

# PRINT

REDEFINING DESIGN 65.5 OCTOBER 2011

*BOYCOTTING IS THE NEW  
ADVERTISING.*

*THE MARKET HAS NEVER  
BEEN BETTER.*



# The Big Deorganization

by Metahaven

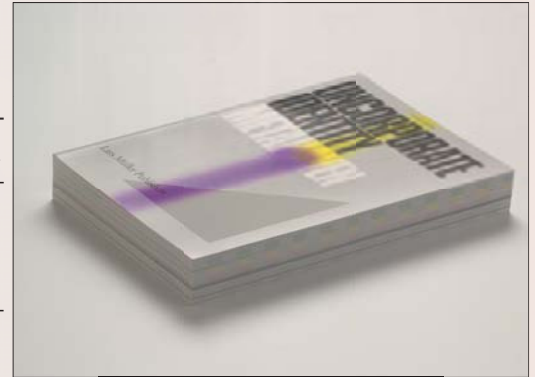
If corporate identity used to be the image-clad wall around an organization—a visual border between its members and its nonmembers—today there are plenty of ways in which holes can be poked into that wall. It is probably better to view identity as a membrane that is both transient and permeable. As the world deorganizes, there are fewer and fewer clear ways to set an organization apart from its surroundings, as our book *Uncorporate Identity*, published last year, has argued. This is not to say that every organization has become alike, or that organizations are losing their purpose. But membership in an organization has turned into an ambiguous concept.

One of the great achievements of HBO's seminal series *The Wire* was how it showed that distinct blocks of social power—the criminal underworld and the police, the trade unions, the school system, and the press—are in fact intimately connected ecosystems. As the artist and geographer Trevor Paglen has argued in his work on the U.S. military's "black projects," even the most secretive of organizations celebrate their members' birthdays in semipublic places like bars and restaurants. The spouses of MI5 employees hang out on Facebook too.

The increased awareness of their own permeability has led corporations and states to protect their secrets ever more desperately, which has in turn added to the power of whistleblowing; with the WikiLeaks revelations, it has moved to the center stage of geopolitics. Cyberconflict routinely involves stealing someone else's valuable data from behind the permeable membrane, and today's digital Robin Hoods, the cyberinsurgents of Anonymous and LulzSec, do just that, to the embarrassment of power.

In their desire for friends and followers, corporate brands will now gladly shelve a costly logo restyling over the risk of losing valuable "reputation"—as happened last year, when the clothing company Gap abandoned its planned rebranding, returning its Ultravox-esque logo of stretched capitals after outcry on Twitter. Such brands now prefer "dialogues" and "conversations" to the unilateral power of visual overhaul. Obviously, there is an increased fear of making mistakes now that the days of consumer-brand fetishism are through and the economic outlook leaves much to be desired for corporate capital.

Arguably the last remaining überfetishized brand is Apple, which holds more cash than the U.S. government. Other winners are the Taiwanese manufacturers of cheap smartphones sold as "BlockBerries" (which reportedly helped facilitate the Arab Spring), the fake Apple stores that have sprouted up in China, the companies that design and build cloud-data centers, and, indeed, the online social platforms monetizing the deorganization of the world. Ironically,



If corporate identity used to be the image-clad wall around an organization, today there are plenty of ways in which holes can be poked into that wall.

a world as chaotic and unpredictable as ours is overseen by a “cloud” of social software. The cloud, facilitating our ever-present access to online tools and networks, is a social and infra-structural standard provided by a corporation; it’s a focal point in the sense that we literally expect to convene in it, just as we might gather in the main concourse of New York’s Grand Central Station. In the cloud, our membership and participation are a central value resource for the corporation. We, in turn, tend to stay in it, for we might miss opportunities otherwise. We haven’t built our own cloud—yet. Even to publicize how we are against the cloud and its governance, we tend to depend on it.

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*Print’s* tagline is “redefining design.” For this issue, we moved to the fringes of the design world and cast a look at what is going on there that might inform a contemporary view on “identity.” Ryder Ripps, when we asked if he would be interested in being a part of this issue, responded (sic):

*“I find it sort of funny that you are approaching me for a design publication, my design sensibility is very much function over form,, I feel that the best design is honest, true to the tool/application and purpose.. I have friends who went to Yale for graphic design and I work with great designers at my job at Visionaire/V Magazines—I am familiar with that world, but also skeptical. Concerned with what facilitates interaction on a conceptual level, I have a lot of thoughts on the forms intended to be transparent/sans-culture found within social networks. This might make for a good story. I dont believe in good or bad design from an aesthetic point of view,, I think most design is terrible because its unnatural and forced,, this is the same reason I think most stand up comedy is bad,, anyone who thinks they are funny probably isn’t funny. I like design by people who would never think of what they do as design, yet they are shaping, setting the tone of everything,, this is very common the internet and extremely exciting, what I am most inspired by.. In a world driven by consumer culture, defaults are most honest,, exploiting them,, exploiting their flux in turn shows their spiritual function and purpose, which is what I am most interested in. That being said, I wouldnt want my work to be understood as graphic design in a magazine, without its contextual and conceptual baring. So lets think of something that shares this aspect.”*



Reference ID	Subject	Created	Revised	Classification	Type
1	Keppin Ribbons	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
2	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
3	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
4	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
5	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
6	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
7	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
8	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
9	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons
10	Keppin Ribbons (2005)	2005-01-01	2005-01-01	Keppin Ribbons	Keppin Ribbons



This should stand as a slightly provocative but mindful warning about the larger world’s perception of design as little more than an unnecessary appendix—a perception that design’s esteemed broadcasters and narrow-casters should perhaps exhibit much more concern for.

Is the world, now largely beyond corporate identity, similarly beyond design? Ripps’s love for the honesty of the default affirms social media’s obsession with standards; it makes seemingly trivial things like a button or a profile graphic today’s grand design. Also, these apparently authorless shapes are memes. The term “meme” was introduced by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins to describe a self-replicating “cultural gene” (and was also chosen for its rhyme with “cream”). The meme appears to be a broadly shared interest of new generations of artists and online activists. They are avid subscribers to its ability to propagate by imitation. And for them, the survival of the fittest can mean the survival of the political.

In another strand of visual production, Ryder Ripps works with the Sri Lanka-born singer M.I.A. Her songs present a connection between glam and politics—a glam that is more Bollywood than Gucci and a politics that is more Al Jazeera than CNN. We detect a similar energy in London’s Deterritorial Support Group (DSG), a self-styled think tank for 21st-century communism,

Pages from Metahaven, *Uncorporate Identity*, Lars Müller Publishers (2010).

Trevor Paglen, *Morning Commute (Gold Coast Terminal)*, Las Vegas, NV *Distance 1 mile, 6:26 a.m.* (2006).

WikiLeaks homepage, screenshot (2011).  
Cover of M.I.A.’s debut album, *Arular* (2005).

and responsible for, among others, the recent online wildfire claim that the Lacanian–Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek and the pop icon Lady Gaga were best friends. This meme, crafted by DSG, made its way into the *Los Angeles Times*, *Vogue Italia*, the *New York Post*, *Interview*, and elsewhere. DSG’s link between two distinct spheres—radical politics and pop—is as absurd as it is plausible; so, at least, thought the countless professional journalists who copied it. During a public debate with the WikiLeaks editor, Julian Assange, Žižek denied even knowing Gaga’s music—instead, he assured the audience, he listens to Schubert and Schumann. The Deteritorial Support Group is not a design group in the narrow sense, but its activities are relevant to the design field; this is a new kind of insurgent agency, using the free software of the cloud.

Amid a plethora of exciting material, Benjamin Bratton of the Center for Design and Geopolitics at the University of California, San Diego, puts these tendencies into perspective. Bratton argues that geopolitics is itself a design problem, and from this vantage point he makes sense of the possibilities of the global cloud. In our interview with him, Bratton notes that:

*“As I write these sentences in Google Docs and Gmail [...], my words are framed by advertisements. By parsing my words about ‘designing geopolitics,’ the algorithmic phylum has figured out what I might be interested in at this moment, and what goods and services might interest me. (In this case, according to AdSense, several companies that will ‘help you use Twitter to do business in China.’) This is a frightening aspect of social media: that the domain of private, interior human communication has already been absorbed by nanotargeted advertising. Anything I might write to you is made possible by the fact that my ideas might hold your attention long enough for you to notice an ad about something that my own words have already put you in mind of.”*

### IIII

This section of *Print* is, really, a status report of torrential change around a discipline—design—conventionally preoccupied with sameness and similarity. Maybe we are mistaken in our conviction that design and designers will ultimately benefit from uprooting their deeply held “stable” worldviews with new information that cannot be categorized in its routine slots. But maybe we aren’t. The term “graphic design” is itself less than a century old; it is too young for us to proclaim it beyond fundamental change. Uprooting is, in a way, its only real tradition. The arrival of the printing press disturbed the manual tradition of scriptural reproduction and ultimately made it possible to print cartoons, pulp fiction, and political pamphlets. The internet is equally disruptive to the culture of artifacts from which this magazine derived its name.

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“Nike Store” in Ramallah, Palestine (2010).

Advertisement for a knockoff smartphone, the “BlockBerry” (2009), using the image of President Obama.

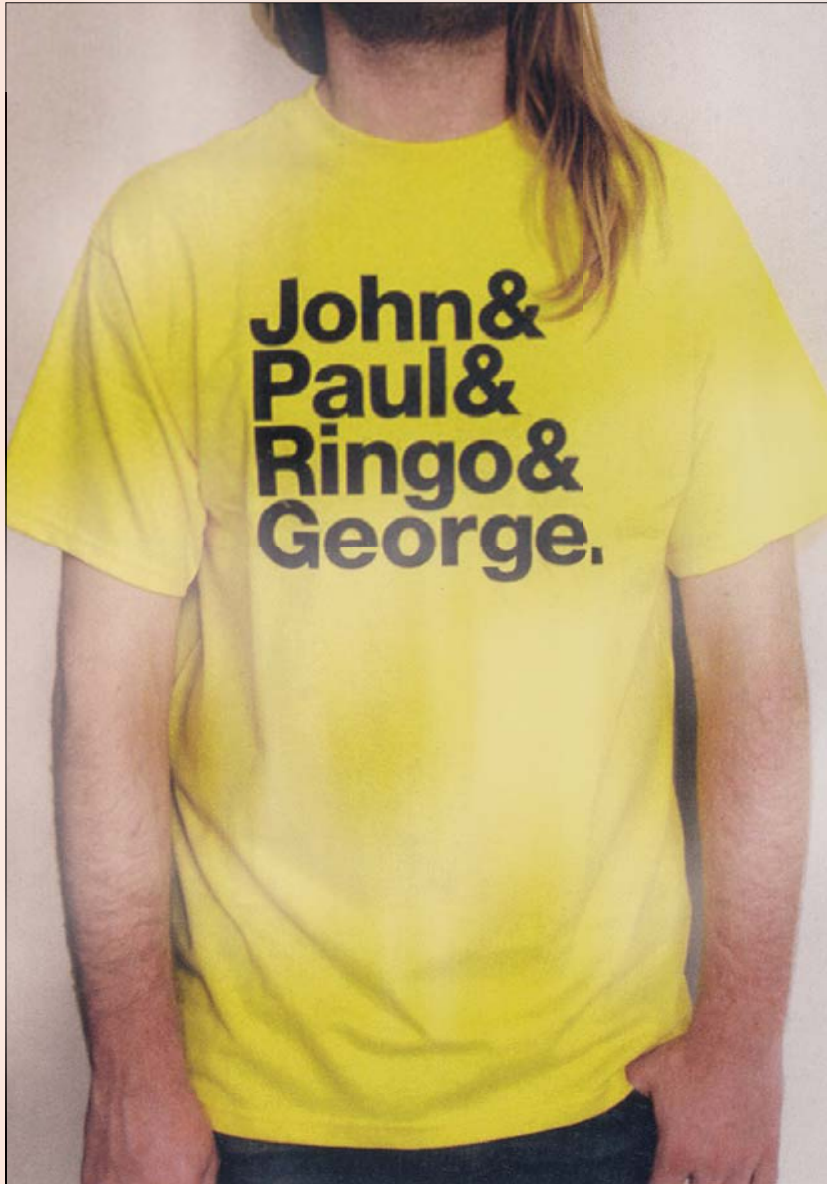
Slavoj Žižek denouncing the DSG–designed Lady Gaga rumor in a debate with Amy Goodman and Julian Assange, London (2011). Video still courtesy Democracy Now!

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# Autoreply: Modernism

A conversation with Experimental Jetset  
by Metahaven

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If you send an email to Experimental Jetset, the Amsterdam-based graphic design studio founded in 1997 and consisting of Marieke Stolk, Erwin Brinkers, and Danny van den Dungen, you will receive an immediate, automatic reply. In fact, that autoreply is a mini manifesto of more than 1,000 words. An excerpt:

*“As we write this, we are approaching the last few days of July. We are currently working on a couple of projects that will occupy all our time and attention—in order to fully concentrate on this, we decided to effectively close down our studio for the full month of August. During that time, we will be checking e-mail only sporadically—and we probably won’t be able to answer e-mails at all. We are very sorry about that. We will return to our usual studio routine in the beginning of September—we will try to answer your mails then. In the meantime, please find below a list with answers to the most common questions. We hope this will help you further.”*

While their heroes are modernist designers like Wim Crowel, they combine this affinity with a DIY punk spirit that they claim has always been part of modernism’s vocabulary. Experimental Jetset is one of the oldest “young” Dutch graphic design studios and by far the most consistent. The trio has worked on projects for Stedelijk Museum CS (SMCS), Purple Institute, Centre Pompidou, Le Cent Quatre (104), De Theatercompagnie, Musée d’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (CAPC), Bureau Europa (NAiM), and the Japanese T-shirt labels 2K/Gingham and Publik, among others. In 2007, a large selection of their work was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, and included in its permanent collection. In contrast with the anonymous technocracy and consultancy of the late-modernist fallout of Total Identity and others, Experimental Jetset, educated at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, has maintained a hands-on and personal approach. The following email conversation took place in the summer of 2011.

#### IIII Metahaven

We are keen on establishing a link between the postwar culture of graphic standardization that produced the Swiss International Style and the post-2000 culture of social networking and communication standards that seems to have replaced mass communication at large, with memes as self-replicating visual genes. We regard your whole approach as a proper meme, as you seem to have created a viable compression of certain modernist tropes that propagate into contemporary visual culture, comment on it, and demarcate a clear position. Your most successful meme seems to be the “&&&” shirts, which have, by imitation, multiplied their presence beyond control. Ultimately, there is a generosity and a significance to this that goes beyond the narrowly defined “graphic design” practice. We are also aware that you regard your visual culture as one governed by material objects. Nevertheless, we would propose that the way you treat these objects, or the way that “visual culture” treats them in turn, is not so much about immaterializing them into virtual objects floating on websites and desktops as it is about taking their essence and then teleporting this to all kinds of other destinations and purposes, much as in Lawrence Weiner’s famous dictum that “You can experience my work by someone telling you about it”—which is, again, nothing else than his version of a meme.

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Experimental Jetset,  
“John & Paul & Ringo & George”  
(2001), T-shirt for 2K/Gingham,  
Japan.

The Swiss International style emerged out of postwar Europe. Univers promoted its own “universal” applicability; Helvetica promoted Switzerland. Helvetica was also the first typeface to be honored with a feature film (which, of course, featured you). You have often noted that despite this tradition of Swiss neutrality, to you there is a more subversive side to modernism. In his article “Graphics Incognito,” Mark Owens establishes a few links between modernism, West Coast punk rock, and principles of anonymity and pseudonymity inherent to underground culture. Could you elaborate on why for you modernism is subversive, and what that subversion consists of?

Then there has been a consistent urge to treat modernism as a style sheet, where it can be separated from its substance—like a Helvetica-styled “identity” can perfectly essentialize a luxury beauty product, an airline, a mediocre sushi-bar franchise, and countless other examples. No doubt part of the “success” of modernism is its lightness, the fact that it can from some perspective be seen as a legitimizing of the entity that it is pasted on. Nevertheless, your treatment of modernism is more concerned with its substance and therefore must at some point have (perhaps violently) confronted the sushi-bar version of the contemporary Helvetica fetish. So what is your position and point of view on modernism’s style versus its substance?

At the time when the most prominent modernist visual tropes came into existence, visual communication meant that an institution or organization broadcasted its information and identity to a constituency of receivers. It seems that today, organizations increasingly seek to redefine the relationship to their audience to the detriment of this sender-receiver duality. Corporate ads now lead viewers to a company’s Facebook profile, soliciting “likes” and gathering visible social capital. There is also an important sense of continuity, in that both the Swiss International Style and Facebook’s sterility provide a powerful means of standardization. The modernist standard had been overriding regional, “vernacular” peculiarities, and Facebook in turn eliminates materiality and realness in the prefab virtual bathroom. Finally, could you give your views on modernism as a standard? How does Experimental Jetset, which maintains an active Facebook profile with many subscribers, look at the continuum and/or break in the use of standards from print to internet and back?

#### IIII Experimental Jetset

We would first like to say something about our views on modernism as a standard. And before we can do that, we’d like to point out the obvious: the fact that we don’t necessarily see the so-called “International Style” as synonymous with modernism. In our view, the International Style constitutes only a very small part of modernism—and more important, we don’t believe this small part to be exemplary of modernism as a whole.

However, since we grew up in an era in which we experienced a particular Dutch version of the International Style firsthand, we do believe that this very indirect version of the IS is now part of our cultural vocabulary, and as such it became part of our natural graphic language—in a genuinely authentic way, rather than in a contrived, studied manner. Having said that, we like to admit that we never have been particularly inspired by the International Style itself. We have never studied those coffee-table books or grid guides filled with Swiss masters. Our point of reference has always been the particular way in which the International Style has been filtered into Dutch culture. And that is ultimately what interests us most: the way in which a phenomenon such as the International Style has been applied within very different cultural contexts. There are Dutch versions, Brazilian versions, Italian versions, Japanese versions, “working-class” versions, “middle-class” versions, and so on. Just to give a simple example, we would argue that the way in which Crouwel employed the International Style is typical for a Dutch context, while the way in which Vignelli used that same language shows the sensibilities of an Italian working within a New York context. In other words, it’s all a matter of accents.

It is this “bastardized” version of the International Style that interests us the most (not that the International Style was ever “pure” in the first place). The more removed it becomes from the source (both in place and time), and the more regional and vernacular peculiarities it absorbs, the more interesting it gets. We really love that whole notion of second-, third-, fourth-, or even fifth-generation versions of the International Style.

In other words, what interests us much more than the standard are the variations on that standard. And if “identity” is the way in which a particular object is similar to its own category (which is roughly how Adorno defines identity), then what we are

personally interested in is exactly the “non-identity” that exists between the standard and its variation.

