

## LEONARDO REVIEWS

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### BOOKS

#### PROBLEM SOLVED: A PRIMER IN DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION

by Michael Johnson. Phaidon Press,  
 New York, U.S.A., 2004. 288 pp., illus.  
 Trade, paper. ISBN: 0-7148-4174-9;  
 ISBN: 0-7148-4453-5.

Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens, Department  
 of Art, University of Northern Iowa,  
 Cedar Falls, IA, U.S.A. E-mail:  [<ballast@netins.net>](mailto:ballast@netins.net).

In the U.S.A., where art schools are often a mixture of artists and designers, the former are typically said to “create” works of art while the latter are apt to more modestly claim that they only “solve problems.” To put it another way (as does this book’s author), “[while] a fine art student can get away with creating his or her own problems to solve, a communications student is usually handed someone else’s, with a looming deadline thrown in.” It is itself a problem that designers always have to deal with limitations of time, function, budget, style and print production, and it leads to unending discussions about whether or not it would help to compile a typology (a comprehensive directory) of kinds of problems, and, having done so, to identify trustworthy, timesaving means to address those problems. Among the best-known books on this subject is *Forget All the Rules You Ever Learned about Graphic Design* (1981), by Bob Gill, whose influence is acknowledged in the introduction to this book. Of related significance are books by Edward de Bono (not mentioned here), who wrote interminably about

what he called “lateral thinking”; *A Smile in the Mind*, by Beryl McAlhone and David Stuart (1996); and, most recently, *The Art of Looking Sideways*, by Alan Fletcher (2001).

This book by Michael Thompson, a British designer and Creative Director of Johnson Banks, is the paper-bound edition of a title that was first released by Phaidon in 2002. Given the excellence and extraordinary number of its illustrations, as well as its vigorous, literate tone, it is a deserving addition to the always ongoing debate in design about how to arrive at proposals that are both unexpected and appropriate.

The book has 18 sections, each dedicated to a certain kind of communication problem, the point of which is summed up by a memorable heading that (consistent with the samples shown) is both surprising and suitable. There are, for example, sections that play up such themes as evolution versus revolution, doing more while using less, making fresh use of historical styles, finding legitimate ways to resolve ethical *imbroglios*, effectively designing for education, and so on. With each turn of the page, one encounters the finest examples of wit (ranging from hilarious to offensive), such as the political billboard of a pregnant Tony Blair that reads, “Four Years of Labour and He Still Hasn’t Delivered”; or a book of short stories by Vladimir Nabokov (who was not only a writer but also a prominent butterfly expert as well) in which the letters of his name on the cover are mounted on pins in a butterfly case; or a recent ad for Volkswagen in which three of the redesigned Beetles appear to be feeding like piglets at the chassis of an older van.

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#### BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THOUGHT

by Graham Priest. Oxford Univ. Press,  
 Oxford, U.K., 2003. 336 pp. Trade.  
 ISBN: 0-19-925405-2.

Reviewed by Robert Pepperell, University of  
 Plymouth, University of Wales, Newport,  
 U.K. E-mail:  [<pepperell@ntlworld.com>](mailto:pepperell@ntlworld.com).

Imagine that a foundational principle of Western science, logic and reason—perhaps *the* foundational principle—turns out in certain circumstances to be deeply inadequate, even fatally flawed. This is, in effect, what logician Graham Priest sets out to prove in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. The foundational principle at stake is that of “non-contradiction,” the axiom of rational belief that asserts that a given state cannot be both true and false at the same time. Since it was proposed and defended by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) has exerted a mighty grip on Western thought, serving to underpin much, if not all, reasoned inquiry. But as Priest makes clear, despite the apparent obviousness of the principle, it has been periodically tested during the course of philosophical history and, when pressed, found seriously wanting.

In this mind-bending (and for the uninitiated, sometimes mind-boggling) book, Graham Priest sets out to show that despite the best efforts of some of the most potent minds in history there are states of “true contradiction.” The claim is that when we examine the extreme limits of what it is to say, count,

**Reviews Panel:** Peter Anders, Fred Allan Andersson, Wilfred Arnold, Roy Ascott, Curtis Bahn, Claire Barliant, René Beekman, Roy R. Behrens, Andreas Broeckmann, Annick Bureaud, Chris Cobb, Robert Coburn, Donna Cox, Sean Cubitt, Nina Czegledy, Shawn Decker, Margaret Dolinsky, Dennis Dollens, Luisa Paraguai Donati, Victoria Duckett, Maia Engeli, Enzo Ferrara, Deborah Frizzell, Bulat M. Galejev, George Gessert, Elisa Giaccardi, Thom Gillespie, Allan Graubard, Dene Grigar, Diane Gromala, Rob Harle, Craig Harris, Josepha Haveman, Paul Hertz, Amy Ione, Stephen Jones, Richard Kade, Curtis E.A. Karnow, Nisar Keshvani, Julien Knebusch, Daniela Kutschat, Mike Leggett, Roger F. Malina, Jacques Mandelbrojt, Robert A. Mitchell, Rick Mitchell, Mike Mosher, Axel Mulder, Kevin Murray, Frieder Nake, Maureen A. Nappi, Angela Ndalitanis, Simone Osthoff, Jack Ox, Robert Pepperell, Kjel yngve Petersen, Cliff Pickover, Patricia Pisters, Michael Punt, Harry Rand, Sonya Rapoport, Edward Shanken, Aparna Sharma, Shirley Shor, George K. Shortess, Joel Slayton, Christa Sommerer, Yvonne Spielmann, David Surman, Pia Tikka, David Topper, Rene van Peer, Stefaan van Ryssen, Ian Versteegen, Stephen Wilson, Arthur Woods, Soh Yeong.