

STOP BEING SHEEP



Speak Up

YEAR ONE

September 2002 > 2003

BORN ON-LINE—CURRENTLY GROWING OFF-LINE—IN SEPTEMBER OF 2002, SPEAK UP IS A COMMUNITY DEVOTED TO GRAPHIC DESIGN. OPEN TO CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE, IT STRESSES AND QUESTIONS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROFESSION IN OUR CULTURE. SPEAK UP CHALLENGES THOSE WHO PRACTICE INSIDE THE FIELD, IN HOPE OF MORE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THEIR ACTIONS AND IN LIGHT OF THE RESPONSIBILITY WE ALL HAVE AS COMMUNICATORS.

Spanning the course of one year, STOP BEING SHEEP exhibits Speak Up's most provoking thoughts, ideas and commentaries on graphic design.

talk **ask** listen **listen closer** scream if you need to **don't ever stop questioning** why **why the hell not** silence is inconsequential **voices** your voice **your opinion** your experience **important as ever** more than you think **now** at this moment **as loud as you can** as long as possible

push **pull** pull some more **tug** give in **don't give up** not now **scratch** dig **dig deeper** it's right there **don't let go** go **go further** careful **too far** bet it felt good though **ask for more** always **from others** from yourself **constantly** few feelings are more rewarding

laugh **share** dream until dreams come true **wonder** speculate **curse** be yourself **for fuck's sake** be honest **cocky** modest **humble** confident **funny** determined **never for anybody else** for your own good **this is for you** solely for you **just this once** experience it

think **think harder** fight for it **not easy** isn't supposed to be **try** try again **fail** one more shot **succeed** sustain it **be accountable** be responsible **every moment** too simple otherwise **struggle** strive **it's strenuous** almost there **it's imperative that you do** you can feel it **closer than ever** the power in your voice **don't doubt it** **Speak Up**

today **tomorrow** forever

welcome to the new dialogue



Why Graphic Design?

Design is not a product to buy and sell. It is a cultural dialogue that can be manipulated into anything we (as designers) want, to convince and trick anybody who encounters it into changing their views to whatever we (as designers) so desire. We are cultural propagandists and general mindfucks.

ART CHANTRY

Regardless of the lifestyle you lead, design remains a political act. Design is not some benign, innocent, ineffectual undertaking. It has a major impact on people and the environment, and you can exploit that in a variety of ways, both good and bad.

RUDY VANDERLANS

Bad design creates confusion and even a kind of aesthetic depression (also known as the early '80s).

SAM POTTS

We might not all agree on what is good design and what isn't, but I think we all agree that design matters. And together we need to communicate that. Real loud.

DEBBIE MILLMAN

Just remember how lucky you are to do something you love.

TAN LE

Michael Bierut



Are designers up to the task? The world isn't changed by the people who hang the punctuation and spec the soy-based inks. It's changed by the people who imagine the goals, and come up with the messages that advance them. In my experience, these are not your typical graphic designers.

It's interesting to me that some of the designers who have been truly influential in projecting big ideas to the larger world are people like Tibor Kalman or Richard Saul Wurman; people of intelligence and passion who were not trained as graphic designers in the first place, and who would, in fact, deny being graphic designers at all.

If graphic designers really want to change the world, are the right people becoming graphic designers?





Tan Le

I enjoy Steven Heller's work and worship Glaser, but that doesn't mean I also value their political views and opinions. If I want a political opinion, I'll watch Henry Kissinger on *Meet the Press*.

It's fine to make posters if you want to voice an opinion. But let's not kid ourselves and give any more weight or substance to the work than they deserve. AIGA was wrong to be so involved.

While we're here, why don't we hear what Paula Scher has to say about abortion, or what Rudy VanderLans has to say about the WTO and China. They're notable designers, so they must also be experts on world affairs and their opinions must matter.

Gimme a fucking break.



Scott Stowell

Little by little, people who call themselves *designers* (but are in fact no-talent idiots who exist only to perpetuate the ill-conceived agendas of visionless corporate drones) are remaking our visual landscape.

