



NEW ADVENTURES IN WEB DESIGN

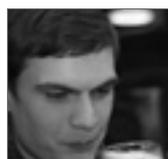
NACONF
2011

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THE STANDARDISTAS
 (CHRISTOPHER MURPHY & NICKLAS PERSSON)
<http://webstandardistas.com>
 @standardistas

HELLO



PHOTO: LACHLAN HARDY

In June last year, I was sat at the back of Greg Wood's editorial design talk in San Francisco. The workshop content itself was really valuable, but the group discussion that followed was a revelation. Here we were, a large and diverse bunch of designers, developers, publishers, writers and the like, spending a further fifty minutes engaged in spontaneous debate about the future of web content. The discussion bounced around, and as a group we were facing tough questions and finding outcomes. It was so progressive, and at that moment I wanted the whole web community to be able to listen in on the things we were saying.

Seven months later, and that inspiring moment brings you all here, to Nottingham, in winter. It sparked my long-held desire to put on a meaningful event specifically for web designers. I couldn't stop thinking about how special it might be to get a hall full of smart people together for a day of intelligent, thoughtful, ambitious talks and subsequent discussion.

THE ROLE OF THE CONFERENCE

In many ways *New Adventures in*

Web Design is no different to other events that I consider extremely valuable; specifically events such as Build, DIBI (Design It Build It), EECI (ExpressionEngine conference), and dConstruct. These are brought to us by individuals, small teams, or agencies that do the same work as you and I every single day, and this real-world empathy ensures that we as attendees see our concerns and interests being addressed, year after year.

All conferences have value, but for me the ones listed above have a special integrity as they treat audiences with great respect, and assume a level of intelligence that allows the organisers to program a range of brave topics. The talks may be immediately useful, or they might deliver ideas through analogies or sideways perspectives that make attendees think a bit harder; the fruit of these topics often not truly ripening in our heads until days, weeks or months later.

Still, *New Adventures* aims to feel different. It's an experiment, and a comparatively affordable one for all of you I hope. The aims are not only to bring incredible speakers and some industry spotlight to this under-served yet historically creative region, but also to facilitate discussion, to ask questions, and hopefully explore outcomes. To succeed, the event has to be built upon relevant and engaging content that a diverse audience of six-hundred can relish. In search of that, we have a carefully curated program featuring ten topics in one day, bringing a fast and punchy program that provides room for the audience to respond to the topics during the debates and beyond.

Maybe the true role of a conference is to investigate new ways of

thinking and collectively examine our challenges; to inspire, enthuse, and validate our thinking in broader strokes. The conference hall is not a classroom, and more direct learning is perhaps better placed in workshops — something we may bring you with *New Adventures* in the coming years.

THE PAPER

Much like the main program, this paper you're holding is full of opinion. Aside from the essential conference information you need, it contains nine specially commissioned contributions from established designers and exciting new or unsung creative minds.

The brief was simple. "*You have one or two pages to speak directly to other designers. There are no rules, and it is your space to deliver your message.*" As a result, we have exactly what I'd hoped for.

There are thoughts on design in these pages that I embrace and agree with, but there are also some thoughts that don't align with my own views. When it comes to something as subjective as design, we can't possibly all agree on the same things. It's healthy to have our own ideas challenged, or be made to think twice about what it is we value about the discipline. This, for me, is the very spirit of *New Adventures*, and it bleeds from every contribution in this paper.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT

A conference like this creates opportunities to try so many things. For this inaugural event, we've kept it manageable, and we have a couple of "fringe" events from the fine folks at Erskine Design and Second Wednesday, plus some other giveaways. Importantly, we

have a mighty after-party for you all to enjoy and continue your conversations.

These fringe events aren't just for larks, they're the ideal opportunity to make new friends, establish potential working relationships, and get things off your chest with people who understand what riles you. Traditionally, they are also about drinking so by all means give that your all.

THE INEVITABLE THANKS

I shall end by extending my sincere thanks to the ten incredible speakers who didn't hesitate to say "yes" to my crazy late-night emails last Summer. They are the backbone of this event, and they've each worked hard to bring us brand new talks never seen anywhere else.

Our fantastic sponsors and providers deserve gratitude from all of us. Their contributions big and small make everything tick. To put on an event like this costs a fortune, and logistically it can be daunting. Our sponsors take the sting out of the whole process, and without the venue staff, technical wizards, and volunteers this whole show would be an embarrassment.

Finally, I'd personally like to thank you for supporting this conference. The UK is heavily represented here today, but we also have a number from the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Ireland, plus a few from Romania, Poland, Australia, and many more corners of the globe. I hope each and every one of you finds real value in what we're doing, and will consider supporting our events in the future.

SIMON COLLISON

JANUARY 2011



MARK BOULTON

Mark is a graphic designer living in South Wales, UK with his wife and daughter. He currently runs a small design studio, Mark Boulton Design, where he works with clients such as ESPN, Warner Bros, BBC, British Energy and Drupal. In the past, he worked for the BBC and Agency.com. He also runs a small publishing imprint, Five Simple Steps, where he publishes practical design books for the web community.

[HTTP://WWW.MARKBOULTON.CO.UK](http://www.markboulton.co.uk)



ANDY CLARKE

Andy Clarke has been called many things since he started designing for the web over ten years ago. His ego enjoys phrases like “ambassador for CSS”, “industry prophet” and “inspiring”, but he’s most proud that Jeffrey Zeldman once called him a “bastard”. He runs Stuff and Nonsense, a small web design company that specialises in designing highly usable and attractive websites. Andy’s a renowned public speaker and presents at web design conferences worldwide. He teaches web design techniques and technologies through his own workshop masterclasses, For A Beautiful Web and is the author of the highly acclaimed *Hardboiled Web Design*. He writes a popular blog, And All That Malarkey, mostly about the web, and tweets as @malarkey.

