



## ACTIVITY TO ACCOMPANY:

### *Designing Sustainable Packaging* by Scott Boylston

#### SECTION 2 – RE:STRUCTURE

##### **Silent Critique as a W.I.P. (work-in-progress) exercise**

Rambunctious verbal critiques are the lifeblood of the creative process, and there are simply no substitutes for them. They help young designers develop in many ways and offer an invigorating environment for ideas to grow in an organic fashion. As a supplement to the traditional verbal critique, however, a silent – or written – critique is an excellent method of ensuring an intimate, physical experience for package design students. In fact, a good package design critique is only possible when the opportunity to handle the package is made available. One must be able to feel its weight, assess its center of gravity, and discern its level of intimacy with the content it is intended to hold. One must also be able to consider the package's material quality in relation to the material quality of the contents, the ways in which the box opens and closes, and the methods in which the contents are extracted and re-inserted. Since these are fundamental aspects of any package, any assessment of a package's success can only honestly be determined when a package is held in one's hands.

A written critique in a controlled situation provides an opportunity to assess all of these variables, and to do so in a manner that is more consistent with the way a consumer would experience a package in a retail environment – not with a cacophony of opinions wafting around the room, but within a more personal, even visceral, setting. This kind of critique should occur relatively early in the process: perfecting the volume, form and function is imperative and will dictate the nature, size and placement of the surface graphics. This part of the project is also the most intimidating for students who have had little exposure to 3-D design, and it's important to push them into wrestling with the unique and varied prerequisites of such an endeavour.

Depending on the complexity of the packaging project, timed intervals of 6-9 minutes is usually an adequate enough amount of time for each student to experience each package, to comprehend and assess the surface graphic application, and to write individual comments about the piece's successes and shortcomings. Once the pre-determined span of time is complete, each individual can then shift to the package that is next in line and spend the same amount of time interacting with the next student's work. This 6-9 minute experience is repeated until either the class time expires or the students have made a full loop around the entire room, whichever comes first.

##### **Tips**

- The act of a student intensely critiquing a series of projects that are not his or her own, in the quiet intensity of his or her own thought processes, is the most important outcome of this exercise. Cultivating the ability to resolve numerous packaging problems, one after the other, and ones that are not of a student's own making, can nurture the necessary habits of art directors everywhere. It is also often the case that by handling so many packages, students can discover ways to resolve nagging problems that they themselves might have had with their own packages. So, while the students might expect that they are participating in the critique for the sole benefit of gathering their classmates' comments on their own projects, the real take-away is experiencing the demands of high-pressure problem-solving advice that they must be able to generate as future art directors.
- Explain the process and the rationale thoroughly at the beginning. However, there is no need for the students to know before the class that they will be engaged in this exercise.
- Have each student lay out all of his or her work in a designated space within the classroom – tight quarters can be easily manoeuvred and, in fact, create an atmosphere of camaraderie. It is required

that the entire package (structure and all functions) be built as what is called a 'white' or a 'full dummy,' which are terms to describe a sturdy, well built comp of the final proposed package that is constructed in a single colour (white illustration board, for example) with clean seams (clear tape if any tape is required on the outside, or hot glue on the interior), so that the individuals critiquing it can experience the form directly, without any visual or tactile interference. On the table beside this 'white' should be relatively large material swatches, proposed and printed colour schemes, as well as a rendering of the proposed surface graphics applied to the form. Of course, the students could go so far as to create a full-colour comp at this point, but that generally happens in the next critique, once the form, function and volume of the package have been fully resolved. There is no sense critiquing the details of surface graphics if the package comp is 5 cm (2 in) too high, for instance.

- As they prepare the space, the student should leave a bullet point list of important project parameters, such as target audience demographics, likely retail placement, purchase price, market niche and market competition. While this information would most likely have been conveyed to the entire class during an early proposal presentation stage, it's helpful to remind everyone of such details. The student should also leave a sheet for others to write their comments on.
- Once each student has adequately prepared his or her individual space, ask him or her to shift one seat to the left (or right), and explain that the first few minutes of each timed exercise should involve a process of absorption only: reading the bullet point list, feeling the material swatches, observing the illustrated surface graphics and, most importantly, it should be comprised of pure interaction and intimate experience of the package's form and function. After several minutes of interaction and 'absorption' students should begin writing their reactions. They should be as laudatory or as critical as necessary, keeping in mind that if problems with form or function are not addressed at this point all of the care in managing effective surface graphics will be wasted.
- A consistently timed and organized process is most effective, so time each 6-9 minute interval and be sure to let students know when they have one minute left. This '1-minute warning' is very important as it enables the students to wrap up their thoughts and put the packages and materials back the way they found them – so the next student encounters the package as a closed package.
- Stress to the students that it is important not to read the comments on the sheet made by students who have preceded them. Verbal critiques are great opportunities to build on other people's comments, but this particular critique, as already mentioned, is a supplement to that sort of community endeavour. The silent critique allows for individuals to experience the work on his or her own terms, and to delve into matters that seem most pressing to him or her personally. By reading other people's comments, the student is preventing an authentic experience for himself or herself.
- Once all students have made a complete circuit, and commented on each classmate's work, they should return to their own projects and read through all of the comments left. This provides a learning opportunity regarding the nature of a designer's need to integrate diverse opinions with his or her own sensibilities. The comments should be read, then left alone for a day or two, then read again. Each student must then determine ways to address the comments that resonate with him or her, and comprehend the nature of the comments that he or she may not at first agree with – all of this must be assimilated into each student's own manner of understanding design, whether or not every comment is applied.