



WHAT

WANT

You only have to look at the website 43 Things to see the wide and varied goals and hopes humans have. List upon list details how people want to live their lives. Human wants can be encapsulated by the line 'one person's trash is another's treasure.' A lonely person wants lots of action in their lives while a busy, stressed out person wants less. Privileged people may want a 'back to basics' holiday with no running water or electricity. Those that live permanently in environments like this dream of anything but.

There are a few unifying wants that people have in common though: a desire for greater sense interaction, to love and be loved, to share meaningful experiences and to enjoy peace of mind.

Construct

Time, energy and space are the building blocks of almost everything in our lives. Many of us complain that we don't have enough time to do all the things we want, while others complain of a lack of energy, and another lot say lack of space stops them from having what they really want in life.

LOSING CLOCK TIME

Bodil Jonsson who wrote 'Unwinding the Clock' suggests the key to breaking our link to measured time is to focus on time as it is experienced. 'Experienced time' means internalising time as you live. To simplify, your perception of time relies on your own unique perceptual biases. So if you think time is passing quickly, it will, and if you feel time is crawling at a snail's pace, it will do that too. Time will go exactly at the speed to which you attach your thoughts to it. If your perception of time is working for you - great. But if not, you can 'stretch out time' by changing your attitude to it.

We're especially craving spaces and experiences where we can lose clock time. Think of happy times past and how you barely stole a glance at your watch or the clock on the wall. Western linear time is deemed to be our reality, not circular time. But it sometimes helps to remember that there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1). So rather than rushing to be on time, maybe we should try to be 'in' time instead.





PLEASURE STEEPED IN MEANING

Daniel Pink in 'A Whole New Mind' noted that baby boomers are entering the Conceptual Age with an eye on their own chronological age. They recognise that they now have more of their lives behind them than ahead of them. And such indisputable arithmetic can concentrate the mind. After decades of pursuing riches, wealth seems less alluring. For them, and for many others in this new era, meaning is the new money.

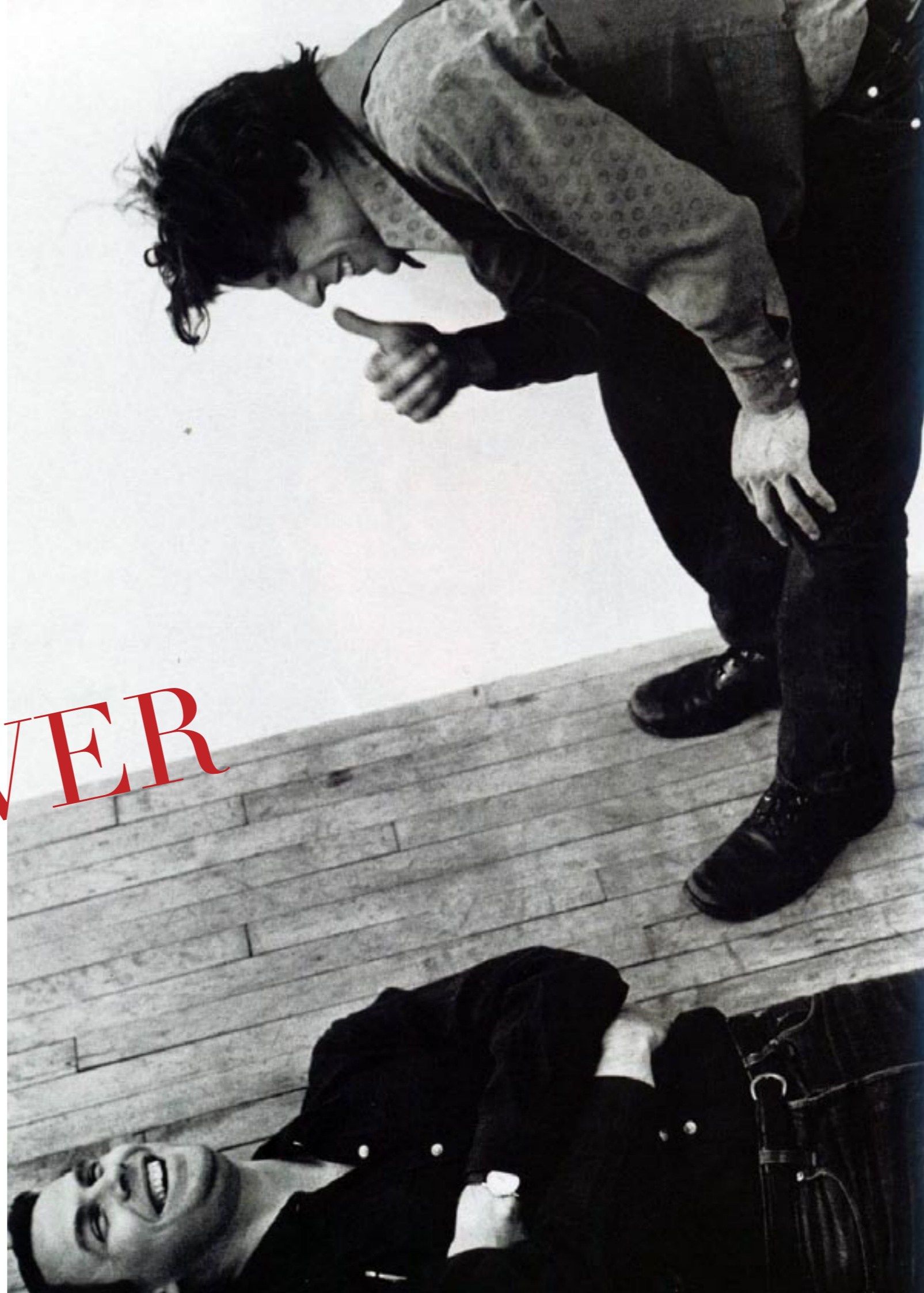
What constitutes a meaningful experience is specific to your personal context i.e. your interpretation of time, energy and space. 'Value' as a concept therefore becomes more and more context specific. In 'The Progress Paradox' Gregg Easterbrook says, "a transition from material want to meaning want is in progress on an historically unprecedented scale - involving hundreds of millions of people - and may eventually be recognised as the principal cultural development of our age."