All traces of humanity—surprise, humor, charm—eventually get replaced by conformity, slickness and above all, emptiness.

As designers we have the responsibility to look past the petty concerns of the moment and act not just in our own interests, or those of the client, but to create work that speaks to people and adds something to the world. This new logo says nothing, does nothing, and removes a little bit of joy from the world. And that's bad for designers, bad for people—and bad for UPS.





Shawn Wolfe

It's important to look at design in the larger context of *The Culture*. Whether design shapes the culture or culture shapes design, both are intimately connected. I think certain individual players (both inside and outside of academia) sometimes set trends and leave their mark, but to me it all seems to be...we all seem to be...part of one large slumping, peaking, surging, stagnating current.

There are seasoned yet inept idiots out there for whom decades in the business have granted them no special wisdom or mastery. Just as there are plenty of fresh unspoiled young guns out there who couldn't break a rule or think outside of the box if their life depended on it.



Kenneth FitzGerald

This is a common complaint in the wake of sharp critiques and one that continues to puzzle me. Essentially, it says that design can't withstand a deep investigation, and that we must keep standards and expectations low. I reject this view and feel it's the complainers who are the negativists.

Here it is: Designers keep saying they want **more**. From clients respecting their opinions to work that touches people's hearts. In other words, designers want change. I admit I really don't know what designers should do. I do know this: Everything that's been done so far hasn't worked. To get change, you must change.





Patric King

From my experience, fame sucks. It puts you into a public category where your actions and work are completely not your own. You become a public commodity for everyone to tear apart and reassemble as they wish.

I was there for about ten minutes, and I hated it. Having Massimo Vignelli skewer my work in public made me incredibly paranoid. My exposure made my peers jealous. It cut me off from my friends because they wanted what I had, and actually ended a couple of friendships.

Fame doesn't put food on the table. It barely even gets you a better table at a restaurant. It doesn't improve your skills (in fact, it actually made me a worse designer because I was so preoccupied with my next public stunt). Some people can handle it, I couldn't. If you think you can, then be ready for it—it'll change you, and not always for the better.



James Victore

I need to do more work. I'm too young. Too green. Plus, I'd want it to have a larger scope than just *The James Victore Show*. I am just starting to get good. The world is opening up for me. I feel like a smoker who has just quit and can finally smell dinner. I am now just realizing the full potential of my work and I now want to wield it like a large club with nails in it. I want to personally disprove the inequality between money and creativity. I can't make a book now, I'm just now doing good work. The rest of the stuff I've made was just the beginning. There will be a book. **And it will be killer.**



Graham Wood

Designers are the most conservative group of people I've come across. Most of them couldn't organize a piss up in a brewery or pull a whore in a brothel. Their lack of interest and passion about film, music, painting, literature, Jesus! even the history of design (150 years? since the dawn of man? who cares!) has always totally fucking confused me.

What passes for design criticism/writing is, on the whole, about as useful as a very thin stream of piss. The second *First Things First* (like *Final Destination 2*) was pony not because it caused fear and trembling but because it was exactly the kind of bum mud I'd expect from a bunch of people who wouldn't take a step towards you if you were bleeding in the street. Safe, hidden behind words, names, lists of rights and wrongs. **This is not life.**

Design is a mucky raw thing that is alive and can fuck you and steal from you and leave you drugged and retching in the morning. So why do designers want to make an industry of it? With committees? Designers purporting to 'ideologically' stand against design by committee actually volunteering of their own free will to be on design association committees? **Fuck that.**



In the end it does my head in and makes me sad because when I meet these people I'd rather stick my head down a toilet. Luckily those moments are fewer and fewer because I live for my family and the people I work with and the people who come into all that and the work I and my friends make—and design really has very little to do with it. Take ideologies apart with your bare hands and throw them down on the ground and rip the living heart from their pigeon little chests.