[HTTP://FORABEAUTIFULWEB.COM](http://forabeautifulweb.com)



BRENDAN DAWES

Brendan is Creative Director for magneticNorth, a digital design company based in Manchester, UK. Over the years he’s helped realise projects for a wide range of brands including Sony Records, Diesel, BBC, Fox Kids, Channel 4, Disney, Benetton, Kellogg’s, The Tate and Coca-Cola. In 2009 he was listed among the top twenty web designers in the world by .net magazine and was featured in the *Design Icon* series in Computer Arts.

[HTTP://MNATWORK.COM](http://mnatwork.com)



ELLIOT JAY STOCKS

Elliot is an independent designer, illustrator, speaker, and author of the best-selling book *Sexy Web Design*. When not creating work for clients such as Virgin Group, Microsoft, and Campaign Monitor, he can be found speaking at design events around the globe and writing for publications such as .Net and Computer Arts. He is the founder and editor of 8 Faces, a bi-annual printed magazine dedicated to typographic design, and also serves on Smashing Magazine’s Experts Panel. Elliot occasionally dabbles with the idea of being a musician as well.

[HTTP://ELLIOTJAYSTOCKS.COM](http://elliottjaystocks.com)

SPEAKERS (BIOGRAPHIES)



SARAH PARMENTER

Sarah owns You Know Who, a small design studio, now in its 7th year, in the beautiful town of Leigh-on-Sea in Essex. Sarah's passion lies purely in the web. Creating beautiful websites that match the clients brand and adhere to web standards are her forte. Being a Virgo means she is a true perfectionist and can be known to push pixels for hours. Sarah's straight talking nature and no fuss approach to projects have landed her many great contracts over the years with various brands in the UK and abroad.

[HTTP://WWW.SAZZY.CO.UK](http://www.sazzy.co.uk)



VEERLE PIETERS

Veerle is a graphic/web designer based in Deinze, Belgium. Starting in '92 as a freelance graphic designer, Veerle worked on print design before focussing more on web design and GUI (since '96). She runs her own design studio Duoh! together with Geert Leyseele. Veerle has been blogging since 2003 and is number 39 on the list of NxE's *Fifty Most Influential 'Female' Bloggers*.

[HTTP://VEERLE.DUOH.COM](http://veerle.duoh.com)



TIM VAN DAMME

Tim Van Damme is a designer based and raised in Belgium. He designs interfaces as a freelancer at his company Made by Elephant, and blogs and Twitters under the alter ego "Maxvoltar". Some call him rude, some call him an elitist, but the truth is he's just brutally honest and would love to have a beer (or five) with you.

[HTTP://TIMVANDAMME.COM](http://timvandamme.com)



DAN RUBIN

Dan is a graphic designer, web developer, musician and Apple enthusiast living and working in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He is founder and principal of Webgraph (a design and branding studio), co-founder of Sidebar Creative (a design collective) and Sinelogic (UI and usability consulting) as well as a web standards consultant and speaker.

[HTTP://SUPERFLUOUSBANTER.ORG](http://superfluousbanter.org)



JON TAN

Jon is a designer and a member of the International Society of Typographic Designers who sometimes turns his hand to designing furniture. He's a co-founder of the web fonts service, Fontdeck, and the Analog co-operative where he works with some fantastic people making Mapalong, running things like the Brooklyn Beta conference, and the co-working studio Mild Bunch HQ.

[HTTP://JONTANGERINE.COM](http://jontangerine.com)



GREG WOOD

Greg is a senior designer at Erskine Design, who likes the idea of contributing to make the web a generally nicer place. He's a designer because he enjoys solving problems and making things aesthetically pleasing at the same time. He loves to be creative with type and layout, and enjoys occasionally breaking away from his comfort zones to try something new. Last year he presented a packed-out workshop about Editorial Design in San Francisco.

[HTTP://GREGORYWOOD.CO.UK](http://gregorywood.co.uk)

SCHEDULE

08:00	REGISTRATION	
09:00	WELCOME	Simon Collison
09:10	<i>The New Language of Web Design</i>	Dan Rubin
09:45	<i>A New Canon</i>	Mark Boulton
10:20	<i>Crafting User Experiences</i>	Sarah Parmenter
10:50	REFRESHMENTS	
11:20	<i>With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility</i>	Elliot Jay Stocks
11:55	<i>Language and the Lizard Brain</i>	Jon Tan
12:30	Q&A DEBATE #1	Morning speakers
13:00	LUNCH "IN A BAG"	
14:00	<i>Designing on Solid Foundations</i>	Tim Van Damme
14:35	<i>Art Direction & Editorial Design on the Web: Does it Work?</i>	Greg Wood
15:10	<i>Unraveling the Mysteries of Inspiration</i>	Veerle Pieters
15:40	REFRESHMENTS	
16:10	<i>Once Upon A Time On The Web</i>	Andy Clarke
16:45	<i>Produced For Use</i>	Brendan Dawes
17:20	Q&A DEBATE #2	Afternoon speakers
17:50	CLOSING MESSAGES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS	
18:00	ENDS	
20:00	AFTER-PARTY AT ESCUCHA (ENDS AT 2AM)	

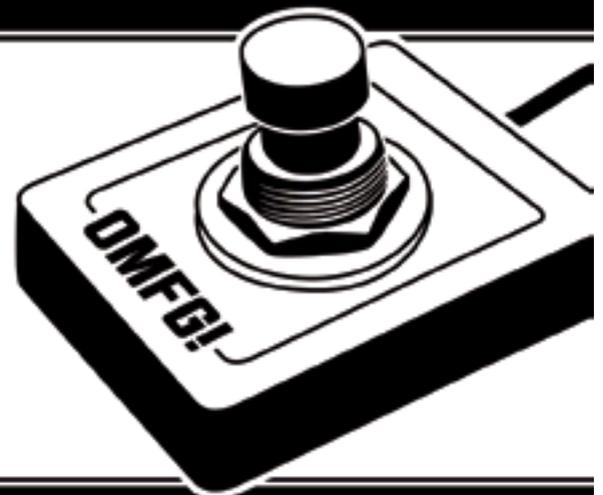
EVER MAKE A MISTAKE AND WISH YOU COULD REWIND THE INTERNET 5 MINUTES?