Or as the philosopher Jacob Needleman said, "we are born for meaning, not pleasure, unless it is pleasure that is steeped in meaning." And for many of us, this pleasurable meaning is to be found in love.

Our high tech society also fragments our social connections. It actually drives us away from others. Yes technology connects us, but at what quality? Emails are quickly fired off, just as quickly glanced at, and easily deleted. To share our inner experiences and to develop and maintain more complete relationships we need to be in sync with those we are experiencing an activity with. It's easy to 'sync up' in real time but more difficult when many of our relationships are widely distributed geographically. The famed movie critic Roger Ebert once wrote, "most films move so quickly and are so dependent on plot that they are about events, not lives." The same thought extends to our personal communications.

The digital network is everywhere now, and mobile networks permeate every area of space. But many members of society, especially the aged, have little physical contact with people; while the young need to learn that illumination does not come from a laptop screen. The more wired and linked we become, the more we crave compensatory human contact. In response, people now want to be sense led, not system led.

LOVE IS THE ANSWER





TOUCHING IS THE NEW SEEING

In his book 'Brand Sense' Martin Lindstrom factually states: 83% of all commercial communication appeals only to one sense, our eyes. But that 75% of our day-to-day emotions are influenced by what we smell, and there's a 65% chance of a mood change when we're exposed to a positive sound. Are your eyes the main sense through which you interpret the world? Could you be limiting your enjoyment of life by experiencing the world primarily through sight?