A text that we always believed to encapsulate this notion of non-identity really well is Leon Trotsky’s *The ABC of Materialist Dialectics* (1939), in which he argues that a letter A is never equal to another letter A—it is not even equal to itself.

When we think of the word “standard,” we always think of the way the word is used in the field of music: a blues standard, a jazz standard, a rock standard. What is interesting about standards is the fact that they can be used by every musician as a platform for a certain voice, a certain aesthetic. It is exactly the standard’s inherent “sameness” that becomes a stage for differences. What’s also fascinating about standards is that they belong to everybody; they have an egalitarian, public dimension. We were once at a pop quiz where one of the assignments consisted of a playlist of 20 different versions of “Hey Joe”—the question was to guess the names of the interpreters. We came to fully realize the role of the standard in differentiating between different voices, between different dialects. In other circumstances, it would be impossible to compare Jimi Hendrix and Mink DeVille. We never think in the categories of style and substance. We always preferred the notion of “language”; after all, a language is a system that incorporates both style and substance, both form and content. The idea of a language presupposes a sort of embedded ideology, the weight of history, an inherent narrative dimension—all these notions seem to be missing from the word “style.” We see International “Style” more as a language than a style.

The way a standard relates to its variations is obviously very similar to the way in which a language relates to its accents, its dialects, its different pronunciations, its different spellings, jargons, pidgin versions, and the like. In the same way that there is always a critical distance between the standard and its variation, a dialect can be seen as a way to challenge the cultural hegemony of the standard language (while simultaneously affirming it).

When we brought up the subject of modernism’s subversiveness in the *Helvetica* documentary, we were specifically thinking about modernism as a dialectical model defined by “deconstructive” tendencies on one side and “constructive” tendencies on the other side. On the one side, there are movements like Dada and surrealism; on the other side, there are movements such as Bauhaus and Constructivism.



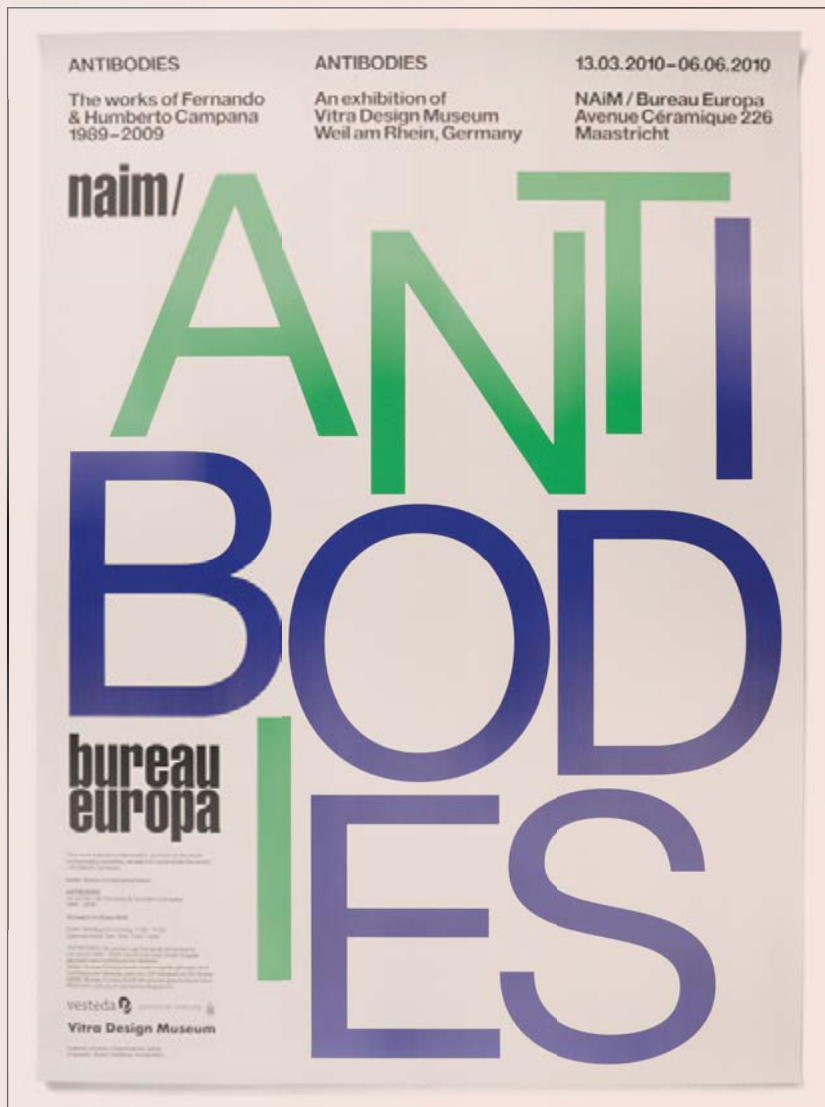
“We are interested in the ‘non-identity’ that exists between the standard and its variation.”

What makes modernism so interesting, so multifaceted, and ultimately so paradoxical is the fact that between these two poles, all different combinations and variations (of destruction and construction) are possible. (In fact, sometimes these opposite poles can be active within one single person—think of Theo van Doesburg's role in De Stijl and his interest in Dada.)

We often see punk as a sort of “scale model” of modernism. After all, punk is also a phenomenon defined by deconstructive tendencies on one side (No Future, Destroy) and constructive tendencies on the other (the whole DIY culture). What we were trying to explain in the *Helvetica* documentary is that we regard modernism in a similar way. However, if you would ask us now to elaborate on the subversiveness of modernism, we would probably start by defining it. For us, modernism has everything to do with the notion of breaking spells, and the ambition to go beyond the chains of illusion. When we say “beyond the chains of illusion,” that is a specific reference to Erich Fromm's book of the same title, in which he tries to synthesize the languages of Marx and Freud. And in our view, it is exactly in the push and pull between Marx and Freud where modernism can be located. To quote Marx, “The demand to give up illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.” This connects all modernist manifestations. From the most fragmentary surrealist collage to the most grid-based Constructivist composition, and everything in between: They all aim, each in their own way, to go beyond the chains of illusion. In that sense, we believe that every manifestation of modernism is inherently subversive. We believe that even in its most harsh and rigid form, modernism still

offers a way out. Even in those rare cases when modernism puts on an unbearable authoritarian face, it still gives the viewer the possibility to completely disagree. It provides a person something to chew on, to work with, to bounce off of. It always demands an active position. Therefore, we even believe that the more corporate outgrowths of late modernism possess a subversive potential.

The idea of Helvetica as a “sushi-bar aesthetic” already seems a few years behind us—in fact, when the documentary came out, the whole idea of Helvetica as a sort of light, lifestyle-based language seemed already on the decline. When you look at that whole retail-and-lifestyle sphere now (fashion chains, for example), you see an aesthetic that is much closer to what some people might perceive as postmodernist: stretched letters, neoclassical centered typography, vernacular irony, moodboardlike imagery. And we're pretty sure that in a couple of years' time, it will look completely different again. But hasn't that always been the case? There are always brief periods of time during which one person's authentic voice seems indistinguishable from another person's fad. The only way to distinguish between the two is simply through time. After awhile, when fashions and trends move on, it's easy to see who remains true to his/her personal language and who was just in it for more opportunistic reasons. So the “violent confrontation” you talk about is much more like a duration test. Moreover, it's not as if we have anything to prove, or anything to lose, or anything to win. We just know that our interest in late modernism is completely authentic and that it is grounded in the cultural landscape in which we grew up. It's not a mask that we can put on and off whenever we feel like it—it is our actual face.



### IIII Metahaven

Eh, Facebook?

### IIII Experimental Jetset

It is tempting to see the internet as the ultimate fulfillment of the ideals of modernism—after all, the world wide web seems the perfect embodiment of Paul Otlet's “Mundaneum.” Also, when you look at it from a strictly formalist viewpoint, the whole visual landscape of the internet is made up of exactly those elements that most people seem to associate with International Style: templates, grids, sans-serif type, the specific use of “empty” space, flush-left ragged-right columns. Even the use of all-lowercase letters in text messaging can be seen as stylistically linked to International Style. But still—we would say there is one fundamental, crucial difference between the print culture of modernism and the digital culture of the internet. In our view, print is still a more public medium. If a poster is hanging in the street, it is seen by every passerby in more or less the same way. Sure, the interpretation of the poster will differ from person to person, but by and large, the poster itself will appear in roughly the same way to every viewer, regardless of his/her class, race, gender, age, personal preferences, etc.

This is different on the internet, where websites and pages conform themselves instantly to cater to the personal tastes and preferences of the individual viewer. Google search results change from person to person, the advertisements that clutter on-line profiles are specifically targeted toward the viewer, etc., etc. This makes the online environment ultimately an individualistic, isolated experience, despite the promise of “being connected.” It also makes most online activity a somewhat unadventurous, undialectical affair, as you only will be confronted with stimuli that are algorithmically curated for you, based on what large corporations (such as Facebook and Google) expect you to want to see. Whereas, within the context of the street, you will be confronted with information that is not specifically intended for you—posters you might not immediately understand, slogans you might disagree with (or not), kiosks carrying newspapers that are not necessarily tailored toward your specific lifestyle, book stalls displaying secondhand books expressing conflicting opinions. In our view, it is this notion of print culture within the urban environment that offers the most dialectical, and therefore most modernist, experience. So it's exactly that idea that we try to explore most in our work. And, as paradoxical as it may sound, it is this theme of modernist print culture that is also one of the main subjects of our online presence—whether it is our actual website or the Facebook group you mentioned.

Experimental Jetset, “The ABC of Materialist Dialectics” poster (2006). Designed for Plexifilm as a fundraiser for Gary Hustwit's *Helvetica* documentary. A2-sized, letterpress print.

Experimental Jetset, “Two or Three Things I Know About Provo” poster (2011), W139, Amsterdam.

Experimental Jetset, “Antibodies” poster (2010). Designed for NAIM/Bureau Europa. Screenprint, A0-sized.





Ryder Ripps,  
Dump.fm visual-chat program  
(2009), screenshot, August 2011.

Picture from Dump.fm, August  
2011.

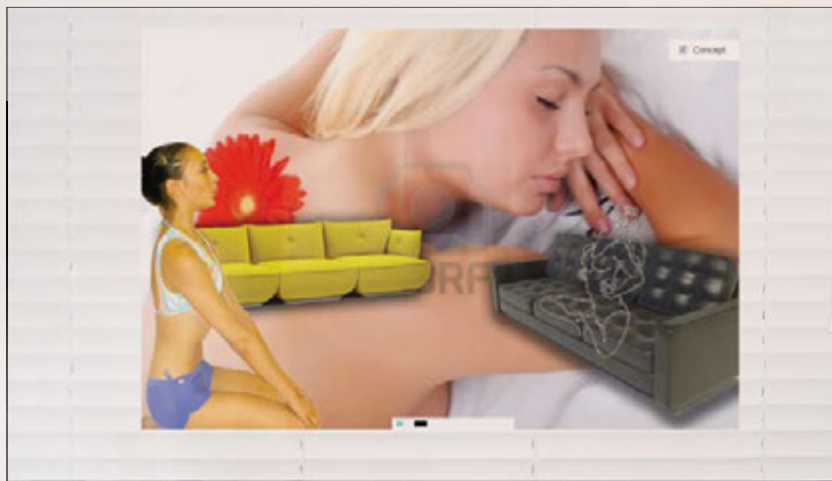
Ryder Ripps,  
screenshots from a world-map  
interface; website in progress for  
M.I.A. (2011).

as they usually appear. Monster responded to the magazine's request in an email: "We will not grant permission to do this.") The phone ad, part of a largely unintelligible campaign, shows a garden hose between the letters "UN'D"; the Monster one has a guy doing a flip on his bike. "My interest in those ads comes from attraction to pubescent male aggression as a thing to attain," Ripps tells me. He says that the Monster Energy ad has a highly emotional pull. Together, they are the visual equivalent of an adolescent male grunt—and presumably appealing to Ripps because they likely would have rankled the average *Print* reader.

But Ripps indulges in their absurd excess. In the easily parodied commercial world, nothing is enough: "You can't do a kick flip that's too high," he says. Ripps engages that aesthetic, and it makes its way into his own work. Log onto Facefacebook.com—which he created with Jacob Broms Engblom, one of many websites Ripps has made for the designer-turned-rapper M.I.A.,—and you'll see five million floating status bars over your face. The site takes over users' webcams and projects their images, and those of other visitors, alongside repeated graphics. Even the GIF background—a sparkling rose mirrored, Narcissus-like, in water—is tiled. It's a video-chat-room-cum-teenager-torture-chamber; you can't actually talk to anyone else on the site.

Like other websites Ripps has designed for M.I.A., few original graphics were used. "It's very much like sampling," Ripps says, though he doesn't draw a clear link between the websites and her music. He does believe, however, that "authentic" identity branding relies on ideas, not original material. As such, websites like Vikileekx ([www.miauk.com/vickileekx](http://www.miauk.com/vickileekx))—which is embedded with a free, streaming album of the same name—try to find new ways to express her interests. It's a pun on WikiLeaks, of course, but the material being "leaked" is a commercial product. The album, which comes with text trumpeting a free internet and open-source creativity, is paired with a Google Street View interface. A gold flash-drive icon is positioned at different locations on the page, each of which links to the music. Clicking the song "FCC HQ" brings you to the actual

bollards outside of the agency's bland D.C. office building; select the gold flash drive, and a hypnotic cloud of downloading status icons spills onto the screen, while what looks like a computer battery somersaults through the air as though on a trampoline. (This last image reappears from song to song.) The



*Sprites Gallery, 2011*



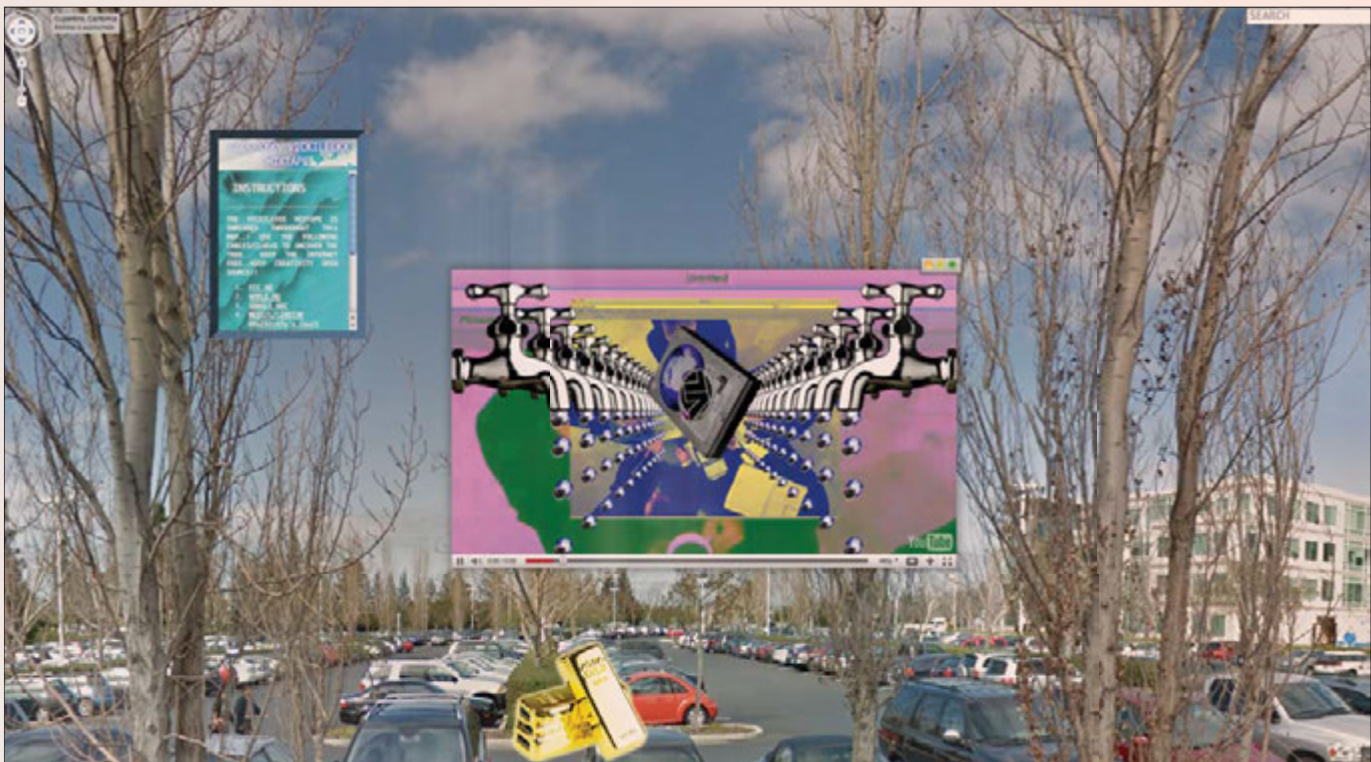
*Old Tools, 2011*

Vikileekx is a pun on WikiLeaks, of course, but the material being "leaked" is a commercial product.

idiosyncratically titled “CONSulate G3Ner4l of SRILANKA” and “NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL” both use scroll bars to make a wide letter M, while the battery splits the symbol to spell the musician’s name. It’s playful stuff

and generous, too, as all 12 tracks are free to anyone who lands on the site.

“Web design and branding is about developing contextual relationships with human beings,” Ripps says, “and being a good artist is



Ryder Ripps, *Internet Therapy* (2010). “I view this piece more as a document of a time in my life than an art piece. It is the result of an hour-long session I had with my 68-year-old therapist on 11/3/10. It was

recorded on my iPhone without his knowledge. Compelled by the ways people talk about the internet and how time spent on it changes our social world, I bring you *Internet Therapy*.”

Ryder Ripps, *Sprites Gallery*, ongoing.

Ryder Ripps, *Old Tools* (2011), Gateway laptop, paint brush, acrylic paint, tools.

Ryder Ripps, Vickileekx website for M.I.A. using Google Street View (2011). Every location is embedded with a music video.