INTRODUCING THE

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TURN BACK TIME TO RECLAIM THOSE PRECIOUS MOMENTS BEFORE YOU MADE AN ARSE OF YOURSELF

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- DRUNKEN EBAY BUYS
- CURMUDGEON COMMENTS
- FTP EFF-UPS
- TWIT-LIKE TWEETS
- UNSEE GROSS STUFF
- PHOTO SHARING SNAFUS
- OVERDRAFT FEE ERASER



SIMPLY RUB SOME THIS ON A SITE TO PREVENT UNSIGHTLY NON-COMPLIANCE!

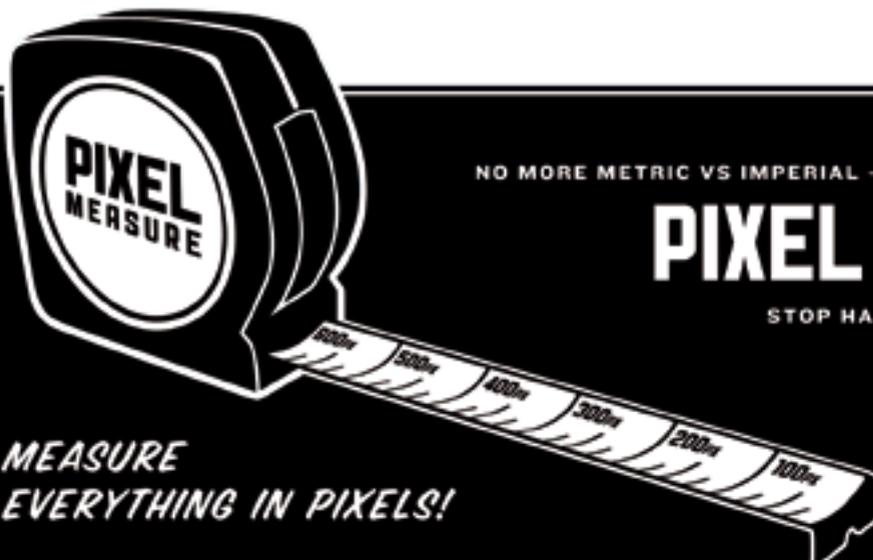
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CRITIQUING ACADEMIA

BY JAMES WILLOCK

I am sat, staring into middle distance, totally aghast. It's Friday afternoon on the first week of university and we've just been given an assignment. "You must produce a portfolio website, derived from these templates, which will house your work for the following three years." I'm sorry—*what?*

There is a great deal of criticism online for how web design is handled in academia. Curriculums are laughably out of date, design courses are taught by developers, students are cut off from the wider web community. Along with the friends I studied with, I went through a similar experience. I was fortunate enough to have spare time to be active within the web community during my studies, so the fact that much of our education was in no way suitable for the pace of the industry was very clear.

Whenever I talk to someone who has had similar experiences, they always seem to have slightly different perspectives on why they found academia failed them. Some people suggest it was their tutors' lack of industry experience, or the broadness of their studies preventing them from specialisation, or the outdated curriculum. I believe the problem is far more fundamental than that.

SKILLS, NOT SOFTWARE

I believe more and more every day that web design is becoming a less relevant catch-all term for what we do. Web just describes our medium – ultimately, we are still designers.

The principles and theories that guide us are largely the same as any other design discipline. Good design for us is so much more basic than the harmonious placement of pixels on a screen. That's why the treatment of Web design as a miscellaneous vocational technical course is so abhorrent.

At university, we were taught to use Creative Suite. If you mentioned grid systems, or typography, or colour theory, you'd be told they weren't "part of this module." Education in this sector is too heavily focused on implementation. It's build, build, build. You don't need to consider what's good or what's bad, so long as you can replicate the tutor's example and shoe-horn enough independent creativity in it for it to qualify as yours.

I think course leaders need to take a step back when writing their future curriculums. On the web, the software they teach with is totally, absolutely irrelevant. No two agencies or freelancers use the same set up. At Erskine, one Phil uses Textmate, another Vim. More pertinently, the technology they teach is a lot less important than they might imagine. As a medium, the Web moves far more rapidly than academia can hope to keep up with (assuming you're not lucky enough to have teaching superheroes like Chris and Nicklas of The Web Standardistas, who regularly rewrite their lectures and materials the day beforehand). The focus should be on teaching fundamentals, rather than specific

techniques or technologies. Yes, students should learn to mark up documents in HTML, but it's worthwhile explaining what markup is, and how to write it well. There was this little thing called the web standards movement which was quite important.

So, instead of a module on Flash, why not teach a module on the fundamentals of typography? The anatomy of type, choosing a typeface for a purpose, learning how to typeset for the web. A module like that would stay with a student for every day of their working career, long after Flash (or Silverlight, or insert any proprietary technology here) is long dead and gone. It would also, I dare say, make them better educated designers.

SPECIALISATION, NOT STANDARDISATION

What worries me most is the potential for academia to create a generation of "jack of all trade" designers who have no particular passion or specialisation. When students are so heavily focused on building and implementation, it's difficult for them to develop an appreciation for elements of their work that could become a focus for them in their career. Universities shouldn't be looking to output a group of boilerplate Web designers with the same shallow skill set. That's not good for the industry, or for the individuals.

The trend to develop this "jack of all trades" is confounded further in many courses' emphasis

on back-end development (which, let's be honest, is more often than not procedural PHP). The Web as a publishing platform is moving incredibly quickly. How relevant a modest knowledge of one scripting language is, I'm not sure.

Ultimately, what I learned at university was that the best teachers weren't teachers at all, but people in industry putting their work out there for consumption. I learned more from one weekend with Mark Boulton's *Designing for the Web* than I did in three years studying. Good books like that could dramatically alter a student's outlook and knowledge very rapidly. I would implore those writing syllabuses in the future to consider expanding and updating the titles they teach with. *Don't Make Me Think* is essential, yes – but it's not enough.