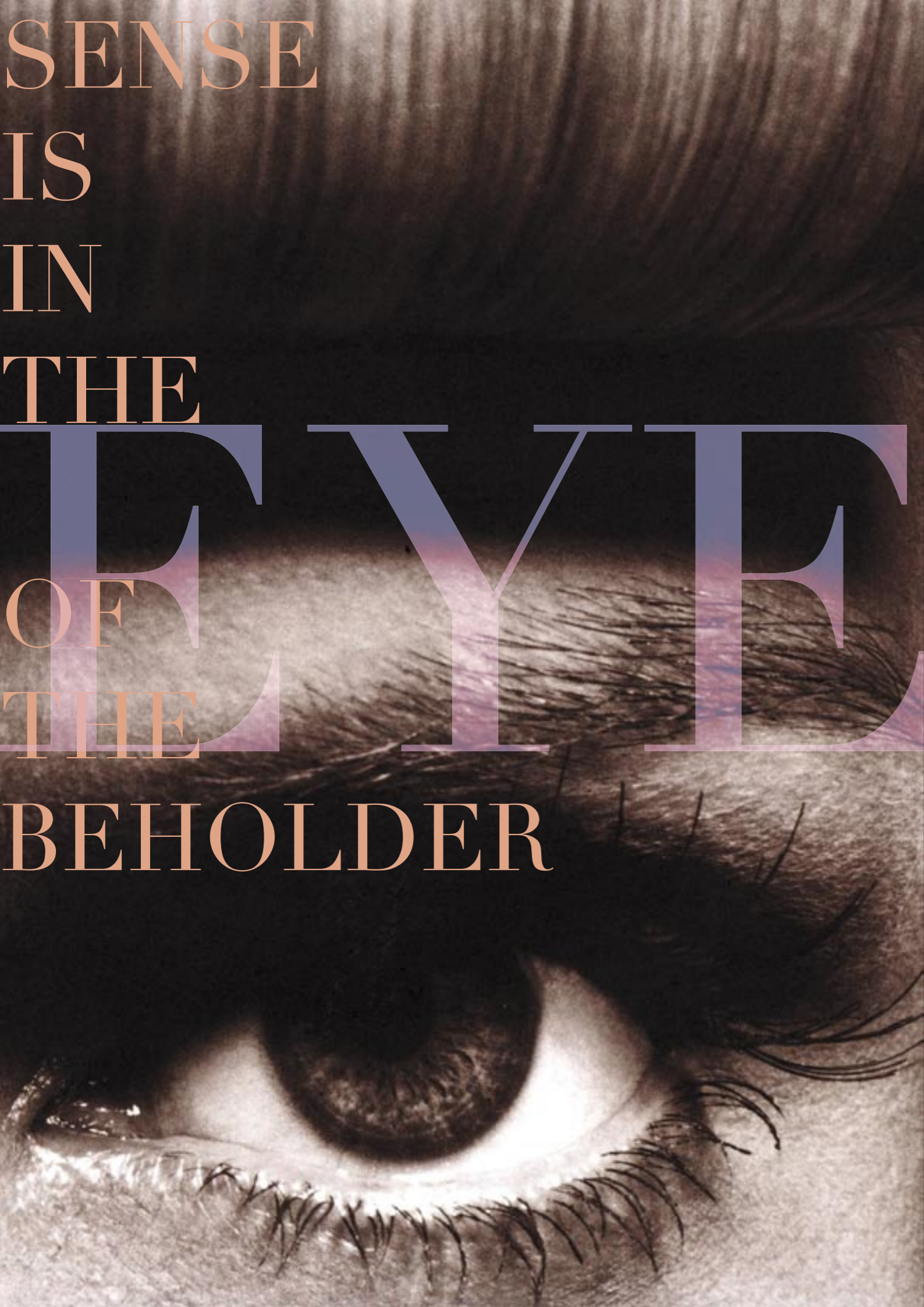
The order of the senses in terms of perceptual reach from closest to furthest range is touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. This is the exact order of the development of the five senses in the womb. It's why we long to touch and be touched. Touch is intuitive and we no longer want such an integral sense held at a distance from us. The saying 'you reached out for my hand but ended up touching my heart' captures the sentiment perfectly. And as Time magazine wrote earlier this month, "touching is the new seeing."

PERFORMING
WITH
TWO

HANDS

Last year at the annual TED (technology, entertainment, design) conference in California, Jeff Han, a human-computer interface designer, demonstrated a high resolution multi touch computer screen. Han rejects the idea of introducing “a whole new generation of people to computing with the standard keyboard, mouse and Windows pointer interface.” Most touch screens usually only recognise one finger at a time, while Han’s system uses both movement and pressure from multiple inputs (from 2-20 fingers) to convey information to the silicon brain. And there’s nothing between you and the data: no mouse, no cursor and no pull-down menus.

As Bill Buxton, father of the multi touch screen said to Fast Company magazine, “today’s computers assume you are Napoleon, with your left hand tucked into your suit. But a lot of things are better performed with two hands. Multiple sensor touch screens bridge the gap between the physical and virtual world.”



SENSE
IS
IN
THE
EYE
OF
THE
BEHOLDER

The other gap we want to bridge is between the sensory inputs. We want to live and feel the seven senses more fully: the five physical senses - sight, sound, touch, smell, taste and the sixth - knowingness and the seventh - thought perception. We want to find new ways to explore the world around us with all these senses.

Because our senses deliver emotional messages we form deeper connections when all of the senses are fully engaged. But the absence of a sense can also be its own message - silence for example. We also process information differently when we receive it via another sense as contrast helps make us more conscious.

Stuart Heller in a paper titled the 'Importance of Senses' says that sensation is to actuality as intuition is to possibility. This means that your senses allow you to use yourself as a laboratory for building and testing your ideas and desires. As more of us begin to recreate our worlds through greater sense interaction, we'll be demanding more sensual interfaces from every product, service, space and person we interact with.

In the future more products will rely on human feeling for form. We'll gravitate to products with curves and lines that simulate nature, the human body and our own emotions. In 1934 the Pioneer Zephyr passenger train was presented at the Chicago World's Fair. Its shape, inspired by a teardrop, was considered to represent nature's perfectly aerodynamic shape (the same shape assumed by water as it passes unhindered through the air). Critics called the new look poetic.

As our world becomes more and more virtual, we will seek out humane and tactile design. There'll be an increase in fabrics that give a warm embrace by providing comfort and warmth through amazing material quality, though they'll never act as a substitute for an embrace with a loved one.