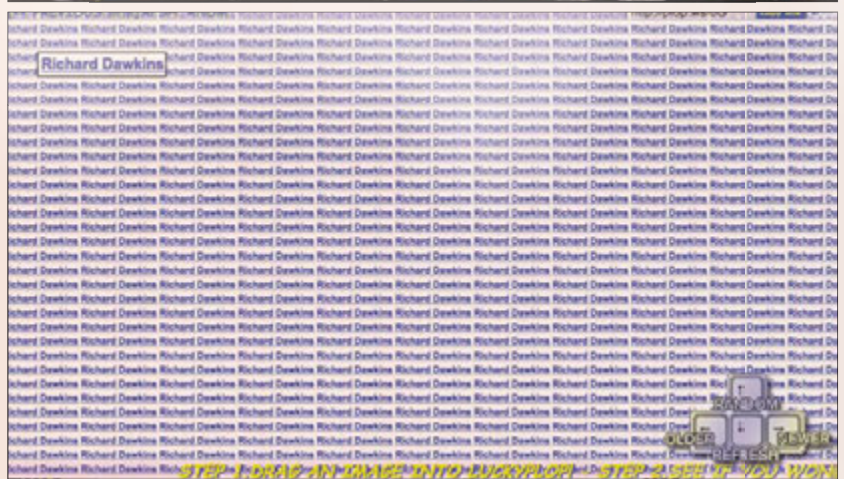
about having a lot of friends.” It’s an idea seen not just in his M.I.A. websites but in his larger work as well. Most of us like to believe, on the contrary, that the quality of art is paramount to its evaluation; Ripps is simply interested in exposing people to it. “Art lives within society, and society by definition is social,” he says. “So if you’re not making an impact on many people, you’re not going to be a known artist. There’s the folk model, the Henry Dargers of the world who get discovered after the fact, but to me that’s really bleak and not glamorous at all.”

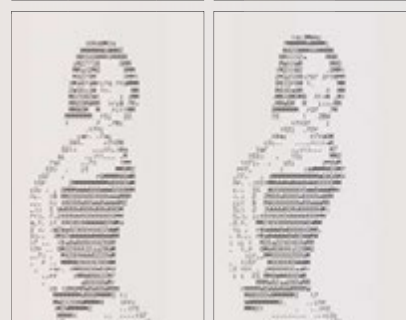
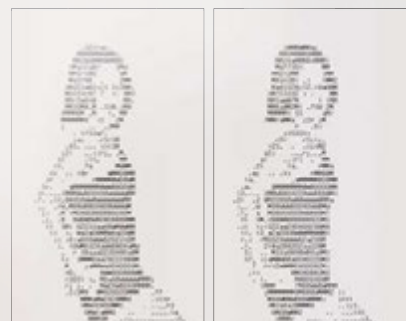
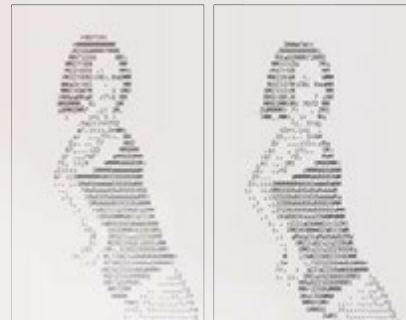
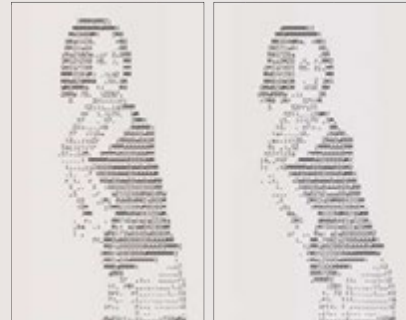
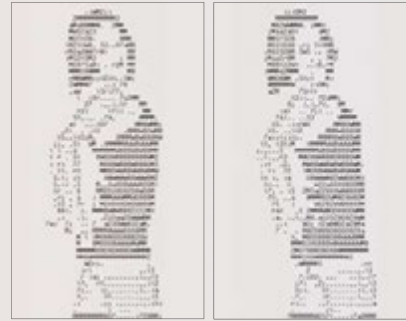
This might be why Ripps finds his new position at *Visionaire* so appealing. The upscale fashion magazine’s new website will fail if no one uses it; Ripps’s job is to make sure they do. *Visionaire* is creating an enormous archive of hand-scanned images from fashion magazines that is designed to appeal to Tumblr users. It uses a search function that privileges image uniqueness, as opposed to Google’s algorithms, which weight the quantity of incoming links. The site will also feature a “VLIKE” button, developed in collaboration with Engblom, that measures how much you like an item based on how long you hold down the mouse, adding depth to the popular but limited function. “It’s not about strength in numbers; it’s about strength in passion,” Ripps says, seemingly unaware that this quality also reflects his values. A graded “like” button will give users greater expressive control over their sharing. Ripps is banking on that being very popular. People instinctively want to express their enthusiasm in more ways than just text. I myself am evidence of this. After I discussed the site with Ripps, we began preliminary talks on creating a video series in which I would critique fashion shows and art exhibitions. I intend to exude judgment.

Ripps and I share this trait, and there’s very little we talked about that he didn’t meet with opinion. On the subject of the art world, and internet art in particular, Ripps lamented the minimalist aesthetic that’s popular today. “That online journal Triple Canopy was trying to tell me about some artist who made some screensaver that’s, like, a block of color that floats across your screen,” Ripps says, “and I was, like, ‘Have you guys fucking seen *Harry Potter*?’” He wasn’t dissing the publication, which he later explained he liked, but rather

expressing his frustration that so much of contemporary popular culture seems off-limits to contemporary art. “I had different kinds of magic-wand effects coming at my face, and you’re trying to come at me with some primary-color block floating on the screen?”

Of course, from my perspective, if the art and design crowd doesn’t get into *Harry Potter* enough to steal from it (and as Ripps mentions, it’s unrealistic to expect artists to produce such high-budget projects themselves), the loss isn’t so great; 3-D movies give me a headache. That’s an honest reaction, though, one I expect Ripps might like, provided it was hurled at him.





Ryder Ripps, *Monster Energy*  
for *PSI* (2011).

Ryder Ripps, ASCII animation  
for M.I.A. (2011).

# Design and Geopolitics: The Alterglobal, Soft Power, and Disaster Capitalism

An interview with Benjamin Bratton  
by Metahaven

Benjamin Bratton is a design thinker who combines theory, fiction, and design. He leads the Center for Design and Geopolitics, a California-based think tank. We asked him about territorial branding and image-making in times of turmoil, and about the many forces that supersede the national sphere: software, social media, and cloud computing, as well as their political implications. We also discussed Google and reason, China and Facebook, Apple and Disney, and the future of citizenship and politics. This is what design can also be about.

## IIII Metahaven

What does “designing geopolitics” mean?

## IIII Benjamin Bratton

“Designing geopolitics” has several connotations, obviously. I am deeply invested in some of these, and not at all in others. For D:GP, the Center for Design and Geopolitics, which I direct at Calit2 and the University of California, San Diego, it means more than just designing on a geopolitical scale, but rather that the geopolitical domain is itself the design problem.

What do I mean? The geopolitical architectures that we have inherited from the Treaty of Westphalia, the Mountbatten Plan, Bretton Woods, and the like were, first of all, “design” decisions and were based on particular political, discursive, even topological understandings of the world. To recognize them as such, it becomes obvious that the “alterglobalization” we imagine for the years to come must take different forms and formats than those through which we currently govern. In time, those forms may be based upon rather different relations to whatever becomes of things like sovereignty, nation, narrativity, geography, polity. These are the material design problems of the next century.

Planetary-scale computation has both deformed and distorted traditionally modern geometries of jurisdiction (think of the Google/China conflict as one example). It is also producing new territories of jurisdiction in its own image. Unusual and as-yet-unnamed networked patterns of informational and urban subjectivity are already shifting the geopolitical landscape. The Arab Spring made this obvious to even the most numb observer. For D:GP, design is as much about understanding and “scaling up” these patterns as it is about conceiving new things ex nihilo.

Ultimately, I am interested—through a convergence of theory, fiction, and design—in how the “post-Anthropocene” era can be more deliberately prototyped and how a genuine, robust cosmopolitan intelligence can enforce itself against its many enemies, both internal and external.

It’s interesting. In our discussions about D:GP, McKenzie Wark has offered some very helpful remarks to me challenging the word/idea “political” as the crux of our initiative, some of which I very much agree with. Reza Negarastani has done similarly about the premise/prefix “geo-.” I myself am perhaps most dubious of “design,” if only because the word, the idea, and the program have been so thoroughly abused by the marketing and decoration industries.

## IIII Metahaven

What forces influence and contribute to a state’s global image? Who makes the design decisions?

## IIII Benjamin Bratton

This question could be taken in at least two ways. The state’s “image” is a product of the civilizational history of states and of nations and also is a function of how states are today constructed as brands. The deeper history animates many interesting debates: from the primordial origins of archaic states and their relation to agriculture and theological geography, Plato’s formulas as renewed by Alain Badiou, Kant’s architectures and their role in contemporary transnational and cosmopolitan models, Eric Hobsbawm and the invention of national tradition, and Chantal Mouffe and Gopal Balakrishnan’s Marxian takes on Carl Schmitt, to more liberal projects, such as Bruno Latour’s, which would expand the domain of formal constitutions. Perhaps most important are the multifaceted postcolonial and various non-Western histories of nations and states, which, while partially indecipherable to the parochial visions of transatlantic political theory, may be more directly influential on the global, designable future of the “state.”

On the other hand (or perhaps right in line with the above) the state seems to be steering further into simulacrum: a malleable brand defined by a two-letter internet suffix, a captured tax base, a nativist bloc, and an Olympic team. At the same time, especially in the BRIC countries, the state is a refortified machine of privatized pub-

lic control. (Informally, we could say that just because the state becomes a brand, it doesn’t become any less violent, and vice versa: just as the brand becomes a state—Google, Walmart, FIFA, etc.—it doesn’t necessarily inherit all the same characteristics of the Hegelian model. Sometimes it really does, if only as another order of simulation; in other ways, not at all. Tim O’Reilly talks about “government as a platform.” By opening up the state’s capacity as an information gathering and structuring machine to its user-citizens, it can become a more powerful machine for economic and cultural circulation. In turn, then, software platforms become governments, and end-user agreements become de facto constitutions. There is a wonderful piece to be written comparing Government 2.0 to the Kojévian End of History.)

We don’t know where any of this leads. I can only presume that things which appear to have one effect today may prove to have quite the opposite in the long run. While the martial privatization of the public sphere may end up turning states into entities much more like multinational corporations, this could have surprising effects. Perhaps this would radically undermine jus soli citizenship, such that to switch, add, or subtract layers of one’s citizenship would be no harder (or easier) than moving from Windows to Mac, or switching from Protestantism to Catholicism (to extend Umberto Eco’s analogy). In turn, that may force another set of demands on corporate space, challenging the sovereignty of brands in a way that would be unthinkable today.

“California, Inc.” might offer strong ecological regulation and platforms, good climate, multicultural vibrancy, and excellent bandwidth, but at a premium price. Disney might enter into an agreement with Apple, making Florida even more of a megawalled garden. It’s not hard to imagine neoprovincial territories, legal and translegal enclaves, and exclaves defined by some weird mix of legacy Westphalian jurisdictions, software platforms, and branded theology taking up a lot of the Earth’s crust! Most of these I would hate, but that is probably the point.

The D:GP project presumes that it’s time for robust political science fiction, both to index our options and to make them available to various design programs. It isn’t about defining ideal or dystopian spaces but gaming what is emergent.

“Software platforms become governments, and end-user agreements become de facto constitutions.”

# PRINT

REDEFINING DESIGN 65.5 OCTOBER 2011

I WANT A NON-IDENTITY.



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE  
DEFAULT AFTER WE'VE  
DISCUSSED THE REBRANDING.





## Social Media and the U.S.

### IIIII Metahaven

Facebook, Twitter, Google, Apple, Obama: Is this the post-Bush American identity? See, for example, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's address on "internet freedom." Isn't that a case in point of how social media are actually deployed as nation-branding tools?

### IIIII Benjamin Bratton

I live in the U.S. and so can only comment on shifts in perception of the U.S. by the world as a whole from that limited, skewed perspective. The idea that Facebook and Google have replaced Halliburton and McDonald's in the minds of Europeans, and that this shift is analogous and parallel to Obama's replacement of Bush, seems quite plausible to me, especially in light of the social-media thematics of David Cameron's Big Society, the "Twitter revolution" discourse around the Arab Spring, etc. (One question is how much of these global technologies will remain available and ownable by unofficial actors in the ways we have seen recently. It may be that the heralded Cairo triangulation of Facebook/Twitter/YouTube can never happen again. Like May '68, it may have been a one-time deal. In terms of both network openness and a critical mass of users, perhaps the seam in the system was exploited for a unique fleeting moment that is never more possible. Or perhaps this is the new system. The new normal is upon us. If so, then that would include the Obama brand as well. It's either a fleeting instant of false hope or the new normal, or both.)

Of course, Secretary Clinton did not mention the U.S. in her address as a source of problems with freedom on the internet. This cannot be expected of the State Department, but that is precisely why the "American internet" should be eclipsed by many other global and local internets constituting a more plural ecology of territories. Speaking again as someone who lives in the U.S., I think that things like the "Internet Kill Switch" are surely dangerous, but there are more systematic problems. We know these: our retrograde digital intellectual-property statutes, a dangerous over-privatization of bandwidth that should have had as serious political consequences here as it is having now in India, and, in general, a cannibalistic exploitation of the digital commons as a matter of course.

That said, "internet freedom" is clearly too simple a phrase to account for that needed plurality. Whatever purpose it may serve is largely meaningless without a sophisticated understanding of how one kind of freedom results in another kind of domination and vice versa. Everything we learned from Adorno, Horkheimer, even Fromm and Arendt, about the dialectic of "positive" and "negative" freedom is appli-

cable here. In other words, it's simply not possible for Clinton to conceive, let alone address as a matter of policy, how the privatization of the common intellect is antithetical to robust digital cosmopolitanism. This is not only because she is a spokesperson for a particular political economy but because the real story is happening elsewhere. Nevertheless, your point is well taken. I know from my time in Russia that Google is synonymous with U.S. power in many circles. To talk about it in a positive light, one might as well be pouring Coca-Cola into the vodka. It is widely seen as a force of cognitive imperialism, not in the nuanced way that Geert Lovink or Matteo Pasquelli examine the soft power of search but in the dusty terms of a bipolar Cold War of two superpowers and their competing megamachines: Sputnik vs. Apollo. (It probably doesn't help to assuage that perception that the new director of Google Ideas is Jared Cohen, whose tenure at the State Department is associated, however inaccurately, with a supposed conspiratorial manipulation of social-media platforms to orchestrate events in the Arab Spring. Evgeny Morozov's take on this is an important correction.)

The key point is this: Facebook, Apple, and Google all represent, embody, and are enacting different geopolitical futures. The architecture of their brands and their software platforms are not only representative of geopolitical interests; they are geopolitics. The more difficult question for these very global technologies is less how they extend U.S. foreign policy than how they constitute three different and incomplete options for what comes next, both as actual privately held companies and, as Eco pointed out years before in "The Holy War: Mac Vs. DOS," different political-theological programs.

### IIIII Metahaven

To what extent do these brands/standards assert U.S. power or extend cultural and political influence abroad?

### IIIII Benjamin Bratton

Allow me to speculate a bit improvisationally on what each of them might mean as an imminent geopolitical form in its own right. It goes without saying that they should be challenged by a range of other standards that are more open and more available to multiple cultural interests.

Facebook, it seems to me, explicitly and emphatically does not wish to foster open information infrastructures, and may prove in time to be critically hostile to the very idea. As for user freedom and the larger picture of digital civil society, the default mind-set of Facebook's core leadership is not so totally unlike that of the Chinese central government in certain respects. Both are interested in enforcing control and profit over the domain they exercise as a monopoly, and each looks at the other-state versus internet—as an ambiguous but indispensable variable in its own schemes. Facebook (perhaps like China itself) is underestimated, at the moment at least, as a technology-infrastructure player. It understands the cloud in ways that Apple can't, and it has its pick of whatever scraps will be left of Microsoft (Office, Skype, Azure, etc.). Facebook's goal is a private internet. Not Facebook online, but Facebook as

the line. Here, too, China's total policy is broadly analogous.

Apple has taken the mantle from Disney in its expertise over closed-system experience design and operates, by comparison to Facebook or China, much more with carrot than stick. Apple bases its market-sector dominance in enforcing a total-design seamlessness into which individual consumers can effectively invest their most utopian desires. All utopias are closed systems, and perhaps vice versa. In a future of nation-size gated communities, that utopian desire (yes, in Fredric Jameson's sense) may lead Apple well out of consumer electronics as we conventionally understand it, and into the wider envelopes of everyday life. Peter Sloterdijk's landscape of "spheres" is Apple's long-term horizon and program.

Google believes itself to have a much more cosmopolitan and reason-driven mission. This week, it bid against Apple and Microsoft for a series of patents from Nortel, with sums representing sometimes obscure mathematical strings. For example, they bid \$3.14159 billion, or pi multiplied by a billion, for the bundle. They had bid numbers that were Brun's constant and the Meissel-Mertens constant, which relate to prime numbers. This I take as an emphatic symbolic statement by Google that ultimately the immutable, ecumenical, and universal laws of mathematics, which are by their nature uninterested in the human folly of political hierarchies, will win out over the hysterical mere "numbers" of the financial market. There are asymmetric echoes of Badiou in this, though he would choke on the suggestion. Google recently dumped PowerMeter but still has its license to sell energy; and I think, in the longer term, Google Energy will be a key player in the retail and wholesaling of renewables and the management of both consumer and municipality-facing smart grids. It sees the pairing of bits and electrons as part of its vocation in ways that other companies cannot: Google Space. Google AI. Google Caliphate.

Twitter is too new and too one-dimensional to compare to the others' more grandiose geopolitical potentials. It may be better compared to a critical insect species in a larger ecology, moving memes from place to place, like bees spread pollen among flowers. It never builds more than simple clusters on its own, but without it, other more complex architectures would decay. It's hard to say. For some time I've argued (directly to Twitter, in fact) that it mustn't overlook the nonhuman user base, and that its potential as a universal platform for the internet of things may prove an equally important function as human-human threads. Twitter could be very important in the deeply addressable space of the "IPv6 universe." Who knows? It's purely speculation on my part. However, right now I see Twitter operating more in terms of epidemiology than geopolitics, though obviously one involves the other.

### IIIII Metahaven

What about when these networks are used to distribute information and content that may shift the geopolitical balance—for instance, the images of abuses at Abu Ghraib; the video of a U.S. Apache helicopter killing civilians in Iraq, leaked by WikiLeaks;

"Strangely, many people think that WikiLeaks is an American company."

or the HBGary emails obtained by Anonymouse?

#### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Strangely, many people think that WikiLeaks is an American company. Many also think that it has something to do with Wikipedia and that, in turn, Wikipedia is implicated with “marines getting killed in Afghanistan.” It’s easy to overestimate the reflexive macro-systemic comprehension of actors within any complex order. Bear in mind that isolationism and exceptionalism are still very powerful recipes of U.S. political culture. The very idea that Google, for example, could be a global platform for a decentralized, postnational democracy of energy, information, knowledge, etc.—however dubious that idea may or may not be—is taken by some to necessitate conspiratorial suspicion. Glenn Beck has referred to Google’s supposed involvement in Egypt as a sign of its sympathies with “global jihad.” Ridiculous, sure, but not to about one-third of the U.S. electorate.