It's not all doom and gloom, though. There are people out there making a difference, like The Standardistas and Leslie Jensen-Inman, who are doing their best to introduce reform where they can. I feel like my passion for this topic should lead me to do more, but I don't think I'm a teacher. What I – and more people in the industry – can do, is make a commitment to inspire and influence today's students. Go to their campus and speak, run a workshop, create a dialogue. There's masses of value for both parties, and it's making a genuine difference. It's important for students to have friends, contacts and role models in industry. Give them shoulders to stand on.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

400x300

120,000 PX

dribbble

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Great, practical web design books.



Hardboiled Web Design

by **ANDY CLARKE**
published october 2010



A Practical Guide to **Designing with Data**

by **BRIAN SUDA**
published august 2010



A Practical Guide to **Information Architecture**

by **DONNA SPENCER**
published june 2010



A Practical Guide to **Designing for the web**

by **MARK BOULTON**
published february 2009



A Practical Guide to **Designing Grid Systems for the web**

by **MARK BOULTON**
to be published in 2011



A Practical Guide to **Designing the Invisible**

by **ROBERT MILLS**
to be published in 2011

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YOUR JOURNEY AND MINE

BY MARK BOULTON

Growing up as an architect's son, I was encouraged to walk around with my eyes open. Quite literally: he told me to always look up as you miss all the detail at eye level.

"All you see is shop windows, Mark. To see buildings, you have to look above all that."

That simple message has stayed with me for a long time, literally and metaphorically. It's all too easy – in any design profession – to carry on with the blinkers on. To look at only your own profession to gain inspiration. To read others' design books and blogs. To engage in meaningful debate on Twitter or to attend web design conferences. This collective experience – made possible with the immediacy of Twitter – is in danger of eroding something that should be sacred; a designer's own personal journey.

A JOURNEY

You may have started your design life as a developer. You may have had an introduction to design at school and stayed true to that one path. For me, my journey started when I was about 7 years old with an obsession with that colourful brick of wonder; Lego. It wasn't just a toy, it was my passion. It wasn't just something we did when it was raining outside and *Why Don't You* had finished on the telly. From the

moment I awoke, to the moment I went to sleep, it occupied my every thought. When I wasn't playing with it, I was designing for it on paper. On long journeys I would sketch plans for intricate Cold-War mountain-side bases, or oil rigs, or airports, or large towns. A stereotypical Architect's son, I know. This preoccupation with make-believe went hand in hand with my other interests: painting and drawing, *Dungeons and Dragons* (but only because I enjoyed painting miniatures) and designing and building tree houses. Making stuff. All the time.

DESIGN IS NOT ART

The desire to make things is what drove me to be a designer. It's something I am, rather than something I do. That old cliché is true, I think. If I didn't end up a web designer, I probably would've been some other type of designer. I'm not one for self-indulgence, generally, but I wonder what has happened along the way that has shaped me in my profession. What makes me the type of designer I am? *Lego*? Looking up at buildings? What are the defining points in our professional lives that shape who we are? Well, I actually don't think it's our professional lives we should be concentrating on.

Design is not art. Design is not a pursuit of self-expression. It is a craft and we are the craftsmen and

women. We take a brief, work with clients, and provide something at the end of it. We get paid. We move on. To do that well, a designer must be versatile with their craft. They've got to have the chops; the theory, the tools, the techniques. They've got to be able to apply them appropriately for a given audience. The wider the range of clients and industries you may be asked to work on, the wider your expertise will be stretched. Then, you will be tested. You will have to draw on your experience. And if your only exposure to design is through your work as a web designer, then you're already fighting a losing battle. Quick! Reach for Dribbble, or for that awesome site you bookmarked last month for inspiration!

Stop. You're operating in a bubble. And it's very bad for you.

SCHOOLING VS PRACTICE

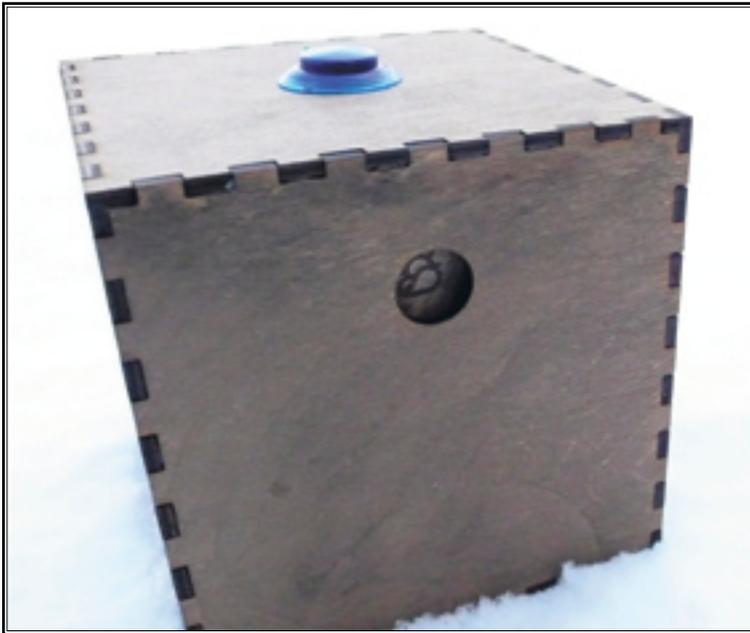
At this point, if you've not been to design school, you may think the best thing to do would be to learn about Modernism, or the Bauhaus, or Charles and Ray Eames. To enrich your design schooling. If you can relate to me, as someone who is a do-er, then I think you'd be wasting your time. History is important. Knowing the roots of an industry is important, but not at the expense of *your journey*. Your journey should be about you. Not about what you think may be expected.

Schooled designers can be terrible snobs. Generally unable to articulate a process, applied techniques and results, they rely heavily on drawing parallels with art movements and using language that is designed to confuse not clarify. Because design is magic, right?

