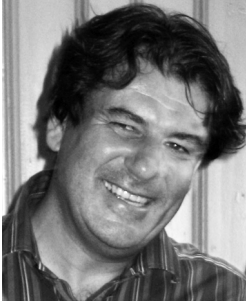


Ruedi Baur

Designer



Ruedi Baur, designer, born in 1956, French and Swiss nationalities, graduated in graphic design from the Zurich School of Applied Arts. After having created BBV (Lyon - Milan - Zurich) in 1983, he set up in 1989 Integral concept, presently constituted of five independent partner studios being able to intervene jointly on any cross-disciplinary project. Since 1989 in Paris, 2002 in Zurich and 2007 in Berlin, Intégral Ruedi Baur has been working on 2- and 3-dimensional projects within the different fields of visual communication: identity, orientation and information programs, exhibition design, urban design. Between 1989 and 1994, he coordinated the department of design «information space» of the Beaux-Arts school of Lyon where he organized between 1994 and 1996 a third cycle based on «civic and design spaces» theme.

In 1995, he became professor (corporate design) at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst of Leipzig, where he was nominated rector from 1997 until 2000. There he created in 1999 the Interdisciplinary Design Institute (2id).

Ruedi Baur has been a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) since 1992 and a member of the “CAFA Art Research Centre for the Olympic Games” since 2004.

Today Ruedi Baur is professor at the Luxun Academy of Shenyang and the Central Academy of Beijing (Cafaa) in China, at the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs de Paris (ENSAD) in France and at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK) in Switzerland. Since 2004, he has been with Vera Kockot and Clemens Bellut in charge of „design2context“, the Design Research Institute of the ZHdK.

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A contextual approach to design information.

Or: what can we learn from the analysis of disorientation?

Abstract:

“But let the mishap of disorientation once occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being. The very word ‘lost’ in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster”
(Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, MIT Press, 1960, p. 4).

Relishing no longer really knowing your way, avoiding anyone who would lead you too directly to the goal, wandering around at random, almost purposely losing track, travelling around, trying to forget where you come from, where you are and where you are heading. Freeing yourself from your home, your achievements, all the automatic behavior that defines us. Moving somewhere else not from obligation but for pleasure, forgetting your roots, changing your language, profession, family; in short, starting the adventure all over again, very soon realizing that this is never truly the case. Doing things with no particular purpose, choosing to venture into unknown lands or cultures, enjoying no longer being able to understand the connections between the various things in front of you, finding yourself purposely lost in information that you can never really use. Introducing new facts that call everything into question, and enable you to shake off old beliefs, add one complexity to another, blur distinctions, delve into chaos not to bring in any order but to enjoy getting

beyond simplistic models. Learning to get lost so as ultimately to work out your way better and choosing to approach disorientation as a realm of possibility rather than only the “overtones of utter disaster” described by Kevin Lynch.

This inversion of values is proposed in the context of a world that is gradually devolving the question of spatial orientation to the machine, as it did not so long ago for temporal orientation. We can already imagine, even analyze, this society in which every citizen will take everywhere he goes this digital extension of his body connected to a global network that will simultaneously tell him the universal time, where he is in the world, and where it is he wants to go. A new screen that will manage his calendar and help him as he moves around. It will enable him to find his destination, identify it, get information about it, even interact with it in the event of any hitches. Based on travelling distances, and informed of any obstructions in real time, it will be able to tell him when to leave and give him the route that is quickest, nicest, most advantageous, safe, and certainly not poetic.

Bernard Stiegler, perhaps better than anyone else, has fully explained the dangerous psychological and social consequences of this total synchronization of our spatio-temporal calendars. We can easily complement these observations by imagining these global systems in the hands either of aggressive marketing or every manner of dictator and religious fanatic. In either scenario, a system of this kind that makes it possible to identify the location of the person seeking information at any moment will be easily open to abuse for purposes that are highly detrimental to our liberties of life and thought. But beyond these ‘Orwellian’ perspectives, unfortunately far from chimerical, understanding these risks gives us a sense of how short a step it is from assistance in orientation to surveillance of our movements.

It is also interesting to analyze how we behave when interacting with a browser. At first, some resistance can be observed to what the machine offers. The user remains active. He compares his experience to that of the machine, groans, and even sometimes gains the upper hand by ignoring what it offers him, or simply stops it. But as his technological aptitude develops and his use becomes more systematic, his confidence increases, there is less interaction, and the comparison with the real space fades. We simply allow ourselves to be guided by the system, led by the hand, almost to the point of losing any notion of orientation in the process. So we can fairly easily imagine this future world in which everyone would be systematically guided by his device, connected to the synchronized global network, and gradually lose any sense of natural orientation. It is a matter of everyday observation that being guided considerably reduces our capacity to know where we are and have any spontaneous sense of the route towards our chosen destination. Neither is this phenomenon only connected with satellite navigation technology; more generally, any guidance by a reliable artificial system tends to reduce our capacity to orientate ourselves naturally, that is to interpret what is in front of us in the environment and independently take decisions that would truly enable us to find our way. Disaster is therefore not necessarily encountered where we expect it, or to put it another way: every development displaces the problems. It is the problem of independent thought and action that is at risk of defining our century.

What can we learn from disorientation? How can a design project leave room for individual choice? How can we orientate without guiding? In twenty minutes and in English, some lines of approach to this space of possible disorientation will be suggested.