#### IIII Metahaven

Why does China censor websites like Facebook and Google, but then allows in-state surrogate sites to flourish?

#### IIII Benjamin Bratton

And flourish they do. Obviously, the institutional space of the internet, and its relation to the state, are very different in China than in the U.S. or Europe. Consider what “net neutrality” might mean in Beijing. In the U.S., protecting the functional independence of the internet as a civic space means protecting the implied constitutional position of each receiver of information as equally a producer. All those spoken to, equally have voice. This is clearly distorted when, as in *Citizens United vs. FCC*, a corporation that wields power closer to that of a state than of a person is granted the protections afforded to the individual. In the U.S., net neutrality means that the public intervenes through the state on its own behalf to ensure greater access and a more robust information ecology. To use these terms again, it acts on behalf of long-term “positive” freedom at the expense of short term “negative” freedom.

It could be argued that in China a kind of inversion of this is at work, with the state having more fully absorbed the functions of corporate capital, including a more explicit agenda for social media as a mechanism of governance. In China, net neutrality is a very different issue because according to its institutional logic the internet, like the body politic itself, is something to be crafted and curated by the state as a component content of the unified nation.

If you read the opinion pages of Chinese newspapers after every confrontation with Google, the reasoning is not circumpect or inconsistent, though perhaps disingenuous. The phrase “information imperialism” is deployed frequently. As your readers are aware, I am sure, China already has more internet users than any other country. The Chinese internet is “emergent” only in relation to what it itself will become. The central state hopes to sculpt Chinese society through that infrastructure as it does through all others at its disposal, and in doing so, the elite can realize enormous financial profit that would not be possible if American first-movers were to capture Chinese market share. Anyone reading this in ten years may be surprised to learn that in 2011 hardly any English speakers were using Renren, Baidu, or Weibo yet. These sites may start off as clones, but they will evolve into global platforms in competition with Facebook, Google, and Twitter, not only in the service of geopolitical interests but as

an imminent material form and expression of geopolitical architectures that are as powerful as the sponsoring states from which they came. They will surely be much harder to control once they are successful global brands.



#### Iceland

##### IIII Metahaven

After Iceland’s economy crashed in 2008, the country established the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative and rebranded itself as a “transparency haven,” touting press freedom and protection as its global brand as well as an economic model. Is Iceland uniquely qualified to pull something like this off? Do you think it’s working? How does the notion of an island-based zone of legal exception tie in with the networked nature of today’s global communications? Isn’t a haven that can be easily pinpointed especially vulnerable to outside aggression?

##### IIII Benjamin Bratton

WikiLeaks underscores both the upside (potential) and downside (risk) for national initiatives like Iceland’s. To use the privileges of a sovereign state in this way is a very interesting geopolitical strategy, but perhaps not as unusual as it may appear at first read. Iceland has certain advantages, but it’s hard to say which might prove most important. Its history as an in-between state during the Cold War (e.g., the Fischer-Spassky chess match), as well as its cultural and linguistic independence, means that it is not entangled in the same kinds of ethnic and military alliances that might complicate an initiative of generalized sovereign exception for information economies as it might for other states. Its physical location in the near-remote of Europe makes direct connection and commerce feasible, it has deep cold caverns for data centers, and as an island it has a geometrically unambiguous jurisdiction. The later is an advantage over Switzerland, which shares some of the same ambitions.

Nauru is a classic case of an island nation using the privileges of sovereignty in ways that other states would consider illegal. The little island’s guano had been exploited for a century by other states under the dubious rights of the colonial flag, and once independent, Nauru became a hub of money laundering, sham passports, and tax havens. Nauru’s schemes were dependent on international telecommunications infrastructure, but perhaps not as much as Iceland’s project is a direct function of what planetary-scale cyberinfrastructure makes possible. (The Bank of Iceland’s internet banking was, as the British will remind us, exemplary of the risks of transnational deregulation of intrastate banking. Losses related to Icesave were hundreds of billions of pounds.)

Fredric Jameson and others have written at length about the relationship between islands and utopian spaces. Both are sites where total design is possible because they are closed systems. It’s interesting then that Iceland uses its island status to enable a more indiscriminate and ungoverned circulation of valuable information through its national body. Iceland can be a site of informational transparency and promiscuity because it has a discrete and distinct geography.



#### Greece

##### IIII Metahaven

The current debt crisis and austerity plan in Greece have a grim outlook. Does its state of emergency present a novel situation in terms of design and geopolitics?

##### IIII Benjamin Bratton

I am hesitant to make claims or prognostications about Greece because I don’t think we really know the full extent of the situation yet. It’s quite possible that the financial rot goes even deeper than we know, not just in Athens but in Brussels and Berlin as well. It’s easy to say now that Greece probably never should have joined the European Union in the first place, and this “conclusion” suits both left and right perspectives, but it sidesteps the question of how it was possible for the European Central Bank not to know how fragile and fraudulent the situation really was and is. It’s much worse that it didn’t know. Of course, the economic violence of the current solution, where generations of young Greeks watch their country sold on eBay to the very financial industry in London whose systemic incompetence diagrammed the calamity in the first place, is shocking and painful. I don’t need to repeat the obvious points (for example, that the lack of enforcement of the tax code in Greece, along with the empty accounts that follow, is a criminal example of private profit and public risk/loss).

So, to answer your question: yes, in that Greece is now the poster child to the left for disaster capitalism and to the right for disaster socialism. The ECB, the IMF, the NBA—you name it, they will all have a seat at the auction. Perhaps the refinancing of the debt fails, the ECB or the bond market decides to cut Greece loose. And in that case, it’s uncharted territory, and anything is possible, including the wholesale nationalization of Greek cities, monies, historical possessions, land, time, language, or—we don’t know what, something genuinely new. No one can fail to note the possibility that “democracy” might be reinvented in Athens. Novel situation? Not yet; possibly soon.

##### IIII Metahaven

Is an austerity package a design strategy? Who is effectively ruling the Greek people? The citizens via their democratically elected politicians; or investors, shareholders, and rating agencies via the stock market, the EU, and the IMF?

##### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Certainly it is, but that is not an evaluation of its merits. The methodological shift to “design by subtraction” away from the high-modern “design by addition into tabula rasa” is important for the post-Anthropocene era. When the planet is full—and it is always full—then subtraction is the other half of the technical economy. In the case of the austerity package, it is painfully clear that the body politic is being dismembered for spare parts. This is a design strategy, yes, but like war is design strategy.

##### IIII Metahaven

If Greece sells off its national assets—from mining rights to airports—would this privatize “Greekness”?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

It would. But what does that mean? If these things have exchange value, then why can't they be "rented" instead of sold outright? You recall the campaigns in recent years trying to wield international trademark protection for the names and brand of certain foods and drinks associated with particular regions. In the U.S., for example, you cannot sell champagne that is not grown in the Champagne region of France and officially certified. The same is true with certain Italian ham, French mustards, Russian vodkas, as so forth. I wonder if there isn't a way for the rich semiotic commonwealth of Greece, from Plato to olive oil, to be held in some entrepreneurial national trust, a sovereign-wealth fund of a new sort, which over time would leverage the exchange value of these assets against the national debt in such a way that the Greeks would profit from the speculative investment, which is what the outright sale of assets is as well. The irony that this rent would be capitalized in London should not pass unremarked upon.



## Bahrain

### IIII Metahaven

It was reported that Bahrain hired an American PR agency, Potomac Square Group, prior to brutally suppressing popular uprisings. Can a state use PR to manage an image crisis in the same way Lindsay Lohan would?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Lindsay Lohan would not manage the crisis well at all! While this sort of Machiavellian "Council of Dissimulation" is ancient, the example you cite points to the incredible power of advertising as a social force, one which goes even beyond what the Situationists identified as the Society of the Spectacle. In the U.S., the public-relations industry moved into this space as a technique for managing emergencies: Bhopal, Three Mile Island. The origin of this contemporary form of "crisis communications" as a service is generally thought to be the 1982 recall of Tylenol pain medication in response to tampering. The client lists of Burston-Marsteller and Edelman are a who's who of the world's most powerful and deeply capitalized enterprises, including sovereign states. If they recognize themselves as brands and understand that their power is dependent upon maintaining a degree of public trust, then it is not surprising that they would source the production and management of public perception to a professional expert agency. There is much that is disturbing about the pervasiveness of branding and advertising as predominant discursive economies, and that pervasiveness is only becoming more deeply ingrained into everyday life.

As I write these sentences in Google Docs and Gmail in response to your questions, my words are framed by advertise-

ments. By parsing my words about "designing geopolitics," the algorithmic phylum has figured out what I might be interested in at this moment, and what goods and services might interest me. (In this case, according to AdSense, several companies that will "help you use Twitter to do business in China.") This is a frightening aspect of social media (and both search and email are social media now): that the domain of private, interior human communication has already been absorbed by nanotargeted advertising. Anything I might write to you is made possible by the fact that my ideas might hold your attention long enough for you to notice an ad about something that my own words have already put you in mind of.

Our information technologies are becoming more intelligent as we use them, and click by click, search by search, we train them about who we are and what we know. It's a useful exercise to look at one's search history at the end of the year—the important and banal searches, the upstanding and the dodgy—and imagine who your search engine thinks you are. Lacan could only dream of it!

Perhaps soon the cutting edge of neuroscience will be funded by the big holding companies, Omnicom, Interpublic, WPP, Publicis, Dentsu. In this kind of environment, how can Bahrain not hire an American PR agency? When the emergency is permanent, the techniques of crisis are the infrastructure over which interests compete.

### IIII Metahaven

How might something like a conference to "set the agenda for a national dialogue," with over 300 participants dealing with political, social, economic, and human rights, shift Bahrain's image? (One is being held as we speak.) What do you make of the Bahrain National Safety Council sentencing eight dissidents to life in prison within the same two-week period?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Imagining the event you describe, I think of Albrecht Dürer's woodcut "The Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I," a political cosmology rendered in section. You know, I just finished rereading one of my favorite books of political philosophy, the play *The Balcony*, by Jean Genet. It's all about the transvestism at the heart of any structure of political representation: the law, the revolution, the moral order, or of the one true challenge to that order.

I don't know enough about this particular forum in Bahrain to offer any specific critique regarding its goals, who is and isn't involved, or what paths to transformation it can contain or curtail. But even if it is a "theatrical" event, that does not mean that it is without political substance. The substance of power is transvestite, and its proscenium is a factory of consensus. Now, there is more than one kind of consensus: that which is doxic and so deeply habituated that it cannot even be addressed as such, and also that which is agreed to in bad faith, like the terms of a truce, and also that which is informed by a Foucauldian process, where the protocol of an event becomes over time the architecture of the political itself (such as how "left wing" and "right wing" shifted from a parliamentary seating plan into the shape of the

ideological spectrum).

There is consensus that is implicit and explicit, latent and manifest, and the transvestism of power depends upon the state's management of these economies. Bahrain, I imagine, is hoping to physically stage a diagram of the structures of power it proposes to perform going forward, which, if people perform in place, becomes itself the consensus. Slavoj Žižek has built his oeuvre on the dissection of these necessary hypocrisies.

### IIII Metahaven

Facebook, Twitter, or Google+?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Google+ is too new to say. So far, so good. I can imagine a version of Google+ that would be much better than what we have now, but that is only my whiteboard dream. They haven't asked me for my input. Twitter will be very useful for nonhuman actors communicating to human users and, likewise, other nonhumans. Facebook has made huge gains in cloud architecture and, well beyond any direct social play, will be a dominant technology company in the years to come. It is also the most politically dangerous of the big American players. I am writing something now about its hyperlibertarian early funder, Peter Thiel, and his tutelage under René Girard. Very strange.

### IIII Metahaven

Something you'd like to disclose in the name of transparency?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

I saw Slavoj Žižek and Lady Gaga leaving Dominique Strauss-Kahn's hotel room the night of the supposed incident.

### IIII Metahaven

Dream leak?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Not sure, but it is in Chinese.

### IIII Metahaven

First order as newly appointed king of Bahrain?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

Merge with Iceland.

### IIII Metahaven

Last best lulz?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

"Prisencolinensinainciusol" by Adriano Celentano. <http://youtu.be/Wz04IBZqfPE>

### IIII Metahaven

The next neologism?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

More interface features turning into verbs of intimacy; e.g., overheard this morning: "Circle me on that" (meaning add me to your Google+ circle on that topic).

### IIII Metahaven

Top three power players in design geopolitics?

### IIII Benjamin Bratton

LAMP stack, Walmart, Al Jazeera, Android, Hu Jintao, IPv6, Eurovision, Lula—too hard. Too many options.

"There is much that is disturbing about the pervasiveness of branding and advertising as predominant discursive economies."

# Cloud Communism

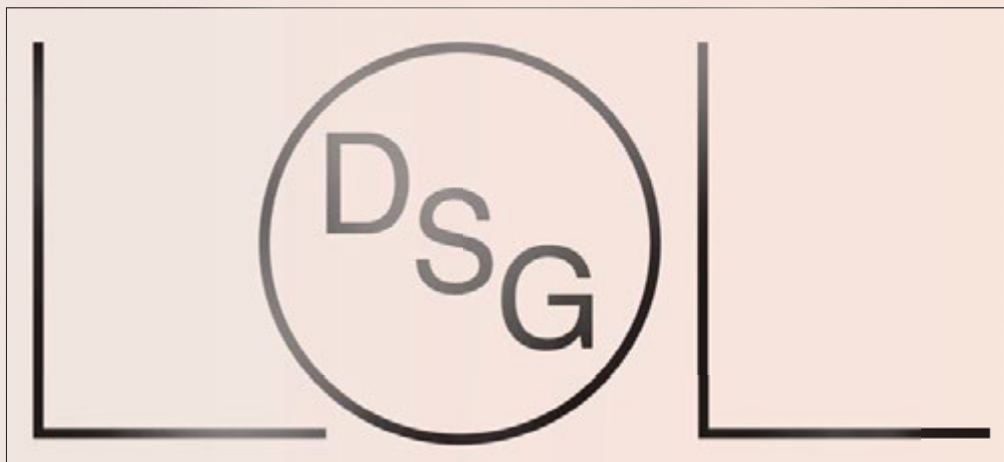
A conversation with Deterritorial Support Group  
by Metahaven



Mark Zuckerberg wants people who use Facebook to register and operate under their real names in order to increase “transparency” and “accountability.” Deterritorial Support Group, or DSG, does not comply with that directive. Although the group maintains a Facebook profile, the names of its members are not publicly known. We do know, however, that DSG is based in London and advertises itself as ultraleftist. The group makes playful, humorous, and intellectually penetrating use of the internet and pop culture. DSG belongs to an emerging archipelago of activist artists and writers, including prolific authors such as Mark Fisher (*Capitalist Realism*) and Owen Hatherley (*Militant Modernism*). In “Twenty Reasons Why It’s Kicking Off in Cyberspace,” DSG writes: *“Make no mistake—this is not a minor struggle between state nerds and rogue geeks—this is the battlefield of the 21st Century, with the terms and conditions of war being configured before our very eyes. Given the significant economic disruption online activism and hacking can cause, and the power online tools have to agitate, plan and execute IRL activism, the current increase in tensions between hackers and the capital/state partnership is every bit as significant as the continuing developments of the Arab Spring, with which the online activist movements are inextricably linked.”*


Two of DSG’s major projects to date have been the birth of a meme and the debunking of a fraud. On the first occasion, DSG launched an online rumor that the Lacanian–Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek and the celebrity pop singer Lady Gaga had developed a friendship. “Proof” was given in a blog post titled “ŽIŽEK/GAGA: Communism Knows No Monster,” in which Žižek allegedly wrote:

*“But what of my good friend Lady Gaga’s theoretical contributions? Certainly, there is a certain performance of theory in her costumes, videos and even (some of) her music. Nina Power has already noted that the infamous ‘meat’ costume could be seen in reference, indeed, a performance of, Carol J. Adams’s The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist–Vegetarian*



Deterritorial Support Group,  
“We Will Fight We Will Kiss—  
London Rome Cairo Tunis”  
(2011)

Deterritorial Support Group,  
DSG LOL sign (2011)



Critical Theory, a book that notes the consistent linking in the oppressive imaginary of the patriarchy of the female body and meat, of animality and the feminine. Equally, her moral support for the cause of gay rights in The States has been well documented—in an underrated piece Dan Hancox traced the spidery pathways between her work, WikiLeaks, Bradley Manning and the end of the ‘don’t ask don’t tell.’ Gaga’s work as a cultural phenomena has generated its own theory. But what of her actual theoretical project?”

On the second occasion, DSG began tracing and analyzing a supposed interview with the Italian leftist philosopher Antonio Negri, conducted by the celebrated journalist Johann Hari and published by *The Independent* in 2004. DSG noted that while the purpose of the interview seemed to have been to slant Negri, the “quotes” that Negri purportedly said in an encounter with the journalist in fact came directly from his books. This was widely publicized, and many other similar incidents were discovered in pieces by Hari, exposing his work as a highbrow, liberal variation of tabloid journalism. We asked DSG three questions.

#### IIII Metahaven

Slavoj Žižek + Lady Gaga?

#### IIII DSG

ŽIŽEK/GAGA made us laugh, that’s all. It was a chance to experiment with how we can utilize other media outlets to help spread certain ideas; we took a Facebook joke being spread around parts of the British student movement, moved content around, tried to see how far we could manipulate the path of a meme. It seems to sum up our mode of operation well. We work on a model that sits somewhere between an affinity group and a think tank—descriptions of our organization as a “political blog” or “anarchist collective” miss the point; class struggle is the imperative, not maintaining a constant media presence.

Using multiple fields of communication and modes of transmission, our proposals, speculations, and invective can find a thousand ways to engage with the push and pull of everyday political struggle. So we have a fluctuating group of contributors, working on different shared strands rather than toward a unified goal. We wouldn’t classify ourselves as a blog node with attached social-media feeds, but rather we utilize those as tools for dissemination. We engage in scenario planning, speculative research, street actions, and lectures; we pick things up as we go along. We push out forced memes from a network of online identities; we brief journalists, we manipulate news cycles, we troll. This is part of 21st-century communist practice.

#### IIII Metahaven

Antonio Negri + Johann Hari?