Ideology. Thank God at least half the planet has spent as much of its time as possible (not that it's resulted in much) ignoring that particular wretched word. *Conscience.* What can you live with? What did you do at that moment, and that moment, and that moment? Always making the effort to be aware. Not treating everyone and everything as equal but treating things on their own terms, in their own circumstances. Make a cigarette ad but give the whole fee to cancer research. Find your own way, follow someone else's, but for fuck's sake whatever you do, find a way. The thing of it is that it is soft and a bit abstract and really about love in the end but that is the hardest (as in face punch hard) thing and if you don't believe that then you haven't lived yet. Do you make work? Good: Make more, make it say something, put it out and we can decide. This act is more powerful than any manifesto could ever be: Make work. Make work. **Don't waste time.**



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Paula Scher

Though I have changed the type on the Public Theater year by year since 1998, I have tried to maintain some kind of stylistic consistency other than the logo. What I have tended to do is experiment with different typefaces in Public Theater scale and style. Sometimes it works better than others. The *bad imitation of myself* comment gives me pause. I liked this poster when I did it, but don't think it was my best. I am only as good as my last job. And I am always trying to get better.

Thanks for noticing.



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Rudy VanderLans

Actually, I'm pretty sure that designers come in all kinds, despite the high number of black turtlenecks. But by the look of their work, and who they work for, I believe that the bulk of graphic designers are actually a rather conservative bunch who are quite happy maintaining the status quo. What surprises me is how outraged they become when somebody questions the status quo. This is what happened when *First Things First* was published. Why were graphic designers so up in arms about an ill-composed little tract if they are so confident that what they are doing is the right thing?

Perhaps they feel trapped?





E. Tage Larsen

The retooling of Modernism is a natural and nearly predictable reaction to the illegible typography that preceded it and a format that seemed to dovetail into the awkward meter of online design. It's not a lack of progress. It simply 'is.' That this is a vogue and a commodifiable expression of design presently shouldn't be the deciding factor of its quality.

I'm all for multiple voices in the design community. In fact, I think you'd be hard pressed to illustrate a time when you could pursue so many different styles at once. By choosing to pick on popular flavors in design practice, arguments like Mr. Keedy's and FitzGerald's aren't pursuing how to elevate design. Just because something exhibits minimalist tendencies doesn't make it bad design.

There should be discourse in the design community. However, the idea that academia would offer anything relevant I find highly suspect. The academic railroading of the fine art community in the last 15 years has produced the largest crop of useless, skill-less crap that I can possibly imagine. I'm not wont to suffer that in another guise. For instance, do Helfand and Drentell really need to bury a poorly formed idea under Hegel, Heidegger and a biologic model? What does that get you but garbage under the rubric of intelligentsia?



Bradley Gutting

Here we have a bunch of people [*Adbusters*] who've developed an ideology that they are so convinced is the absolute **best**, the **right** way. Well, I declare that grapes are superior to cherries! And hear me now: Pantone 303 is the best blue there is, 312 isn't cutting it anymore. Yes, it's **that** arbitrary, my friends. Is *Adbusters* concerned with "change," or are they simply more concerned with change on their terms? Not only that, they're a bunch of pussies, too—oh, you are offended? I'm sorry. I remember (rather remember **reading** about a day because it's so long gone now) when instigators of change didn't spend all their time grumbling and creating self-indulgent, whiny posters. I remember times when people just **did**. When there wasn't any sort of glory or mysticism or myth or magic about "protesting," you just fucking did it. *Adbusters* might revel in trashing Ralph Lauren billboards but the moment somebody trashes their **over designed** magazine they'll whine like the impotent little rich white suburban wusses they are.



Debbie Millman

Everything we do, everyday, has the impact to change. If we don't do that—even if we tell ourselves that *our clients won't let us*, we are just copping out. We can talk about making a difference, or we can make a difference. We can preach or we can practice. We can blame account managers, the client, the culture, society, our parents, our spouses, our dogs, whatever. If we do that, we are just avoiding the truth and appointing blame. We only need to look at ourselves and stop babbling. If we are not doing good, meaningful work, then maybe we don't have the talent or the balls or the desire. If we want to make a difference, we just need to reach within ourselves and try, if we can (if we have the talent and courage), to make a difference and actually do some good work.