My point is that design schooling – traditional design schooling – is not what it's cracked up to be. My advice to anyone who asks about it is to go on a short writing course, or ask a printer if you can shadow or help out a day a week. Go life drawing. Go to yoga. Learn how to be an electrician. Enrich your life with other skills that will shape you as a designer, not shoehorn you into a designer 'box'.

Let's not muddy the waters. In my mind, design practice – and when I say practice, I mean 'doing' – is not an academic pursuit; it's a practical exercise, is working with people to create beautiful, meaningful and purposeful things. For clients. For money. Let critical thought belong to the critics. Let design thinking – whatever that is – belong to the legions of designers too busy staring at their navels. Stop. Look at your work and do good work for good people. And then go home and do something else. Stop thinking about design, and look around.

But this is my journey. Go and have your own.



WE LIVE IN THE FUTURE

BY BRENDAN DAWES

Take a moment to look around you and you'll see we're continually surrounded by magical objects, systems and devices ripped from the pages of a Ray Bradbury novel. Giant image walls that feed us information and entertain us in our homes; impossibly small, wafer-thin screens that fit in our pocket and connect us to people and services no matter where we are; interfaces that can be controlled by seemingly manipulating the air around us; personal desktop thing-making machines that can make physical objects appear at the press of a button. These are all things which are everyday and commonplace—or soon will be, sometime around tea time next week.

SIMPLICITY

However, within this world of multifunction-do-anything devices I believe there is still a beauty in an object that does one thing and one thing well; a beauty born from being selfish and single minded; that celebrates its simplistic arrogance. The older I get the more obsessed I become about simplicity and the removal of superfluous details so a product or service can be as perfect as it can be. In order

for me to become better, and make better more simplistic things, I have to do two things—*learn* and *make*. Learning for me means observing and soaking up the often humble yet beautiful objects that we bump into everyday. Like the genius of the pull-tab on that can of Coke, the brilliance of the flat-bottomed brown paper bag, or the quiet elegance found in a pencil—an object with so much affordance built into its form that it's scary. How many objects do you know you can snap into many parts and it still work? Of course, none of these things have anything to do with so called *web design* yet are everything to do with design and user experience.

MAKING IS LEARNING

However, the most important thing for me to do to become better is to simply *make*. I have to practice the craft of making in many forms, whether that's making a website, making an iPhone app, making a hand-made paperback notebook or making something with Play-Doh. Making things is good, equally ideas without making are just intentions and intentions never changed anything.

So, born from my obsession with the concept of “an object that does

one thing and one thing well”, I've been exploring the idea of creating objects that are a celebration of less features = better product. From a design process point of view it's paradoxically much more liberating working within a set of predefined constraints, none more so than a product that only does one thing.

SAY HELLO TO FIDO

FIDO (Frugal Internet Data Object) is an Internet connected display system that uses laser engraved wooden discs to communicate information. In its present form FIDO displays the day's weather forecast for Manchester (where I work) in the form of icons together with a coloured light that matches the temperature chart from The Weather Channel. When the button is pressed the box goes onto the web, gets the information it needs then rotates the disc so the relevant icon is shown through the single hole on the front of the box. It's what I like to think of as a curiously selfish cube, comfortable in its single-minded mission to do one thing.

The use of laser engraved wood within the design is an extreme constraint that I imposed on the design. It would have been far easier to

create an LCD display but I already have one of those—it's called a phone. LCDs also allow for more flexibility yet I weirdly wanted less flexibility. It forced me to think of a design solution that had real finality to it; there was no way I could change my mind on the design of the icons or what those icons were once the laser burnt the graphics into the wood. I really liked that, especially coming from a digital space that is so easily changeable.

But what I love about this box is its outward simplicity. Press button, get answer, get on with your life. Not, “choose options, press one for that, two for this” or any of that nonsense. Simple as it can be, though lets not forget, you could just look out of the window—that's the simplest form of weather forecast! The idea though is this box could be anything. Change the discs, change the logic that it connects to, and boom—a simple Internet connected object that does it's job without fuss.

The process of making FIDO and other other things like it, be they physical or digital, continues to educate me about the importance of simplicity and how good design is not about adding things but is always about taking things away.

I WROTE A BUNCH OF STUFF,
BUT MY COMPUTER CRASHED & I
LOST IT ALL. PAPER DOESN'T CRASH,
SO HERE WE ARE... ANY WAY, I
PRETTY MUCH JUST SAID THIS:

LET'S SLOW DOWN

AND LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT
WHAT WE'RE MAKING
AND MAYBE ASK OURSELVES:

DOES THIS HELP US
TO LIVE BETTER?

THAT'S IT. THANKS FOR READING.

YOURS,
FRANK CHIMERO

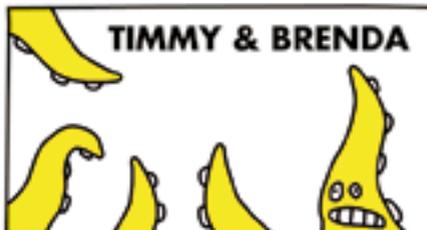
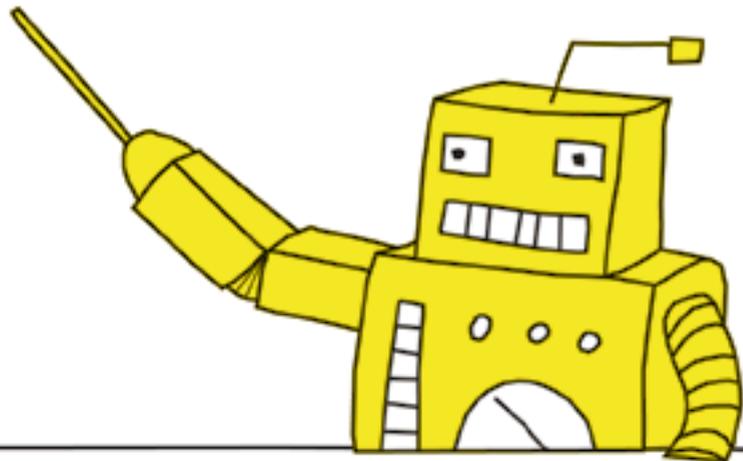
THE CENTERFOLD!!