#### IIII DSG

So perhaps you can say we’re working in a new political situation which is just revealing its nature to us—a European generation who does not frame our experience as “post-socialist” but “pre-communist,” with little in the way of sympathy to traditional (now-defunct) structures of working-class power, such as trade unions or the welfare state. DSG was formed explicitly within the context of the European anti-austerity struggles. The sharp end of that struggle has recognized and internalized the completely new landscape in which we operate, initiated by the Nixon Shock and end of the Marshall Plan in 1971, and the subsequent victory of neoliberal economics in its battle with organized labor.

The challenge to this form of capitalist realism—the “third way” of Blairism, Schroederism, Clintonism; the conflict-averse middle ground of liberalism—is currently finding political form, and lacking political content; but the move away from the mediation of struggle and toward autonomous forms of organizing seems vital. It’s impossible to overstress the fragility of the European social fabric during the latest phase of restructuring of capital as welfare states are torn down; millions live in poverty of precariousness, with traditional power structures of parliaments,

“Design is vaporous but it has remarkable effects.  
Like chlorine!”

police, and the press losing credibility at an incredible rate and the very European project itself on the edge of collapse with the failure of the euro. We do not intend to sit back and play the passive liberal observers while capital restructures all that surrounds us. Circumstances force us to take sides, and the edges of the tolerated “political sphere” are barriers, not limits.



### IIII Metahaven

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_?

### IIII DSG

Like we said, the rapidly changing political-economic environment in Europe forces us to take sides. The design-form is an important part of what we do, and we find it useful because of its history as a mediator between the individual/private and the collective/public, and its present role as a key player in the structuring of reality. Design is vaporous but it has remarkable effects. Like chlorine!

No doubt, there'll be designers reading this who don't see this power reflected in their daily work life—and this is precisely our point. With the advent of the post-Fordist, neoliberal form of capitalism, design has become too critical to be entrusted to designers; and the general trend across the board for the past few decades has been worsening work conditions, less autonomy, and generalized proletarianization of industries once considered desirable or bourgeois. As proletarians, designers have immense collective power that is necessarily diffused within capital. Occasionally, though, we see some amazing trolling—a subliminal “goatse” hidden in a recent Audi advert was a particular favorite, a brand-narrative war in the making. Postindustrial sabotage has immense potential when we consider the similar roots of the labor movement. Design produces coherent visual environments that make certain modes of thought possible: this is how we see design contributing to the present struggle.

For designers dissatisfied with the present conditions, the discourse around design is stagnant. Why are design institutions still wheeling out Ken Garland and Milton Glaser every time we want to talk about our collective conscience? If we make “critical design,” what is it criticizing? And of what relevance is an ethical appeal of selective client-rejection and humane capitalist social relations when most of us can't get paid work in the first place? We all know professional institutions such as AIGA and D&AD exist for a conception of the

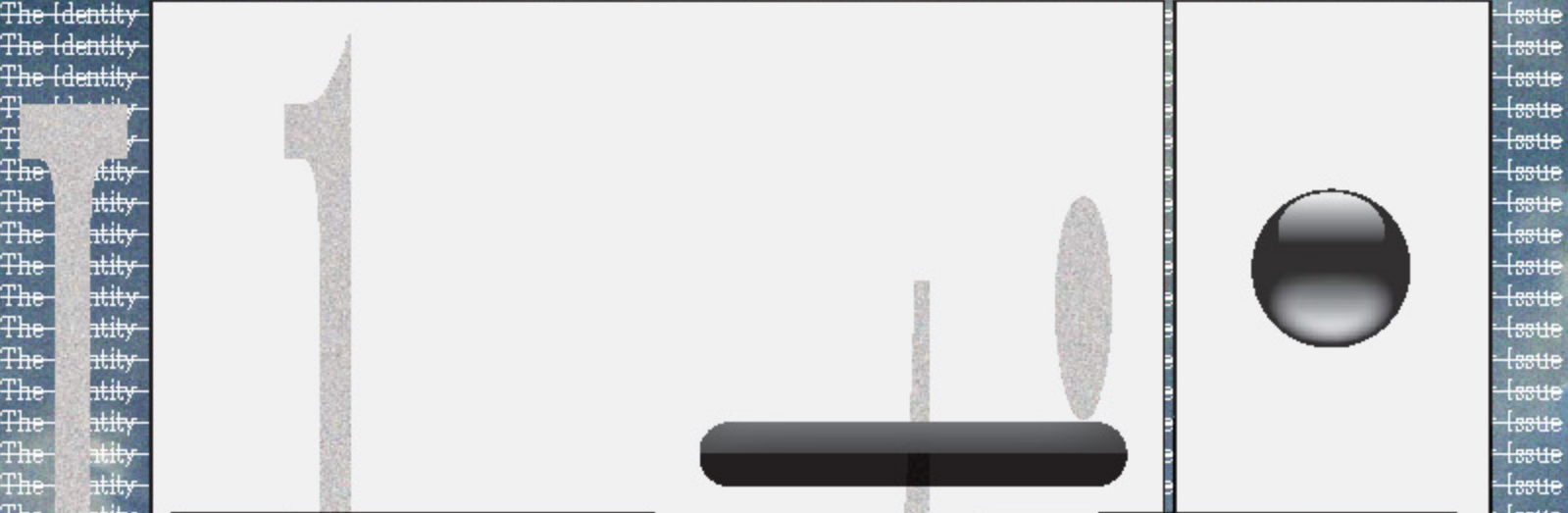


designer-subject as a free agent, in a position of autonomy in relation to clients and coworkers, and with full control over the direction and content of a given job: a conception which is at best rooted in select circumstances and at worst in pure fantasy. We suspect this discourse of ethics and selective refusal of work will, in the face of austerity, be replaced with TOTAL REFUSAL.

The struggle against austerity certainly has historical precedents and similarities, but the majority of commentators have misinterpreted this strange situation borne from a crisis with no obvious discursive opposition. We hope this state of affairs lasts for as long as possible—an uncoded opposition based upon the most radical gestures of refusal. One by one, across Europe, capitalist states are slipping into confusion; when the state finally looks to its citizens, they find no loyalty, no pride, just a contempt for the old world and \_\_\_\_\_.

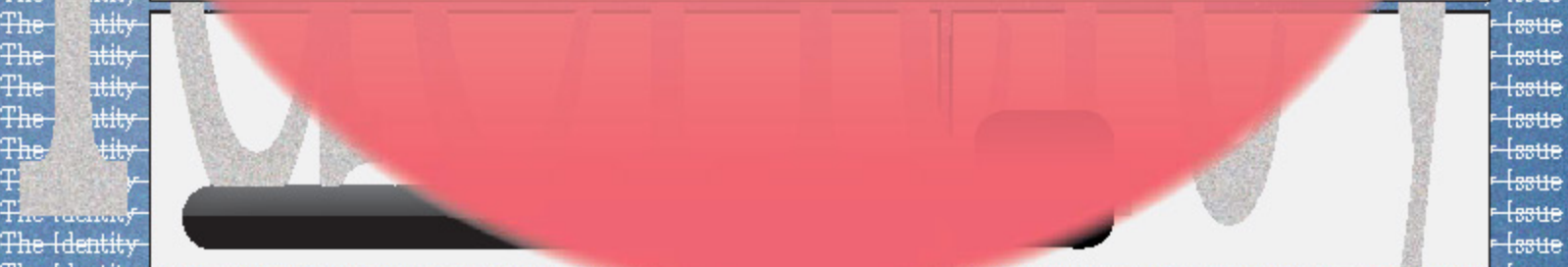
“Marxist Muse Befriends Gaga,”  
New York Post screenshot  
(2011)

“Gaga/Žižek: The Odd Couple,”  
Vogue Italia screenshot (2011)



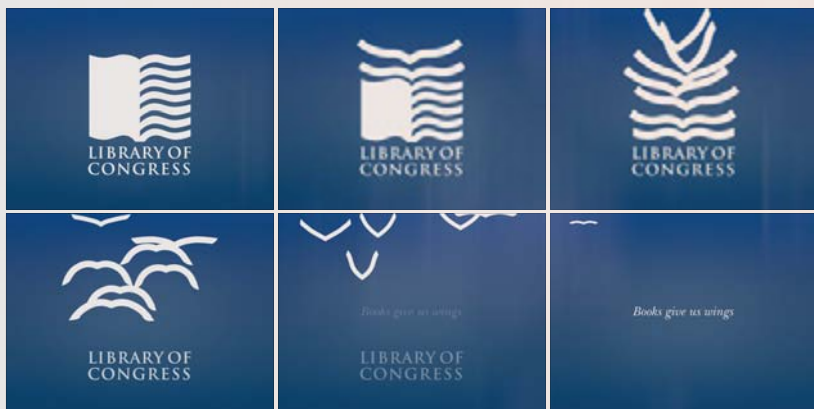
*I FEEL INSPIRED BY THE ARAB SPRING.*

*IN THIS MARKET, IT IS UP TO THE PROVIDER OF SERVICES TO ENSURE DUE DILIGENCE WITH RESPECT TO CORPORATE GOVERNANCE.*



# Marks Men

An interview with Chermayeff & Geismar  
by Aaron Kenedi



This fall *Print* will release its first book, *Identify*, which looks back at the last half century of work by Chermayeff & Geismar, the design studio behind many of the world's most recognizable trademarks: Chase Bank, the Library of Congress, NBC, National Geographic, PBS, Showtime, and many others. Established in 1957, the firm helped pioneer the modern movement of idea-driven graphic design, and its projects span every discipline, including visual identities, exhibitions, print and motion graphics, and art in architecture.

In the spirit of the Identity issue, we talked to the firm's partners, Ivan Chermayeff, Tom Geismar, and Sagi Haviv, about swooshes (never!), whether Paul Rand shares responsibility for Enron (no), and who is really the boss (none of them).

**IIII Aaron Kenedi**

After being in business for 55 years, why did you decide to write a book on identity design now?

**IIII Sagi Haviv**

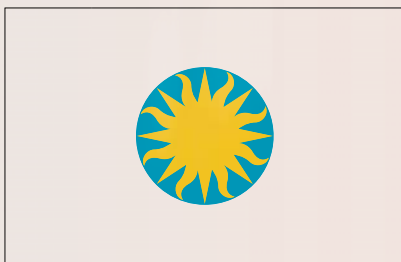
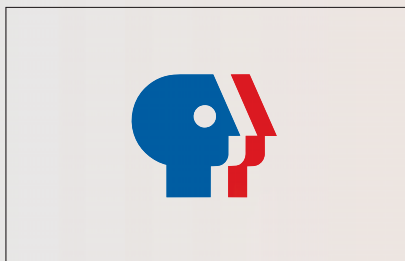
There is not much written about identity design from the standpoint of practitioners. We felt that through the stories of how these enduring trademarks came to be, people could learn a lot about the topic.

**IIII Tom Geismar**

For the first time, to try to explain some of the issues and the thinking that led us to develop the wide range of marks we've designed over the years.

**IIII Aaron Kenedi**

What makes a memorable identity?



Chermayeff & Geismar, identity for the Library of Congress (2008).

Chermayeff & Geismar, logo and identity for the cable channel Showtime (1997).

Chermayeff & Geismar, logo for the search engine Do@ (2010).

Chermayeff & Geismar, logo for Public Broadcasting System (1984).

Chermayeff & Geismar, logo for New York University (1972).

Chermayeff & Geismar, brand update for National Geographic (2002).

Chermayeff & Geismar, logo for the Smithsonian Institution, (1999).

### ||||| Ivan Chermayeff

A memorable identity is one that is appropriate, flexible, and distinguished by its originality. Further, a good trademark, whether a word mark or a symbol, is devoid of fashion or trend, which makes it potentially iconic if it's seen for long enough in the right places.

### ||||| Sagi Haviv

It has to be unusual in some way, even awkward sometimes, in order to “hook” the viewer and persist in the mind. It nevertheless has to be simple and uncomplicated in form. This dichotomy—between simple shapes on the one hand, yet distinctive ones on the other—is what we work with every day.

### ||||| Aaron Kenedi

At a time when companies' images are more dispersed over more media than ever before, is the era of what you call “simple, focused, concept-driven” identity design over?

### ||||| Tom Geismar

No, just the opposite: “Simple, focused, concept-driven” graphic identities, if done well, work best in a wide range of media. It's the ones that rely on details of shading and other graphic niceties that have a hard time.

### ||||| Sagi Haviv

In this supersaturated visual environment, simplicity and consistent application of a brand identity are even more valuable because they naturally make the company or institution stand out in the crowd of busier, more complicated visuals.

### ||||| Ivan Chermayeff

There is no “era” of simple, focused, concept-driven identity design. There is only design that grows out of understanding audiences for specific problems, and that evolves from an idea. This is an approach that does not depend on any specific time period or its technology.

### ||||| Aaron Kenedi

A trademark often becomes the public face of a company. Among the companies you have worked for, some inevitably have gotten black eyes, most recently in the financial crisis. When you see your logo for a client like

Chase (now J.P. Morgan Chase), do you feel a sense of responsibility because, in a sense, you vouched for them? Or do you think the design work can be separated from the actions of the client?

### ||||| Ivan Chermayeff

Good graphic design is not tarnished by the greed or the illegal or other self-implosion acts of clients. We do not feel responsible for the character of those we work for. Good design should follow looking into the products and reputation of clients who



“We do not see ourselves as saving the planet. In the same way, we cannot take responsibility for the ‘evil’ actions of corporations we brand.”

approach you, but this does not mean you have to follow them into bed.

**IIII Tom Geismar**

We have always been concerned not to work for companies and institutions that we can't feel positive about, and we have refused various assignments over the years. But we don't feel that doing work for a particular client means that we have "vouched for them." Obviously we have no say over what they may or may not do in the future, and in any case what people think of a company or institution

is determined by their experience with and the actions of that entity, and has little to do with the logo. Should Paul Rand have some measure of responsibility for the Enron debacle?

**IIII Sagi Haviv**

When we create a great logo for an environmental organization, we do not see ourselves as saving the planet. In the same way, we cannot take responsibility for the "evil" actions of corporations we brand. All we can hope is that by doing good work for visible companies and organizations, we can have some positive effect on the visual environment.



**IIII Aaron Kenedi**

What logo would you redesign? Is there one you wish you had designed yourselves?

**IIII Tom Geismar**

I wish I had designed the CBS eye and the ABC sphere. They're both brilliantly concise, powerful, and memorable.

**IIII Ivan Chermayeff**

McDonald's would be great to redesign, as they are so much in the landscape and contribute so little to its quality.

**IIII Aaron Kenedi**

How do the three of you collaborate? Who has final say?

**IIII Ivan Chermayeff**

Tom, Sagi, and I all put forward ideas or make comments, which include additions, subtractions, or alternatives to one another's work. We discuss all the options (as there are always choices to be made), pick the best by common agreement, and throw out the seconds. It's a democratic process, without too much fighting, and no one has the last say. No one is boss. Sometimes, by the way, good ideas come from the staff in support below, and we try not to be deaf to them.

**IIII Aaron Kenedi**

You say you design a logo today in the same way as you always did. Haven't leaps in technology and the media changed how you work?

**IIII Tom Geismar**

Do authors today write differently because



Chermayeff & Geismar, logo for Chase Manhattan (1955), three-dimensional version at Park Avenue branch.

Chermayeff & Geismar, identity for Armani Exchange (2008), and application in advertising campaign.



their words may appear in digital form, and because they use computers rather than typewriters or pencil and paper? I don't think so, although it's now much easier for them to make changes, edit, print drafts, and, where appropriate, take advantage of the potential provided by digital media.

### IIII Sagi Haviv

As someone who grew up during the rise of the digital era, I've been astonished to see how these simple marks, conceived before this technology, thrive in the new visual environment—in tiny sizes on the web, as favicons and mobile-device application icons.

### IIII Aaron Kenedi

What advice would you give to young designers who have all the necessary technology at their disposal?

### IIII Sagi Haviv

To treat the technology as a tool but not as the generator of ideas. The technology of today will facilitate anything your mind can dream up—but first you have to dream it up in your mind. Only then should you go and execute it on the computer.

### IIII Aaron Kenedi

Looking through *Identify*, there is a noticeable lack of drop shadows, bevels, and swooshes.

### IIII Tom Geismar

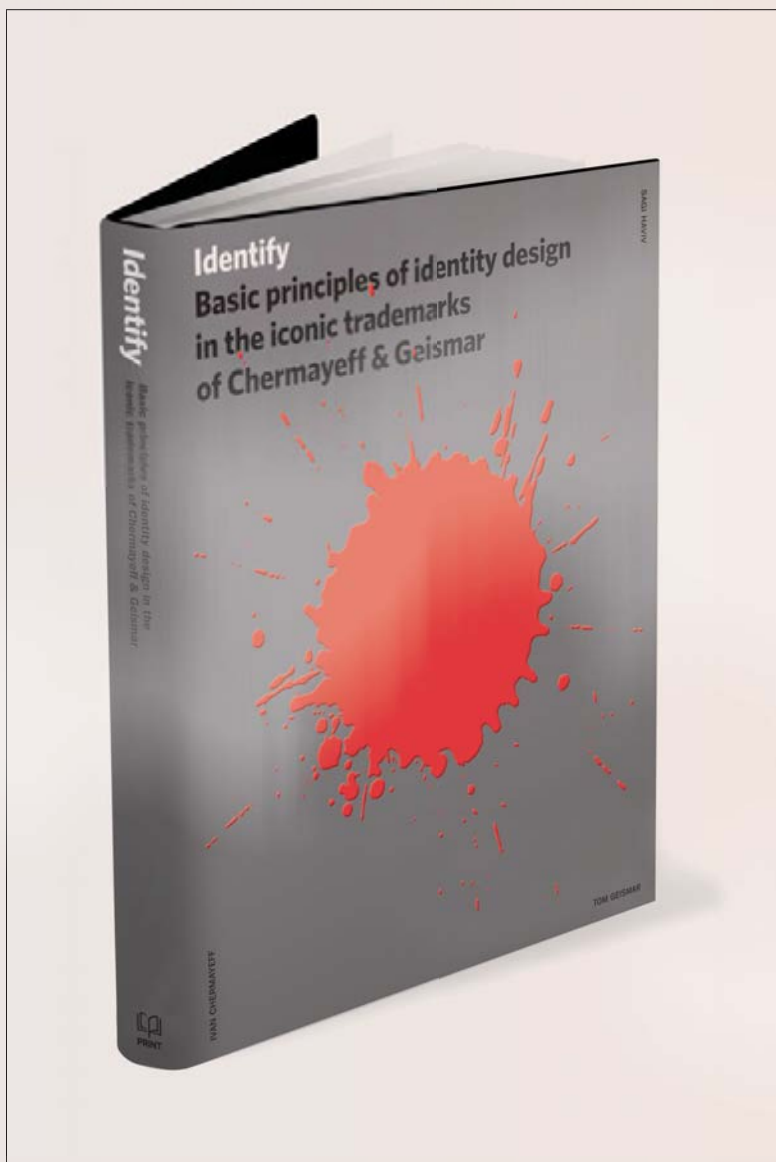
Most of our clients are looking for a graphic identification that can work successfully for many years without becoming stale or dated. We consciously try to avoid graphic trends and can proudly say we've never done a swoosh.

