity design techniques presented in Chapter IV, and to identify additional techniques. Applying the research contained herein in the classroom and the “real world” is the best way of improving the theoretical foundation of the dynamic visual identity design paradigm, testing the viability of its techniques, and discovering new ones.
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