PLEASE FORGIVE ENJOY THIS BRIEF LAPSE INTO:

ASTUTE WISDOM

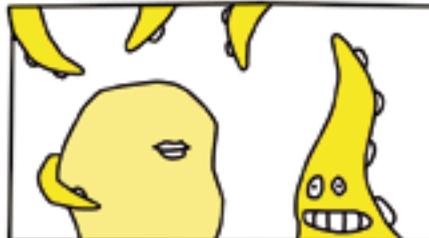
~~INANITY~~

~~POINTLESSNESS~~



Timmy Tentacles was tired of his tentacles. There were far too many of them, and they were too slimy even for the slimiest residents of Slimeville. His father had forbid him to have any of the tentacles removed as an issue of pride, and Timmy was very depressed. All he wanted was someone to breed with.

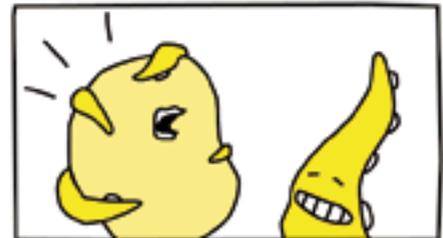
One day, whilst simultaneously gliding and crawling across rooftops the way only a tentacled creature can, he saw a lovely looking blob strutting along the street. In a move so out of character, Timmy descended to talk to her, and charmed her no less. Her name was Brenda, she had no eyes and she was beautiful.



And so Brenda and Timmy Tentacles embarked upon a beautiful romance. All Timmy had to do was keep most of his tentacles to himself, and because Brenda couldn't see them, she wouldn't find him grotesque as his other potential girlfriends had.

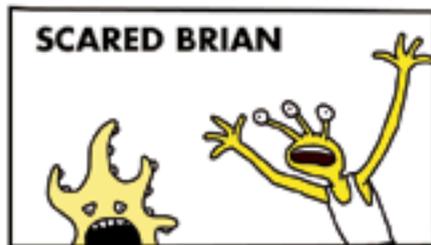
The happy couple dated for ten months, and they had never been happier. They were young and in love; everything was perfect.

One day, during a gloriously sunny Summer, Timmy Tentacles proposed to Brenda Blob over a picnic at the park, and to his delight she accepted immediately. The wedding was to take place in a week, so preparations began in earnest.



Timmy was extremely nervous on the big day, but the service went smoothly and soon the happy couple were rushing to the honeymoon suite to consummate their marriage. Brenda was looking so striking that Timmy, without thinking, gave her a hug using his previously out-of-sight tentacles.

Naturally, Brenda freaked out. She thought Timmy was involving her in group sex activities, which was just not her style at all! She left him before they had chance to consummate the marriage, and Timmy Tentacles ended up spending the rest of his days alone, resentful of his tentacles, his only company.



Brian was not having a fun time. He was scared of almost everything, and couldn't get on with his life. His constant state of fear made it very difficult to meet any new friends.

Desperate to be normal, he visited his friend Carlos, who was Jamaican and the coolest kid in town.

"Carlos" Brian pleaded, "Why am I so frightened of everything I see?"

"Well," replied Carlos, "We do live in a very scary world. The other day I saw a nice old lady get eaten by dogs."

"DOGS!? I didn't even know we had dogs in town! What if one of them looks at me!?" Brian started to panic more than ever, his eyeballs nearly rattling out of thier sockets.



"Chillax, man" crooned Carlos, "I have some ideas". And so they set off into the countryside, where the roads were quieter and the people were odd. They visited a rabbit sanctuary, as Carlos was convinced that not even Brian could be scared of the cute, fluffy rabbits. "THEIR EARS ARE TOO LONG!" Brian had screamed in terror, whilst running away.

Next, Carlos took them to a nice country pub. With its relaxed, friendly atmosphere and cozy log fires, Carlos was sure a pint would calm Brian down. But sure enough, Brian was soon scared witless again, running away as fast as he could, yelling "HOW MUCH!?"



But Carlos would not be defeated so easily. With a gleam in his eye he took Brian to the B-Movie theatre. For a whole afternoon, the two friends shared their fright with audiences as they watched evil monsters terrorise citizens and breathe fire. Scared as he was, Brian seemed comforted at the fact that his fright now seemed justified. He began to visit the movie theatre regularly, and when a cleaning position came up, he quit his job at the zoo and applied immediately.

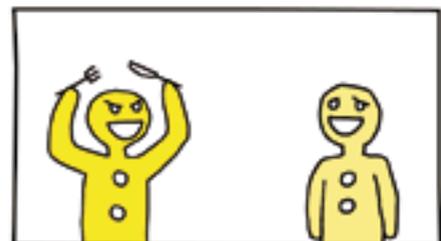
Despite the fact that he was now cleaning up popcorn and vomit for a living, Brian was happy for the first time in his life.



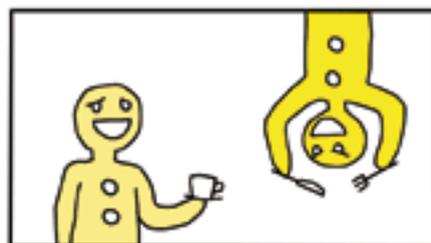
Vincent was not a nice gingerbread man. Unlike many of his peers who seemed to enjoy being helpful, cute and delicious, Vincent was an evil, manipulative serial killer.



He ate his victims, not as a statement against the purpose of a gingerbread man, but because he enjoyed the taste of fear. He'd even eaten squids and a Brachiosaurus in his time.