### IIII Sagi Haviv

We find that as long as we create something simple and distinctive, it can then take on any “fashionable” treatment when necessary, such as 3-D rendering, drop shadows, and so on, without losing its basic recognition.

### IIII Ivan Chermayeff

Show us a current trend, and its death will not be far behind it. Once a trend is “current,” it is in fact already dead. No point in starting out at the finish line.



# Major League Myth

Why did Harmon Killebrew—and everyone else—believe he was the batter in baseball’s iconic logo?

by Paul Lukas

When the baseball slugger Harmon Killebrew died on May 17, several of his obituaries mentioned that he had been the basis for Major League Baseball’s familiar “silhouetted batter” logo. In the days following his death, this factoid was repeated by writers, broadcasters, and fans throughout the baseball world. It’s a good story, one that’s been circulating for years. Killebrew himself believed it. But it isn’t true.

First, some background: The MLB logo has had an unusually long run as the symbol of America’s national pastime. Originally designed in 1969 to celebrate professional baseball’s centennial, it soon became adopted as the official MLB mark. As MLB’s branding and merchandising programs have exploded in recent years, the logo has become more ubiquitous than ever, both on the field (it now appears on every big-league cap, jersey, batting helmet, and ball) and off (on countless licensed products, which totaled \$2.75 billion in sales last year, according to the trade publication *The Licensing Letter*).

Baseball executives didn’t acknowledge the logo’s designer until 2009—40 years after it first appeared—when they formally gave credit to Jerry Dior, who created the logo while working for the marketing agency Sandgren & Murtha. This lengthy period of indeterminate parentage allowed several stories about the logo to spring up, chief among them the Killebrew connection. The story seems plausible enough if you put a photo of Killebrew’s batting stance side-by-side with the logo. There are clear similarities. The thing is, you can play this same game with photos of Johnny Bench, Joe Torre, Orlando Cepeda, and literally hundreds of other ballplayers. Put any of them next to the logo and you’ll have a good match.

Jerry Dior, now 79 and retired, could have settled all of this if anyone had asked him. Since being credited as the logo’s designer, he has repeatedly told interviewers that the silhouette was a “nondescript” composite image, not a Killebrew likeness. But since Dior wasn’t officially credited as the logo’s designer until 2009, the Killebrew myth had time to grow and become entrenched.

But how did the myth begin in the first place? Based on reporting I did in 2008, it appears to have originated with Killebrew himself. Around 1968, he was in the baseball commissioner’s office and saw a photo of himself being marked up with a grease pencil. He was told that it was for a logo. Jerry Dior maintains that he’s never been in the MLB offices (“I wish I had,” he says. “That would be nice!”), and it’s not clear what became of that marked-up Killebrew photo. In any case, when the silhouette logo appeared, Killebrew assumed, sincerely but mistakenly, that it was based on himself. He said as much to friends and associates for decades, and from there it took on a life of its own, so much so that it was repeated in Killebrew’s obituaries, even though Dior had spent the previous two years disavowing the story.

I write about uniforms and logos for ESPN.com. So when those erroneous obituaries began appearing, I wrote a small item reminding everyone that the Killebrew myth had already been debunked. That prompted some nasty emails accusing me of “defaming a defenseless man,” “speaking ill of the dead,” and several things that aren’t printable. Of course, I hadn’t said anything negative about Killebrew (who, for the record, was an extremely gracious and likable man in my limited dealings with him). I’d simply pointed out that a widely repeated story about the design of an iconic logo was inaccurate. But it turns out that in this case, as in so many others, some people prefer the myth over the truth.

Part of this, clearly, is because Killebrew was a beloved figure, and some fans can’t bear to see his stature diminished in any way. But I think the reaction also speaks to the way people gravitate toward origin stories that are rooted in recognizable figures. Baseball fans like seeing a connection between the logo and Killebrew (just as basketball fans like seeing Jerry West in the NBA logo). Sports, after all, is all about myth-making, and most fans find the Killebrew myth more satisfying than the reality of a persona-free composite. It’s like believing in the Biblical version of creation instead of evolution.

As if to reinforce that point, on July 11, nearly two months after Killebrew’s death, MLB held its annual Home Run Derby exhibition at Chase Field in Phoenix. The ESPN broadcaster Chris Berman opened the network’s coverage of the event by dedicating it to Killebrew’s memory. Soon afterward, Prince Fielder of the Brewers hit a titanic shot that slammed against a large poster of the silhouetted batter logo, prompting Berman’s broadcast partner, Nomar Garciaparra, to quip, “You were giving respect to Harmon Killebrew earlier. Well, Prince Fielder gave him some respect—he hit his silhouette!” The following night, during the All-Star Game, a Fox Sports broadcaster briefly mentioned Killebrew, and the camera, right on cue, showed a shot of the MLB logo.



Harmon Killebrew, top; left to right: Hank Aaron, Mike Schmidt, Mickey Mantle

The Major League Baseball logo was incorrectly supposed to portray Killebrew.

Killebrew: Hank Walker/Time & Life Pictures; Aaron: Focus On Sport; Schmidt: Ronald C. Modra/Sports Imagery; Mantle: Louis Requena

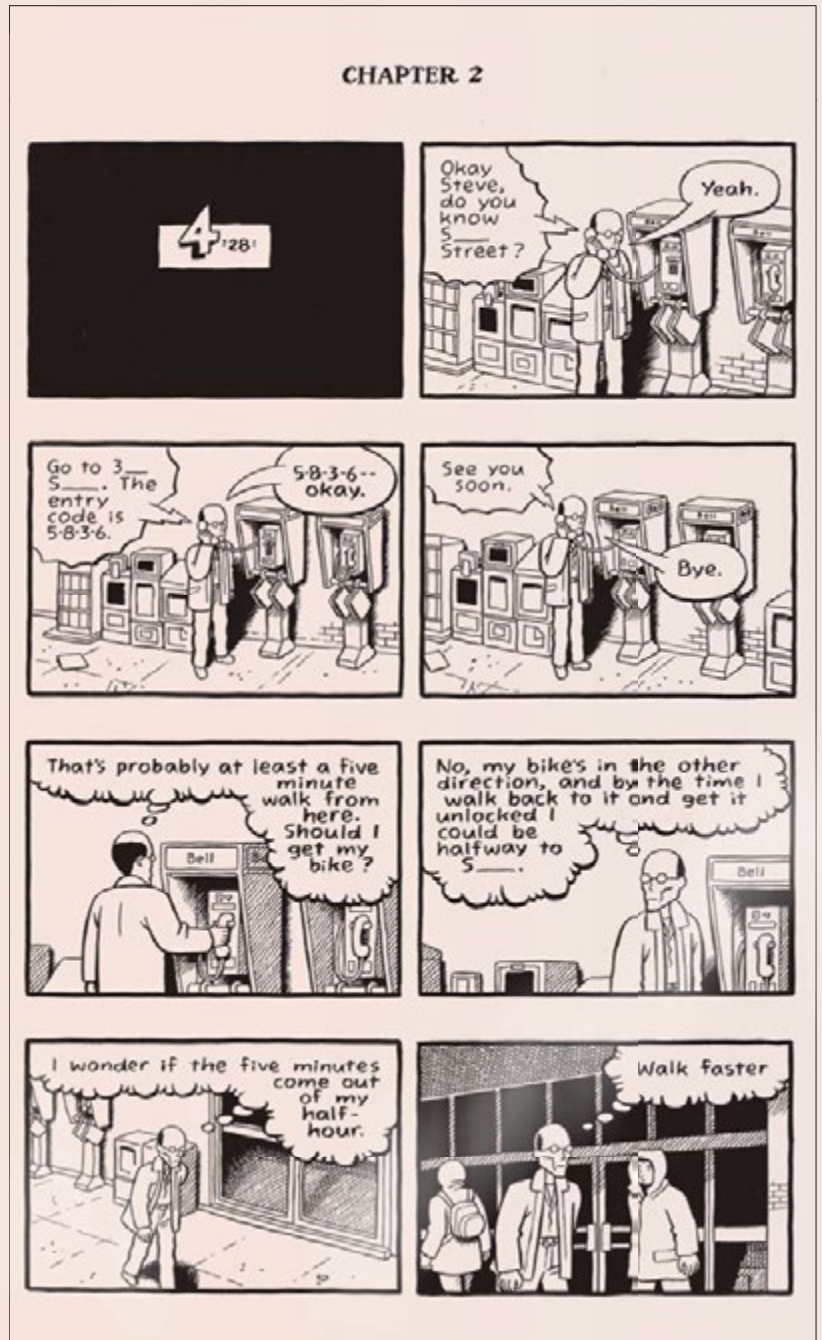
# The Mask of Myself

Self-representation in autobiographical comics  
by Bill Kartalopoulos

*Paying for It*, Chester Brown's frank, autobiographical account of his experiences with prostitutes, was one of 2011's most significant and critically acclaimed graphic novels. More than a confessional, the book makes an overt case for the decriminalization of prostitution and, controversially, against the customs of romantic love (or, in Brown's terms, "possessive monogamy"). *Paying for It* is wryly humorous at times—as when Brown, in his first encounter with a prostitute, wonders how much to tip—but in my first reading the book seemed deadpan, even astringent.

My sense of the book's tone was nearly transformed by a reading Brown gave at the Strand bookstore in New York City. Brown was antic, chirpy, and charming, and his performance got big laughs. But Brown's expressive vocal cadences are necessarily absent from his book. The text in a comic book interacts with the work's images, and *Paying for It* is strongly inflected by the way Brown chose to draw himself. Panel after panel, Brown's face is cadaverous and unsmiling, his mouth taut, his expression nearly unchanging. Brown's cartoon avatar is less the elastic human face of the author than an austere, impassive mask worn in a performance.

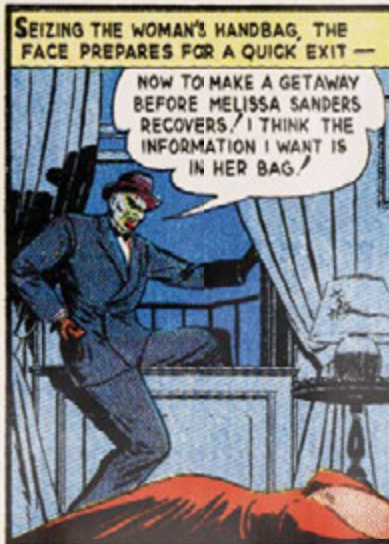
Masks have a long history in American comics. The superhero comic books that emerged in the 1930s—and currently dominate cineplexes—featured a parade of masked men (and occasionally women) who sought to conceal their identities while executing vigilante justice. The underground comics of the 1960s and '70s emerged outside of corporate comic-book publishing, and gave voice to artists who expressed their own concerns directly to an audience of peers. These countercultural comics, with their frequent evocations of grotesque sex and violence, tore down the façades of polite society and revealed the personalities of the artists who produced them. Many turned to the self as explicit subject. The underground comics pioneer Robert Crumb was among



A parade of masked men (and occasionally women) sought to conceal their identities while executing vigilante justice.




**GRIM AND FANTASTIC** — COMPOSED OF THE STUFF OF TORTURED NIGHTMARES — WEIRD AND GRUESOME IS — **THE FACE!** WHO IS HE? ALL THE UNDERWORLD WOULD LIKE TO KNOW! IS HE A CRIMINAL? ALL THE LAW ENFORCING AGENCIES THINK SO — BUT THEY LACK PROOF! HE COMES AND GOES GRINNING AN ETERNAL GRIN — LIKE A NAMELESS SHADOW, SILENT AND MYSTERIOUS!..



Chester Brown, *Paying for It*, panel from book, *Drawn & Quarterly* (2011).

Story by Gardner Fox, art by Mart Bailey ("Michael Blake"), "The Face," from *Big Shot Comics No. 2*. Excerpted from *Superman! The First Wave of Comic Book Heroes: 1936-1941*, edited by Greg Sadowski; Fantagraphics Books (2009).



the first contemporary American cartoonists to regularly depict himself in his own stories. In 1972's "The Many Faces of R. Crumb," the artist variously draws himself as "the long-suffering patient artist-saint," "the status-quo booshwah businessman cartoonist," the "naïve, lovable hayseed," the "sex-crazed fiend and pervert," and many more. Crumb ends the two-page story with a shrug: "It all depends on the mood I'm in!!" In this knowing play of personae, Crumb's shifting roles are consistently rendered in a visual style informed by the traditions of satirical American cartooning. Aline Kominsky-Crumb, before she was his spouse, also drew early autobiographical comics, but her aesthetic is rooted less in comics history and more in the expressionistic work of artists like George Grosz. Kominsky-Crumb's self-revealing comics in *Wimmen's Comix*, *Twisted Sisters*, and elsewhere are drawn from the inside out, constructing a grotesque self-image based on acute emotional memory and the experience of the human body.

Despite their differences, both Crumb's and Kominsky-Crumb's images of themselves proceed from a long tradition of caricature, which, in its original meaning, refers to an image that is charged or given extra weight. In his 1993 book, *Understanding Comics*, the cartoonist and comics theorist Scott McCloud examines another approach to representation. He argued that the simplicity of iconic cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse or Tintin invites readers to fill in the blank spaces of the image and, therefore, to identify with the protagonist.

But even these kinds of abstracted self-representations can control the reader's perception. *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel, which depicts Nazis as cats and Jews as mice, is a prime example. His Jewish characters' mouse heads—including Spiegelman's own—are profoundly iconographic, but they infuse a specific historical and ethnic identity into the cat-and-mouse dynamic's broader cultural associations. The German cat faces are more inhuman and determined, while the schematic downward-facing triangle of his mice prompts the reader to invest humanity in the characters' not-quite-human features—and visually echoes the triangular patches that identified *untermenschen* in Nazi Germany. In a 1994 essay, Spiegelman explained that "the mouse heads are masks, virtually blank...a white screen the reader can project on." The key word is "virtually." Less a blank

screen than a shaped canvas, Spiegelman's visual strategy invites the reader to empathize with his characters while signaling a very particular identity. The potential meaning of those masks is open, but not open-ended.

The collaborative comics of the French artists Florent Ruppert and Jerome Mulot take abstraction to a further extreme. Although the duo's comics aren't strictly autobiographical, they frequently make themselves characters in their own self-referential narratives. The faces atop Ruppert and Mulot's realistically proportioned self-images show the merest suggestion of eyes and noses. Other characters' facial features are uniformly rendered with an abstracted V shape. "It's a bit like Greek theatre," Ruppert told an interviewer. "The actors would do the plays with masks.... By accentuating the gestures in relation to the text, you can read other emotions in the V." The naturalism of the pair's carefully posed figures supports reader investment in the heavily abstracted faces, even while the specific rendering is so schematic as to be nearly alienating. The confrontational ambiguity of these images is consistent with the conceptual game-playing that characterizes the duo's comics; the relative specificity of their features identifies Ruppert and Mulot as the author-characters who manipulate the synthetic narrative at hand.

The mask that Chester Brown wears throughout *Paying for It* similarly denies easy identification. Brown's simplified image disguises, rather than projects, any interior emotional landscape. Because the book is a polemic that seeks to persuade, he wishes to direct attention to his rational arguments, unsupported by emotional display. In his desire to be convincingly dispassionate, he is willing to risk appearing humorless and remote. Brown claims to have decoupled his desire for sex from the messy emotional thicket of romantic relationships, but by the book's end he reveals that he has entered into something like a monogamous relationship with a prostitute for whom he feels affection. For some critics, this revelation undermined Brown's controversial arguments against romantic love. Brown's synthetic visage, designed to be an avatar of uncompromised rationality, may have concealed more emotion than even he will openly admit. Or perhaps, behind a constructed mask that has prompted readers to suppress a visceral response to his stronger arguments favoring decriminalized prostitution, Brown is enjoying the last laugh.

Brown's cartoon avatar is less the elastic human face of the author than an austere, impassive mask worn in a performance.

# Rebrand...or else!

by Metahaven

Rupert Murdoch, his son James, and their protégé, Rebekah Brooks, are at the time of this writing embroiled in a self-inflicted Shakespearean tragedy centered around phone hacking and political influence. The closure of their “toxic tabloid,” *News of the World*, with a final headline, “Thank You & Goodbye,” should be read as an act of design. It tried, in fact, to rebrand (and thus protect) the parent companies, News International and News Corporation, moving them away from the sprawl of bad news. Rebrand...or else!

“Forced rebranding” is a coercive process. It can result from some sort of public scandal, it can lead to one, or it may be used to avert one. It cuts both ways; many of *News of the World*’s advertisers withdrew from the paper under public pressure leveraged by Twitter campaigns. Brands like Ford, Renault, T-Mobile, and Orange began to “review their advertising options”—i.e., they pulled the plug. Being seen advertising with *News of the World* became an undesirable asset; advertisers that had once enjoyed the paper’s soaring sales (thanks to its many corrupted “relations”) now pledged eternal goodness. Ford called itself “a company which cares about the standards of behavior of its own people and those it deals with externally.” Boycotting became the new advertising.

The intricate mechanisms of branding and identity today manifest themselves in a mix of public-relations strategies, secret payments, fact manipulation, legal action, extracourt settlements, and other such methods. Especially since the 2008 financial crisis, the term “rebranding” has increasingly been used to describe a change of strategy rather than a change of logo. *The New York Times* described Citigroup’s 2010 shake-up of its audit committee and advisory board as a “rebranding attempt.” Similarly, a strategic overhaul a year earlier at the banking giant UBS was referred to by a Swiss news portal as a “rebranding.” Observable visual change—like a new logo or name—is often just the tip of the iceberg. Invisibility is even more strategic than visibility. As WikiLeaks’ editor in chief, Julian Assange, has asserted, “power that is completely unaccountable is silent.” A forced rebranding can be a hurried pledge to meet the taste of the public; it can also be a move to restore silence.

## IIII Precursor: Enron

The new millennium of corporate misconduct was spearheaded by Enron, the Houston-based energy, commodities, and services corporation that went bankrupt in 2001 after its massive accounting fraud was discovered. The Enron logo was the very last piece of work by the designer Paul Rand, one of the fathers of American modernism. Rand was born and raised in a “prebranding” age, in which corporations were largely seen as enlightened caretakers, hiring artists to do their advertising campaigns. Enron exposed such beliefs as false when it collapsed under the weight of its fictitious profits—casting a new, somewhat harsher light on Paul Rand’s presumably timeless musings on design, art, and the world of business. For example, in 1991 Rand wrote, “A well-designed logo, in the end, is a reflection of the business it symbolizes. It connotes a thoughtful and purposeful enterprise, and mirrors the quality of its products and services.”

