Chapter 3
Digitalization and Graphic Design From Lascaux to Artificial Intelligence:
The Emergence of Visual Thinking – Lascaux and Symbolic Communication

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ABSTRACT

Although the term graphic design was first coined by typographer William A. Dwiggins in the early 20th century to define emerging professional practices, the origins of the discipline can be traced back to prehistoric times. Visual expressions such as those in the Lascaux Caves demonstrate that symbolic communication predates written language. Over centuries,

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graphic design evolved through major cultural and technological shifts, including the invention of writing, the development of typographic systems, the advent of the printing press, and the transformations brought by the Industrial Revolution. In the modern era, digitalization fundamentally redefined the field by enabling greater interactivity, flexibility, and creative experimentation. Today, artificial intelligence marks a new epistemological threshold, reshaping design methodologies, questioning authorship, and expanding the conceptual boundaries of visual communication.

INTRODUCTION

Since the earliest periods of human history, the need for self-expression has manifested through various forms of visual representation. From the prehistoric paintings in the Lascaux Caves to the digital images generated by artificial intelligence today, this process demonstrates that visual representation constitutes one of the fundamental ways through which humans produce meaning and communicate their experiences. Within this long historical trajectory, graphic design has emerged not merely as a field of aesthetic production but also as a system that organizes visual thinking, structures meaning, and enables cultural communication. In this sense, the history of graphic design is directly related to the formation of humanity's visual memory. The early visual narratives found in prehistoric cave paintings are not only artistic productions but also symbolic expressions of the relationship between humans, nature, experience, and the unknown (Clottes, 2008).

Throughout history, technological ruptures such as the invention of writing, the development of the printing press, and the emergence of typography have played a decisive role in transforming practices of visual communication. These developments fundamentally altered the ways in which visual knowledge was produced, organized, and disseminated. Particularly during the twentieth century, the emergence of modernist design, the Bauhaus approach, and the Swiss Typography School made significant contributions to the formation of graphic design as a systematic discipline. During this period, graphic design began to be considered not only as an aesthetic activity but also as a communication system capable