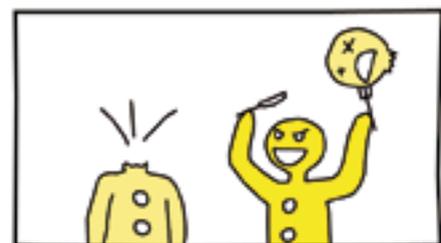
Vincent had a twin brother called Vern, who was the exact opposite of Vincent. Vern was a caring, patient and kindly gingerbread man who volunteered at the local cat sanctuary.



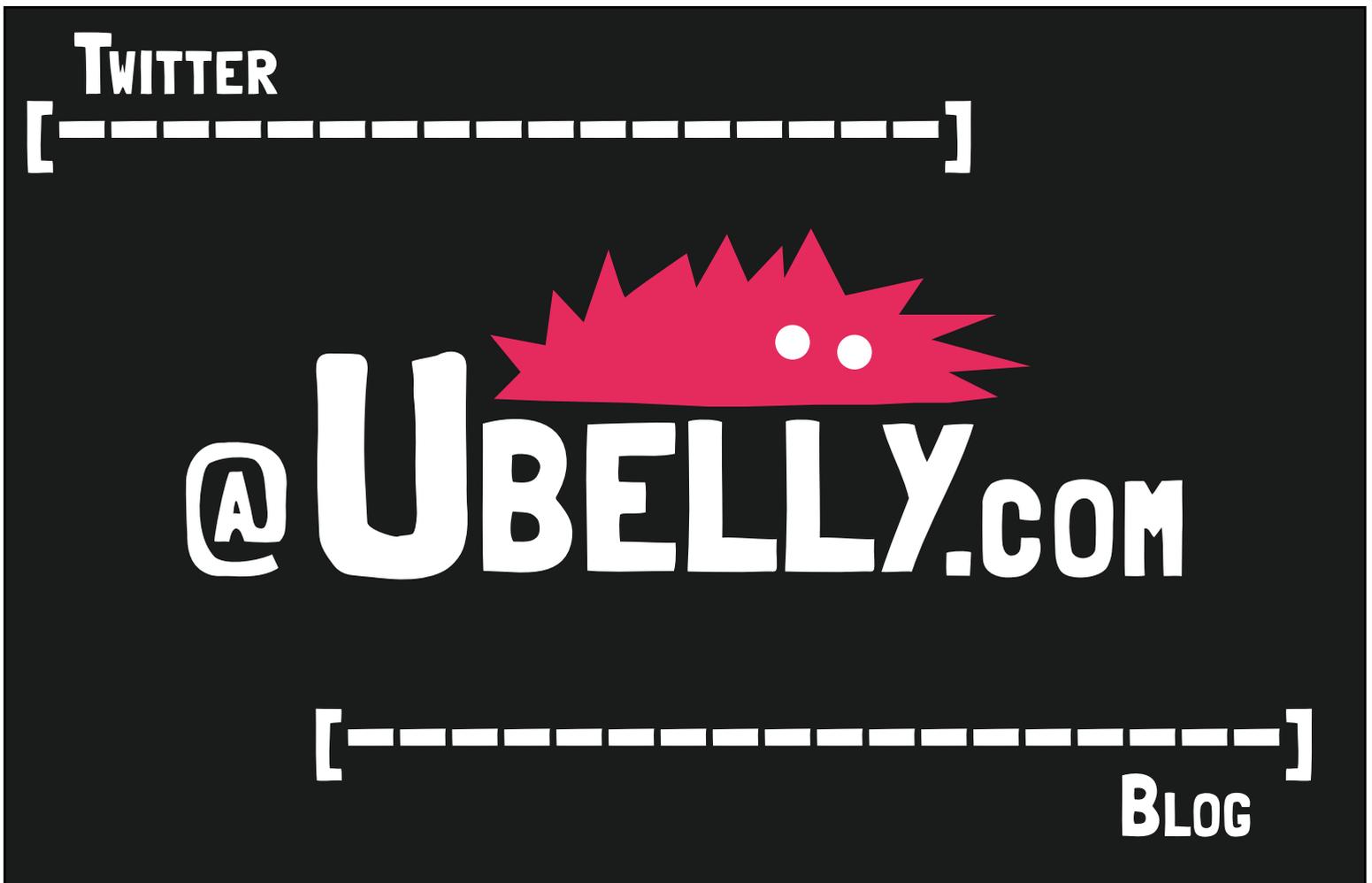
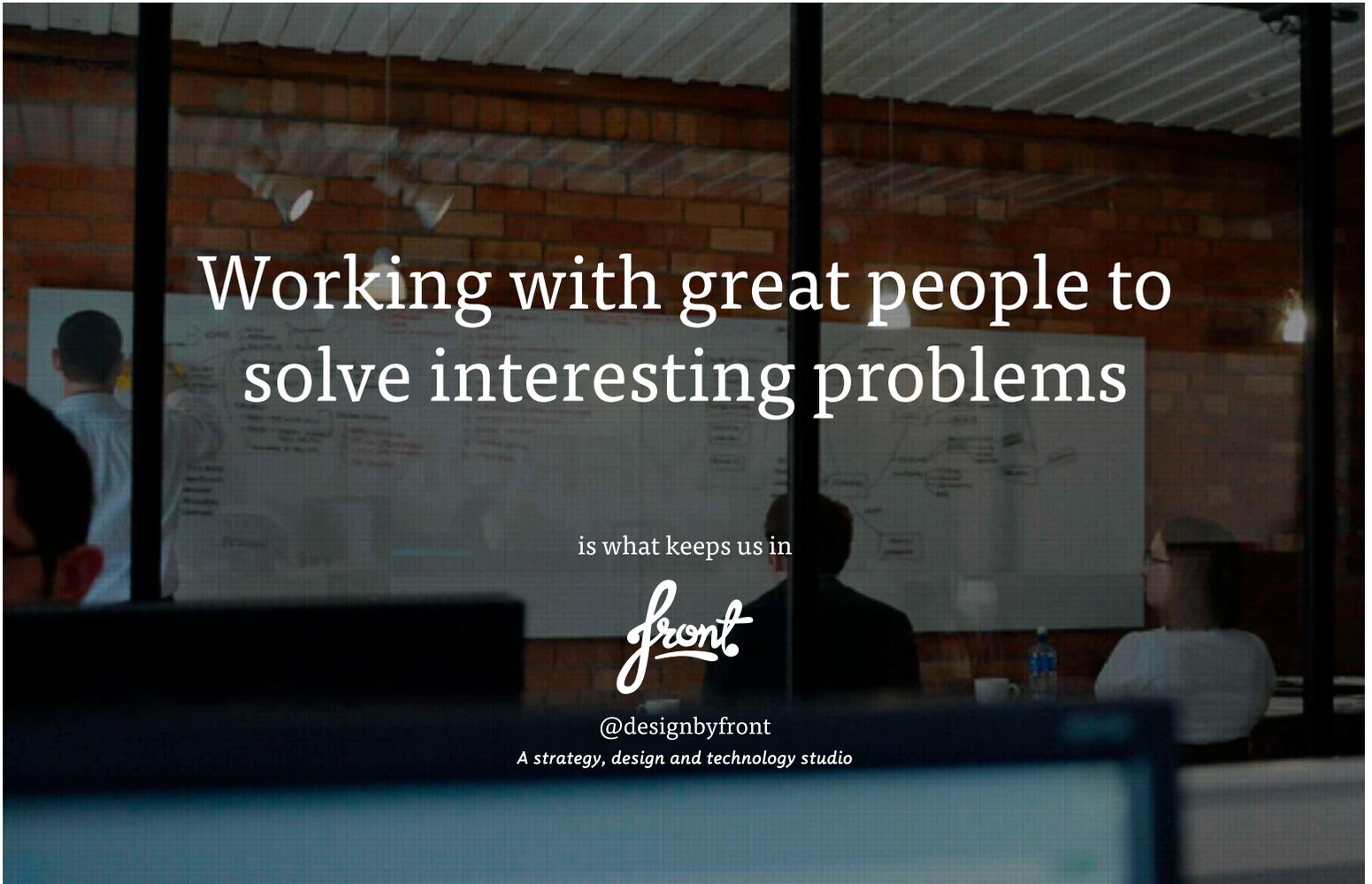
One sunny day, Vern went round to Vincent's house to enjoy a cup of Earl Grey with his brother, and as usual attempted to persuade him away from his evil ways.