Enron logo in front of the company’s onetime corporate headquarters in Houston (2001). Logo design by Paul Rand.



It is good public relations—a harbinger of goodwill.” Though Enron did not have the opportunity to rebrand itself to survive its own collapse, it now stands as a symbol, not of “goodwill” but of the new economy’s accounting bubble of limitless profit that would ultimately lead to 2008’s, and subsequent, financial crises.

#### IIII From Terror to Template: Blackwater > Xe

The Bush (and now Obama) administration’s extensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been fought by a conglomerate of public-private parties, reminding us once again that warfare is big business. U.S. troops in the Middle East are served at Pizza Hut and McDonald’s branches staffed by a giant service sector of Asian laborers—“third-country nationals” who, according to reporting by *The New Yorker*, are being promised work in Dubai luxury hotels, only to find themselves serving fast food in a military camp in Iraq. Combat itself is also partially outsourced to private security companies, of which the best-known was a corporation called Blackwater, based in the borderlands of North Carolina and Virginia and named after the color of the swamp there. After reporters found out in 2007 that Blackwater employees were responsible for various shootings of Iraqi civilians under the mantle of security operations and risk management, the size and nature of its corporate governance became exposed; in 2009 the company rebranded itself as “Xe.” Blackwater’s distinctively carnivorous logo, depicting an animal claw in crosshairs, was swapped for a piece of nondescript typographic stealth that could have fit equally well on a business jet, a laser printer, or a modem. A spokesperson for the company said that the new name was supposed to have “no meaning.” Blackwater’s founder, Erik Prince, has since stepped down and is now creating a private mercenary army in the United Arab Emirates. The Obama administration in 2010 awarded a \$250 million contract to Xe and, according to *The Nation*, “actively defends the company’s continued existence as a government contractor in good standing.” But the forced rebranding was only partially effective; most people still refer to Xe as Blackwater.



#### IIII From Greenwashing to Crowdsourcing: BP by Greenpeace

Greenwashing is a strategy whereby corporations—especially energy companies—seek to impress the public by appearing committed to the environment. For example, in 2000 the U.K. energy giant British Petroleum changed its long-held green-and-yellow crest into a beautiful flower, paired with the slogan “beyond petroleum.” In April 2010, an explosion aboard Beyond Petroleum’s oil platform the Deepwater Horizon (which sat on the deepest oil well in history), triggered an environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Subsequently, both the company’s real policies and the sailing habits of its CEO, Tony Hayward, became painfully obvious, sweeping aside a ten-year-old greenwash of the BP brand. Greenpeace, in turn, deployed an original protest method. It invited the public to rebrand BP.



#### IIII “Gapvetica”: The Failed Rebranding of a “Classic”

Last October, the giant American clothing retailer Gap announced a rebranding campaign. Its existing trademark was a blue box with its name in white, stretched capital serif letters. A sneak preview of the new sign, released on the company’s website, consisted of “Gap” rendered in Helvetica with a blue square behind a section of the *p*. To some, the new mark brought to mind an oil company, while the deadpan use of Helvetica was vaguely reminiscent of American Apparel. The brand’s “loyal fans”—or, more accurately, various people using social media—began to “protest” the rebranding, demanding that the change be revoked. In typical corporate lingo mastered by CEOs, politicians, and “sociopreneurs,” Gap’s North American president, Marka Hansen, wrote an open letter to the angry mob praising the new logo’s consistency: “We chose this design as it’s more contemporary and current. It honors our heritage through the blue box while still taking it forward.” Now comes the best part: “Given the passionate outpouring from customers that followed, we’ve decided to



Branding and identity today manifest themselves in a mix of public-relations strategies, secret payments, fact manipulation, legal action, and extracourt settlements.

engage in the dialogue, take their feedback on board and work together as we move ahead and evolve to the next phase of Gap.” Hansen invited them to submit new Gap logos to the company’s Facebook profile, and covered the silent withdrawal of “Gapvetica” on a positive note: “Thank you to everyone who has already shared feedback,” she wrote. “I’m excited about continuing the conversation and believe passionately in where we’re taking our brand.”

### IIII Emergency Brand Evacuation: HBGary and Anonymous

Following the WikiLeaks release of a trove of U.S. diplomatic cables last December, companies such as Amazon, PayPal, MasterCard, and Visa terminated services to the organization under circumstances that, according to the Harvard Law scholar Yochai Benkler, amounted to extralegal political pressure. In response, a loosely coordinated hacker group working under the collective handle Anonymous launched “Operation Payback.” The action consisted of distributed denial-of-service attacks targeting companies involved in the WikiLeaks boycott.

In February, the *Financial Times* broke the story that Aaron Barr, the CEO of a cybersecurity company called HBGary Federal, claimed to have used social-media tools to discover and map out Anonymous’s much sought-after “top leadership,” which he was to unveil at an upcoming security conference. It did not take long for Anonymous to strike back at Barr; the group hacked his Twitter account, broke into HBGary’s servers, and leaked tens of thousands of company emails, which revealed, among other things, HBGary’s role (together with two other technology firms) in an anti-WikiLeaks information-manipulation task force called “Team Themis” and commissioned by the law firm Hunton & Williams, which was itself working for Bank of America. The subsequent revelations jeopardized not just Aaron Barr’s position but also HBGary Federal’s role in the industry and, eventually, the company itself. In March, Barr stepped down. “I need to focus on taking care of my family and rebuilding my reputation,” Barr said in an interview with *Threatpost*. “Given that I’ve been the focus of much of the bad press, I hope that, by leaving, HBGary and HBGary Federal can get away from some of that. I’m confident they’ll be able to weather this storm.” Again, we observe the familiar pattern of corporate risk containment—ironic, since Barr’s fatal bluster about his Anonymous research was clearly intended to boost the company image and, perhaps, get new clients on board. And again, the visual regimen of all this seemed to be the least concern for all involved. The most striking symbol of the episode was the pictures taken of the vacant HBGary booth at the conference and fair where Aaron Barr was supposed to address security professionals: Nothing to see here. At the time of this writing, HBGary Federal’s website is still offline.

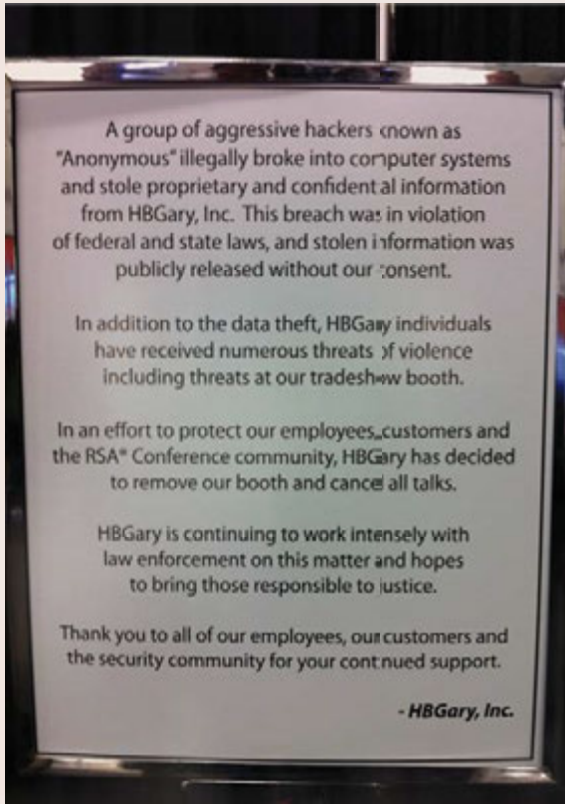


Photo: Ryan Naraine/ZDNet



### IIII

Further study of the anonymity and pseudonymity strategies of volatile network insurgents like Anonymous and LulzSec should be a vital task for anyone making sense of visual identity today. The tools these groups deploy may be technologically new, but they’re part of a long conceptual tradition. In a post-Enron era of rebellion against corporate and administrative misconduct, the laws of Rand’s enlightened despotism are suspended, and the mask reigns supreme.

Xe’s logo, replacing Blackwater (2007).

New (but canceled) logo for Gap, (2010).

Logo for Anonymous (2010).

Winning entry for Greenpeace’s “Behind the Logo” BP rebranding, by Laurent Hunziker, France (2011).

Message at an abandoned HBGary booth at the RSA security conference, San Francisco, February (2011).

# Smoke Screen of Information

The many identities of 2x4  
by Ian Volner

The New York-based graphics firm 2x4 has been in the identity business since 1994, developing visual lexica that speak to the particular missions and messages of clients as varied as Nike and the Harvard Art Museum. In work that runs the gamut from print to film to digital design, the office has shown a knack for turning information overload into a compelling aesthetics, especially in its collaborations with Rem Koolhaas, that master of data-driven mayhem.

It's also a practice whose own identity is a rather fraught business. As Michael Rock tells it, he and the other founders, Susan Sellers and Georgianna Stout, started out knowing that "we wanted to work internationally, and that...we wanted to focus on art, architecture, and fashion clients." They've done just that, as evidenced in their revolving high-concept interiors for Koolhaas's Prada store in New York's prosperous Soho neighborhood, and in their kaleidoscopic, acid-test digital wallpaper for Tiffany's Beijing outpost.

That only tells half the story, however. The firm's global reputation, and its acute insight into consumer culture, sit side by side with a critical inclination that seems frankly hostile to the enterprise of branding itself—viz., the title of Rock's 2005 essay "Fuck Content." "I still believe that we make our commercial projects investigative," he says. But the firm's signature swirl of imagery (as in the near-blizzard of statistics and photography that packs its 2009 book for Prada) seems not merely an interrogation of its theme but a kind of assault on the very notion of a single, knowable identity.

"We start from a position of skepticism," Rock says. He frames the 2x4 approach as a matter of radical objectivity, exposing ev-

ery available data point, every floating factoid, to produce a composite image of its subject. The firm's special relationship with Koolhaas (which began when 2x4 guest designed an issue of *ANY* magazine that featured the architect) is especially meaningful in this



For 2x4, the compromises of working in the global marketplace incite an angst that issues forth in a rush of graphics, text, and figures.

connection, since Koolhaas has been a prime advocate for embracing the informational tide of the digital age. If anything, 2x4 has carried that tendency even further: In 2010, it designed a smartphone app for a MoMA PS1 exhibit that turned the user-generated movements of a site-specific installation into a

dizzying array of visual schema and diagrams. The project signaled the firm's interest in ever more fluid, dematerialized realms for design. "We're aspiring to push ourselves toward in-between spaces," Rock says.

Yet it's an aspiration that also seems driven, at least in part, by anxiety. "We had



2x4, GuilT, wallpaper for Prada (wallpaper project: 2001-ongoing; GuilT: 2005).

2x4, Tableau Vivant, wall covering for Maharam (2011).

2x4, Masked/Hooded Women, wallpaper for Prada (2007).

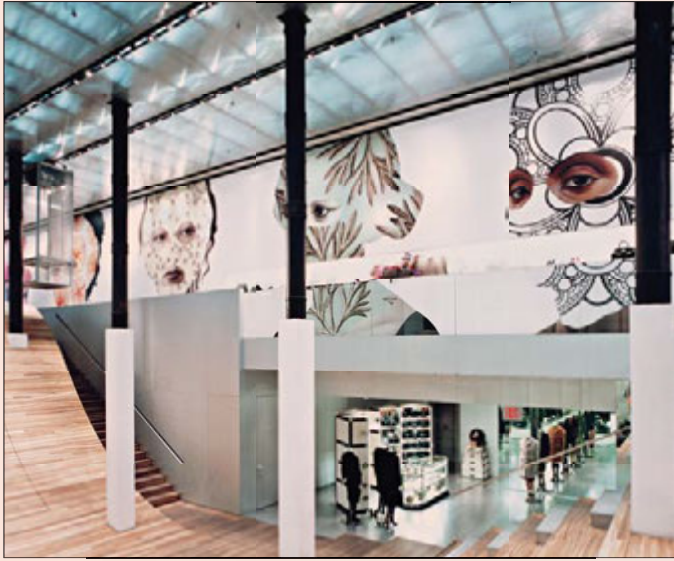
2x4, Caryatids, wallpaper for Prada (2011).

2x4, Pole Dance website and mobile app for MoMA PS1 (2010).

2x4, Design Machine, pattern-making application for Tiffany Beijing (2011).

real freedom at first,” Rock says, “but then eventually you have to work with others.” The modernists of old, at ease with their corporate clientele, aimed for clear, iconic designs that said it all in a few simple strokes. For 2x4, the compromises of working in the global

marketplace incite an angst that issues forth in a rush of graphics, text, and figures. Wary of the political wages of their practice, the designers obscure their clients’ identity (and their own) in a smoke screen of information.



“We had real freedom at first,” Rock says, “but then eventually you have to work with others.”

# Unmooring

Stewart Smith's quiet critiques  
by Justin Sullivan

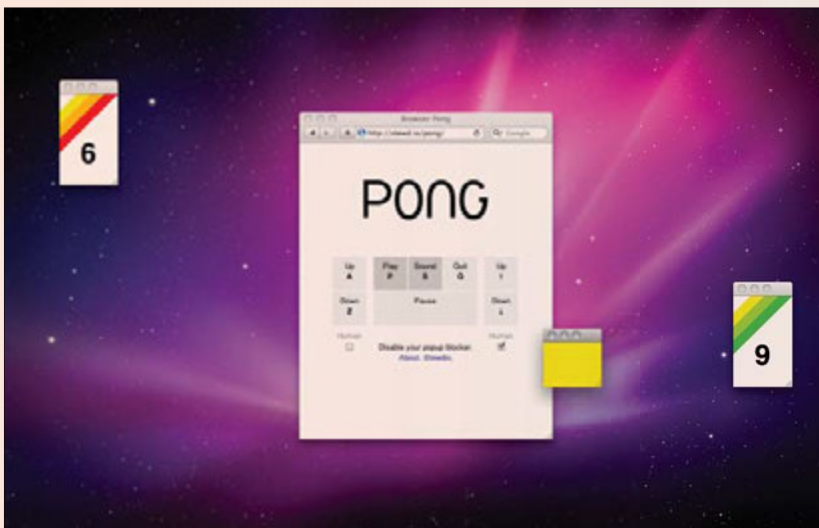
For Stewart Smith, defining what he does may be the hardest part of his job. He once told an interviewer that he “navigates between art, code, and design,” but speaking from his home in London, he admits, “I think that’s just me putting a label on things that I want to do anyway.” Smith, 29, has filled the last few years with these things: His visualization of world vi-

culture appeared in an exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art last fall; two other digital pieces, “Windmaker” and “Exit” (a collaboration with Diller Scofidio + Renfro), are currently on view in “Talk to Me,” at New York’s Museum of Modern Art; and all the while he’s been operating his punningly named design house, Stewdio.

Smith, who moved to the U.K. from New York last year, spent his teenage years in Connecticut and cut his teeth on design while working on his fanzine, *Tweed*, in the late 1990s. “If now it’s art, code, and design, back then it was music, politics, and DIY,” he says. Somewhere amid the glue sticks and Xerox copies, he learned that the presentation of his ideas could communicate just as much as what was inside.

After receiving his M.F.A. in graphic design from Yale (“I spectacularly did not fit in”), Smith began producing work that showed both a sense of play and a quiet critique. “Browser Pong,” for instance, enlists the flotsam of the internet—pop-up windows—in an homage to the classic Atari game. Meanwhile, “Windmaker” subjects web content to the weather conditions of a particular location. Try reading *The New York Times*’s home page on Mt. Washington, once the world-record holder for wind speed, and John Boehner’s grim face bounces around the screen alongside the newspaper’s logo. It’s as if Smith pulled up the anchor of corporate identity and quietly sailed away into the night.

“iQuit,” which he describes as “a one-liner, a wisecrack,” borrows Apple’s slick template but uses it to perform an act of negation. “With just a few clicks,” it promises, “the iQuit website will email your desired party a polite but firm resignation letter, constructed on the fly just for you. No configuration



Stewart Smith,  
“Browser Pong” (2009).

Stewart Smith,  
“Exit” (2008).

necessary. Perfect for quitting any sticky situation.” It certainly seems to be a job at the shiny, happy aura of productivity surrounding Apple, though Smith says that wasn’t his intent. “I don’t think I’m making a statement about brand identity,” he says. “Which is a bit unfortunate, because I’d like to at some point. But to say I’ve dwelled on it and produced some informed, pointed response just isn’t true.” Whatever we might read into his work he ascribes more to levity than political intent. “I actually don’t like postmodernism when it comes to visuals,” he says. “But my sense of humor is so influenced by the nineties and things that are about pastiche that, whether I want it to or not, it makes its way into my work.”

### IIII

His projects increasingly seem to abandon some of that lightness. “Exit,” influenced by Paul Virillo’s theory that humanity is defined by migration, quite beautifully but earnestly renders the movement of people into lights. With his frequent collaborator Robert Gerard Pietrusko, Smith is currently putting the finishing touches on a data-visualization project that examines the art world itself. Set to ap-

pear this fall in a show at the ZKM gallery, in Karlsruhe, Germany, called “The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989,” the piece “explores the art trade’s dramatic explosion around the end of the Cold War.” For the project, a panoramic animation that employs geolocated data, not unlike “Exit,” Smith and Pietrusko created a database of art-world trends in both financial and cultural capital. Smith says that the work explores “the growth of the major auction houses around the world, commercial art fairs that emerged from or were sometimes inspired by major biennials, and the creation of new art ‘regions’ for profit.”

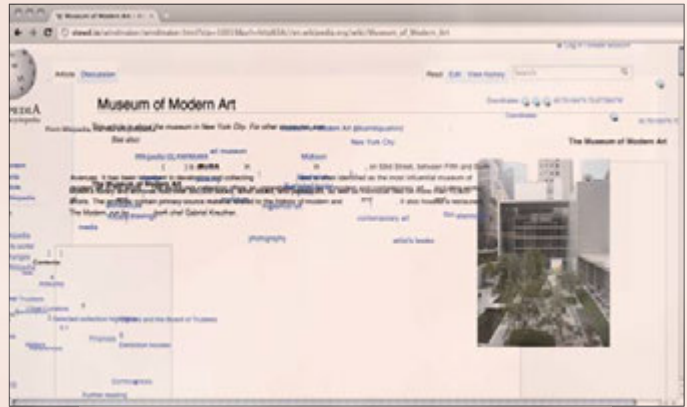
“I think there’s so much potential there,” he says. “The foundation we’ve had to build—databases, content-management systems, methods for building narratives from these observations—we think that has a much longer shelf life. No one else has the kind of data [ZKM] now has for biennials.” He’d like to make the information public as a research tool. His focus on the financial apparatus of the art world seems to have a bite-the-hand-that-feeds quality, but Smith describes the project as a scientist might: It’s a “particular globalization story.”