FORM
FOLLOWS
FEELING

Humans are social beings and we respond physically to the experience of intimacy. Dean Ornish who wrote 'love and survival' states that our connections to other people through love and intimacy are just as important in maintaining healthy lives as good nutrition and exercise.

The notion of family (whether that's relatives or friends, or both) is fundamental to humans. We want someone to help us make sense of the world. And someone to laugh with. Laughter has more to do with relationships than jokes as we rarely laugh alone. Happiness cannot be contained in a box to be enjoyed by a single individual because the very essence of happiness is collective. Its role is to be infectious and to flow and radiate out to everyone. Just as knowledge only exists when it is communicated and shared.

In Sean Penn's recent film 'Into the Wild' the protagonist comes to the realisation that happiness is only real when shared. Intimacy is not essential for physical survival, but it is necessary for emotional survival.



HAPPINESS
ONLY
EXISTS
WHEN
SHARED



CONNECTING THE

DOTS

There has been a focus on holism recently as we come to realise it's the relationship between things that matter. That the whole is more than the sum of its parts. We don't want only one piece of the puzzle. We need it to connect to other pieces to form a greater whole which will help us see the bigger picture. It is within the interaction of the pieces where the value lies.

We want to understand these associations and links. We want to understand how things join up. But it all involves an awful lot of trust. When Steve Jobs dropped out of college, he took a calligraphy course and learnt what made typography great. It had no practical application to his life at the time, but he found the subject fascinating. Ten years later when he designed the Macintosh, it all came back to him. The Mac was the first computer with beautiful typography. As he said in a commencement address to students at Stanford University in 2005, "you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future."

Daniel Pink describes the dots another way, as symphony. "Putting the pieces together, seeing the big picture, crossing boundaries, combining disparate pieces into an arresting new whole." He also states that when facts become so widely available and instantly accessible, each one becomes less valuable. What begins to matter more is the ability to place these facts in context and to deliver them with emotional impact.

IDENTIFYING

GS

AS OUR GUIDANCE SYSTEM

In 'the age of turbulence' Alan Greenspan states that the "economic product of the United States is becoming predominantly conceptual." In the West as we move away from industries like manufacturing to ones like software, we begin to live more in our heads. Having peace of mind therefore becomes a highly desired commodity. Strength is not so much physical now, as it is in the clarity of our mind and emotions. And the more conceptual our world becomes, the more we'll need to be in tune with our feelings and emotions.

Philips Design has prototyped garments that demonstrate how electronics can be incorporated into fabrics and clothes to express the emotions and personality of the wearer. Bubelle, the 'blushing dress' comprises two layers. The inner one is equipped with sensors that respond to changes in the wearer's emotions, and then projects them onto the outer textile. It behaves differently depending on who is wearing the dress. Lucy McRae, a body architect at the company says, "a garment can be a highly complex interactive electronic or biochemical device that is more responsive to subtle triggers like sensuality, affection and sensation."

The dresses display emotive technology, and how the body and the near environment can use pattern and colour change to interact and predict emotional states. These garments were developed to challenge the notion that our lives are automatically better because they are more digital. Philips looked at more 'analog' phenomena like emotional sensing to develop technologies that it describes as 'sensitive' rather than intelligent.

We will also return to more natural materials as synthetics have high consumption of non renewable resources and large energy consumption in production. Synthetic fabrics are also slow to biodegrade and add to the environmental impact of landfill sites. Together with natural materials we'll also want to see the colour of time in products. Nature can't be forced beyond its natural pace so we will look to bring materials and products (and people, places and experiences) that reinforce this idea into our lives. We want to hold close to us that which make us feel connected to nature.

Biomimicry is innovation inspired by nature. Biomimics study nature's best ideas and adapt them for human use. Nature creates conditions conducive to life and we're finally realising we are surrounded by genius. Nature, by necessity, has already solved many of the problems we are grappling with. For example, nature only uses the energy it needs, rewards co-operation, demands local expertise, curbs excesses from within and taps the power of limits.

As Janine Benyus, author of 'Biomimicry' writes, "we are hungry for instructions about how to live sanely and sustainably on the Earth. The good news is that wisdom is widespread, not only in indigenous peoples but also in the species that have lived on Earth far longer than humans. If the age of the Earth were a calendar year and today were a breath before midnight on New Year's Eve, we showed up a scant fifteen minutes ago, and all of recorded history has blinked by the last sixty seconds. Luckily for us, our planet mates - the fantastic meshwork of plants, animals, and microbes - have been patiently perfecting their wares since March, an incredible 3.8 billion years since the first bacteria."

And it is to nature we now turn to remind us how to live again.

NATURE'S BEST IDEAS



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