Sam Potts

Just because I am a designer, I don't feel compelled to complain that people don't appreciate design or that they buy things that are badly designed. It sounds like we're saying, *Boo-hoo, why don't people have good taste like me?* No thanks. I'm bothered very little by bad, schlocky, corporate, banal, dark-side design (unless it's my own work, in which case I'm very bothered by it, of course).

I guess I feel that it's inevitable that there will be bad design, not only because of focus groups and decision-by-committee, but just because there can't be only design done by the best. There aren't enough of the best and many wouldn't deign to do things that need to be done. In that regard, large firms like Landor and Pentagram pull off some miracles by getting any good work made, and a lot of it is good.

A world designed by Karim Rashid, Chip Kidd, Stefan Sagmeister, Landor, Phaidon, Frog, etc. would be a kind of visual fascism. No thanks.





Drakkiez

I have no idea what's going on.

I happen to be the eBay *logo designer* that is being talked about here. To be truthful, I know the logos that I make are crappy. So far, I've sold about five or six of those logos through auctions. Three of them didn't even request a logo or anything, it is just easy money (although not a lot, still enough to buy a few cheap things on eBay). I have made about \$150 for a few hours of really trying to make the logos, that is fine with me.

I have no idea why some of you are getting so bothered by this.



Designers are Witty



- Felix Sockwell* › Someone has to shine turds like ups. Let it be a *big brand* firm.
- Darrel Austin* › A banana. Now **that** is good package design.
- Damien Newman* › I never thought designers were meant to know how to spell.
- Bradley Gutting* › Advertising in my mind has traditionally sucked major donkey gonads for the most part, but lately that seems to be changing.
- Rudy VanderLans* › “Whatever.” Talk about the battle cry of a generation. Apathy is not a form of criticism, you know.
- Kenneth FitzGerald* › As it stands, the charge that I'm subjective rests on nothing but someone else's personal opinion. One word for that is *irony*.
- Shawn Wolfe* › Age doesn't...er, scratch that...shouldn't have shit to do with shit, in my humble and fucking opinion.
- Rebecca Giménez* › Designer men are a bunch of dandies.
- Kevin Lo* › I hate David Carson for ripping off and commercializing the deconstructionist experiments of young designers in the '80s. I love David Carson for showing it to me.

Words of Praise—and Disdain

Sometimes Speak Up comes quite close to the type of reading that I feel is missing in graphic design. What often goes unquestioned is whether the work is beneficial for people, or the environment, or culture, or even graphic designers themselves.

RUDY VANDERLANS

Gosh—who has time for these discussions? Who cares? And, furthermore, who cares? Sheee-eeesh! In case you didn't notice, this field is not brain surgery—nor the cure to cancer or world hunger! I expect these kinds of pompous discourses from architects! Go do some volunteer work for goodness' sake!

ANONYMOUS

My extreme ignorance in graphic design history has been slowly worn away by the great discussions on this site. Six months ago, I wouldn't have known Peter Saville or Ed Fella from Peter Sellers or Ed Norton. Now, I nod along with everyone else when they come up. Finding this site ranks up there in terms of experiences. I've only realized this over time.

BEN SCHICKER

If you bother me again, I will submit your email as well as your site to Spam lists.

ANONYMOUS

This is a horrible place to show work. I will spread this word to as many designers as I can; even if five see my point I'll feel much better.

MAN344

The discourse definitely leans toward the more theoretical and academic aspects of design. Though it's often interesting to read, it's not terribly relevant to my professional life.

BRAM

THANK YOU

Kent Lew for creating the Whitman family
www.kentle.com

The Font Bureau for granting us use of Whitman
www.fontbureau.com

Kenneth FitzGerald for inspiring the title
www.odu.edu/al/kfitzgerald

We warmly thank all the people who have shared their ideas, experiences, knowledge as well as their time.

Speak Up would not endure without the continuous support of its authors and readers.

Thank you, again.

Something genuinely new is emerging here.

RICK POYNOR



www.underconsideration.com