“I’ve grown sensitive to artists and designers making big, unfounded claims.”

Smith is hesitant to answer questions of intent, a reaction to his zine days. “I’ve grown sensitive to artists and designers making big, unfounded claims,” he says. “I used to do this a lot when I was younger, and now I’m very embarrassed by it.” It could explain why Smith gets so excited about

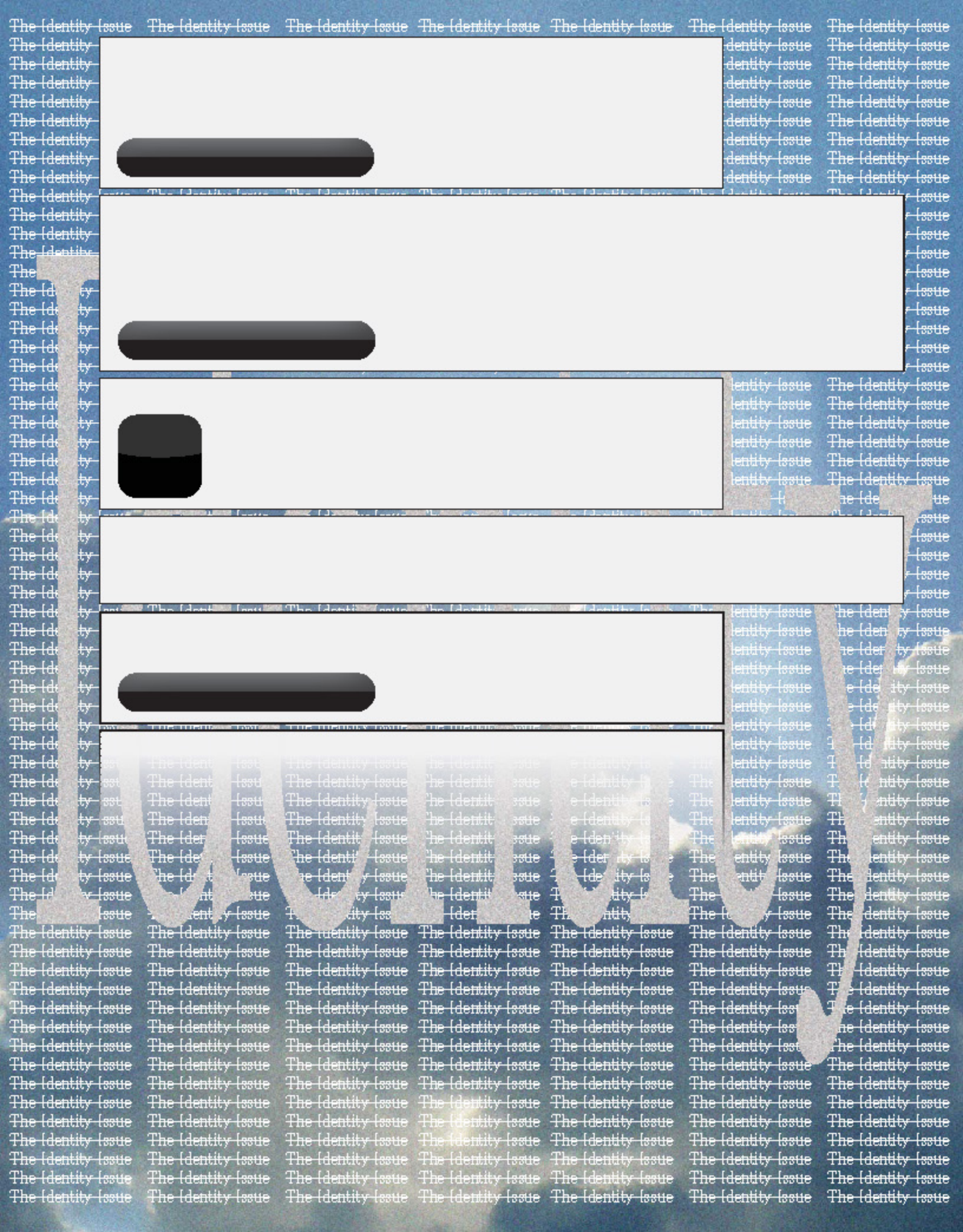
these newer data-visualization projects; the rigor of the research speaks for itself, while leaving the project open to many possible interpretations and uses. Meanwhile, he’s focused on the work. “In my own spare time even,” he says, “I’m just producing things, and I can’t really help it. I can’t even stop it.”



Stewart Smith,  
“iQuit” (2006).

Stewart Smith,  
“Histoface” (2007).

Stewart Smith,  
“Windmaker” (2007).

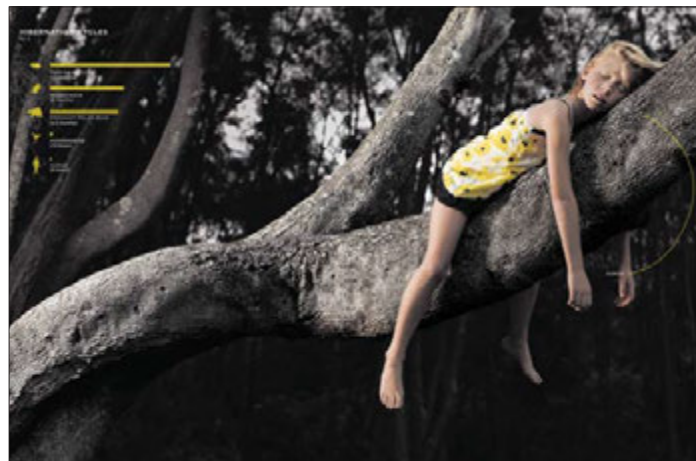


# Creativity + Commerce

The Creativity + Commerce competition is meant to highlight the best business-focused design from around the world: logos, identities, annual reports, advertising campaigns, signage, and corporate brochures. But over the years, that world has sometimes seemed very small indeed, with very few international winners at all. We're happy to report that this year's finalists could not be more visually or geographically diverse. Of the 26 winning designs, nearly half are from outside the United States. (Surprisingly, four come from one Brazilian firm, Greco Design.) Also represented are Spain, Canada, Singapore, Italy, and Croatia. Closer to home,



**Mohawk Loop Almanac**  
Design Firm: Tomorrow Partners, Berkeley, California  
Art Director: Gaby Brink  
Designers: Mónica Hernández, Scott Hickman, Amber Reed  
Illustrators: Paul Tebbott, Edel Rodriguez, Grady McFerrin, Sarah Labieniec  
Writers: Nathalie Destandau, Natalie Linden, Wendy Jedlicka, Jason McVay  
Photographers: Ron van Dongen, Steve Cohen, Misha Ashton, Laurie Frankel, Daniel Geiseke, Blaise Hayward, Kane Longden, Tier Und Naturfotografie  
J & C Sohns, Michael Hall, Getty Images; Katherine Wolkoff, Art & Commerce  
Client: Mohawk Fine Papers



you'll see some familiar names, such as Design Army, Leo Burnett, Wieden + Kennedy, and Crispin Porter + Bogusky. Newer, smaller firms made the cut, too, including JDA, a graphic design office from Long Beach, California; Space150, in Minneapolis; and Chicago's Grip Design. All of this is to say that while business may be idling worldwide, business *design* seems to be thriving.

2nd

**EarBudeez  
Earbud Packaging**  
Design Firm: JDA,  
Long Beach, California  
Art Director: Jerome Calleja  
Designers: Dean Kojima,  
Stephanie Windham  
Client: Audiovox Accessories



3rd

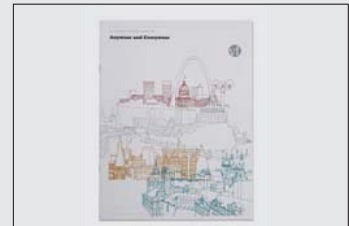
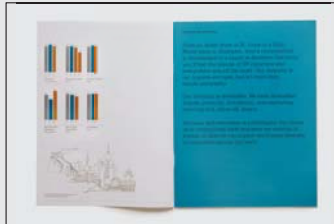


**Version 26**  
Design Firm: Space150, Minneapolis  
Art Director: Billy Jurewicz  
Designers: Roven Bashier,  
Kari Tate-Anderson, Dustin Sparks,  
Michael Watson, Dustin Joyce  
Writers: Cassie Broeckert, Todd Lintner  
Client: Space150



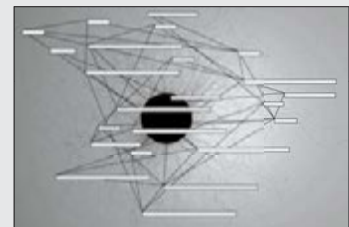
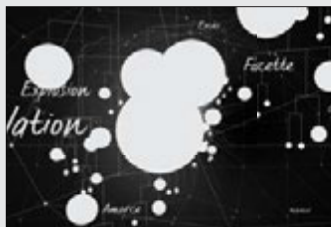
## VF Annual Report 2009

Design Firm: And Partners, New York City  
 Art Director: David Schimmel  
 Designers: Craig Bailey (print), Nina Boesch (interactive)  
 Illustrator: Laura Molloy  
 Writer: Charles Veprek  
 Photographer: Julian Dufort  
 Client: VF Corporation



## CREA

Design Firm: Baillat Cardell et Fils,  
 Outremont, Canada  
 Art Directors: Jean-Sébastien Baillat,  
Guillaume Cardell  
 Designers: Jean-Sébastien Baillat,  
Guillaume Cardell, Melanie Martin  
 Client: Info-Pressé Labieniec



## Burger King Global Packaging

Design Firm:  
Crispin Porter + Bogusky, Miami  
 Creative Director: James Dawson-Hollis  
 Art Director: Mike Del Marmol  
 Designer: David Iglesias  
 Client: Burger King



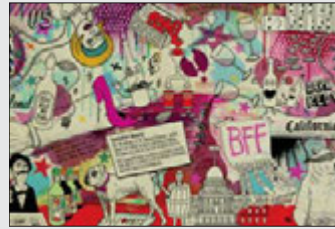
## design (re)Invents

Design Firm: Design Army,  
 Washington, D.C.  
 Art Directors: Pum Lefebure,  
Jake Lefebure  
 Designer: Sucha Becky  
 Illustrators: Sucha Becky, Matt Chase  
 Client: AIGA



## Bear Flag Wine

Design Firm: Eduardo, Madrid  
Designer: Eduardo Bertone  
Client: Bear Flag Wine



## Intel Infoscape

Design Firm: Elements Design Group, San Francisco  
Art Director: Janet Brockett  
Designers: Daniel Schambach, Elie Jamaa  
Client: Foghorn Creative



## Wanderlust Identity

Design Firm: Foreign Policy Design Group, Singapore  
Art Director: Yah-Leng Yu; Designer: Yah-Leng Yu  
Illustrator: Cheryl Chong; Photographer: Michael Tan  
Design Production: Tianyu Isaiah Zheng (TY)  
Project Management: Arthur Chin  
Client: Wanderlust Hotel



## Boudoir Logotype

Design Firm: Greco Design, Belo Horizonte, Brazil  
Art Director: Gustavo Greco  
Designer: Ana Luisa Gomes  
Client: Alessandra e Rebecca Dias



## Fundação Dom Cabral Signage System

Design Firm: Greco Design  
Art Director: Gustavo Greco  
Designer: Ana Luisa Gomes  
Client: Fundação Dom Cabral





### Mendes Junior 2009 Annual Report

Design Firm: Greco Design  
Art Director: Gustavo Greco  
Designer: Ricardo Donato  
Client: Mendes Júnior Civil Engineering



### Ayrton Senna's 50th Anniversary Invitation

Design Firm: Greco Design  
Art Director: Gustavo Greco  
Designer: Zumberto  
Client: Ayrton Senna Institute



### Death's Door Spirits Packaging

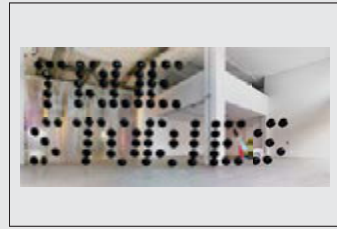
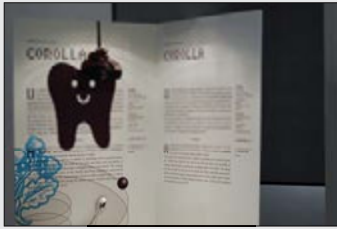
Design Firm: Grip Design, Chicago  
Art Directors: Kelly Kaminski,  
Kevin McConkey  
Designers: Joshua Blaylock, Molly Wells  
Client: Death's Door Spirits



### Visual Identity of "True Stories" Exhibition

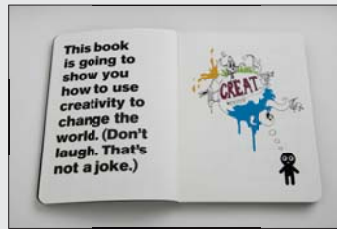
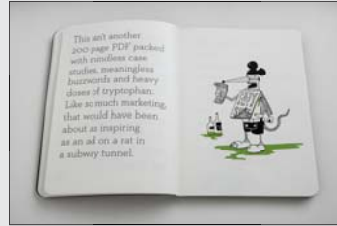
Design Firm: Jekyll & Hyde, Milan  
Designer: Marco Molteni  
Client: Scuola Politecnica di Design





## The Most Important Book You'll Ever Reread

Design Firm: [Leo Burnett](#), Chicago  
 Designer: [Shereen Peterson](#)  
 Writers: [David Schermer](#), [Dave Loew](#)  
 Illustrator: [Blake Calovic](#)  
 Chief Creative Officer: [Susan Credle](#); Agency Operations: [Frank Cirrincione](#)  
 Corporate Strategy: [Michael Peters](#); Strategic Planning: [Karen Green](#)  
 Producer: [Anne Trout](#)



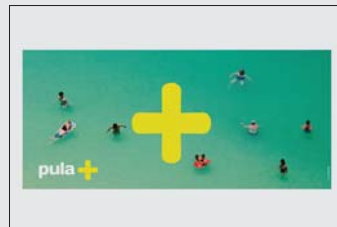
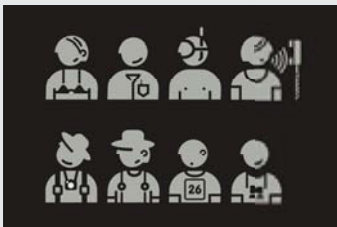
## Self-Promotional Valentine's Day Card

Designer: [Oussama Mezher](#), Montreal



## Pula Is More

Design Firm: [Parabureau](#), Zagreb, Croatia  
 Art Directors: [Igor Stanisljevic](#), [Marko Baus](#), [Petar Popovic](#)  
 Designers: [Aja Turcic](#), [Kristina Ivancic](#)  
 Illustrator: [Petar Popovic](#)  
 Client: [Tourism Office Pula](#)



### Ideas + Buildings Vol. 02: Perspective—Global Context

Design Firm: Perkins + Will, Atlanta  
Designer: Mimi Day  
Writers: Diana Davis, Kalpana Kuttaiah  
Client: Perkins + Will



### Make Better Art from the Streets

Design Firm: Space150, Minneapolis  
Art Director: Ned Wright  
Designers: Michael Seitz,  
Andrew Ridgeway  
Writer: Michelle Swanson  
Client: Space150



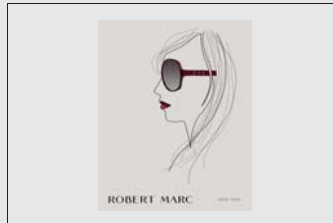
### Lerner Digital Trademark

Design Firm: Space150, Minneapolis  
Art Director: Jason Strong  
Designer: Ian Crombie  
Client: Lerner Digital



### Robert Marc Campaign

Design Firm: The O Group,  
New York City  
Art Directors: Jason B. Cohen,  
J. Kenneth Rothermich  
Designer: J. Kenneth Rothermich  
Client: Robert Marc



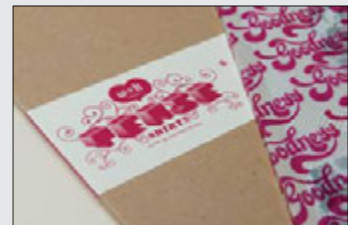
### Mohawk Solutions

Design Firm: Volume, San Francisco  
Art Directors: Adam Brodsley,  
Eric Heiman  
Designers: Eric Heiman, Adam Brodsley,  
Talin Wadsworth  
Client: Mohawk Fine Papers



### W + K Studio Goodness

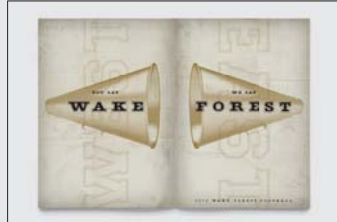
Design Firm: Wieden + Kennedy,  
Portland, Oregon  
Art Director: Paul Levy  
Designer: W + K Studio  
Writer: Nathan Goldberg  
Client: W + K Studio





## Wake Forest Football

Design Firm: Wildfire,  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina  
Art Director: Shane Cranford  
Designer: Ross Clodfelter  
Writer: Sarah Lassiter-Mason  
Client: Wake Forest Athletics



## The Judges

**Joshua Liberson and Ethan Trask**, vice presidents of **Creative**, spent the first part of their careers designing magazines in-house for a range of titles as varied as *US Weekly* and the fashion bible *Visionaire*. In 2001, brought together by a job, they decided to form Helicopter, a New York-based design consultancy. Over the next ten years, Helicopter expanded its practice to include both design and strategy across multiple sectors including media, the arts, retail, and hospitality, receiving international recognition along the way. In January 2011, Helicopter was acquired by its then client One Kings Lane. Josh and Ethan now run the creative group. Josh holds a degree in studio arts from Wesleyan University and was a founding member of the School of Visual Arts'



**Amanda Spielman** is a graphic designer at SpotCo, an advertising agency that specializes in creating artwork for Broadway theater and other live entertainment. Prior to SpotCo, Amanda was an associate art director at Time Inc. Custom Publishing, where she helped to launch *Proto*, an award-winning magazine for Massachusetts General Hospital. Her work has been recognized by *Print*, the Society of Publication Designers, and *Graphis* and has been featured in *Step*, *Metropolis*, *Good*, *The Design Entrepreneur*, and *Fingerprint*. Amanda graduated from the M.F.A. design program at the School of Visual Arts and holds a B.A. from Vassar College. She lives in Jackson Heights, Queens.



Master's in Branding Program. Ethan holds a degree in English from Lewis & Clark College and is a former member of the New York board of AIGA. They are both inordinately fond of toile.