"It's not as if you weren't given the right opportunities in life, Vincent" Vern said earnestly. "I know you can be good; I can see a kind heart in you, you're just afraid to use it."



Because of Vern's tendency to see good in everything, he overlooked the fact that his twin had always been pure evil. Vincent overpowered and ate his twin brother. He was delicious.



JACK A NORY

BY JON TAN

Stories are everywhere. When they don't exist we make up the narrative — we join the dots. We make cognitive leaps and fill in the bits of a story that are implied or missing. The same goes for websites. We make quick judgments based on a glimpse. Then we delve deeper. The narrative unfolds, or we create one as we browse.

Mark Bernstein penned *Beyond Usability and Design: The Narrative Web for A List Apart* in 2001. He wrote, 'the reader's journey through our site is a narrative experience'.¹ I agree wholeheartedly: Websites are narrative spaces where stories can be enacted, or emerge.

Henry Jenkins, Director of Comparative Media Studies, and Professor of Literature at MIT, wrote *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*. He suggested we think of game designers, 'less as storytellers than as narrative architects'. I think web designers are narrative architects, too. (Along with all the multitude of other roles we assume.) Much of what Henry Jenkins wrote applies to modern web design. In particular, he describes two kinds of narratives in game design that are relevant to us:

Enacted narratives are those where:

*'[...] the story itself may be structured around the character's movement through space and the features of the environment may retard or accelerate that plot trajectory.'*²

Sites like Amazon, New Adventures, or your portfolio are enacted narrative spaces: Shops or service brochures that want the audience to move through the site towards a specific set of actions such as buying something or initiating contact.

Emergent narratives are those where:

'[...] spaces are designed to be rich with narrative potential, enabling

*the story-constructing activity of players.'*²

Sites like Flickr, Tumblr, or Dribbble are emergent narrative spaces: Web applications that encourage their audience to use the tools at their disposal to tell their own story. The audience defines how *they* want to use the narrative space, often with surprising results.

We often build both kinds of narrative spaces. Right now, my friends and I at Analog are working on Mapalong,³ a new maps-based app that's just launched into private beta. At its heart, Mapalong is about telling our stories. It's one big map with a set of tools to view the world, add places, share them, and see the places others share. The aim is to help people tell their stories.

We want to use three ideas to help you do that: Space (recording places, and annotating them), data (importing stuff we create elsewhere), and time (plotting our journeys, and recording all the places, people, and memories along the way). We know that people will find novel uses for the tools in Mapalong. In fact, we want them to because it will help us refine and build better tools. We work in an agile way because that's the only way to design an emerging narrative space. Without realising it we've become architects of a narrative space, and you probably are, too.

Many projects like shops or brochure sites have fixed costs and objectives. They want to guide the audience to a specific set of actions. The site needs to be an enacted narrative space. Ideally, designers would observe behaviour and iterate. Failing that, a healthy dose of empathy can serve. Every site seeks to teach, educate, or inform. So, a bit of knowledge about people's learning styles can be useful. I once did a course in one to one and small group training with the

Chartered Institute of Personal and Development. It introduced me to Peter Honey and Alan Mumford's model⁴ which describes four different learning styles that are useful for us to know:

1. **Activists** like learning as they go; getting stuck in and working it out:

*'Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now, and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new.'*⁴

2. **Reflectors** like being guided with time to take it all in and perhaps return later:

*'Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to a conclusion.'*⁴

3. **Theorists** to understand and make logical sense of things before they leap in:

*'Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories.'*⁴

4. **Pragmatists** like practical applications of ideas, experiments, and results:

*'Pragmatists are keen on trying out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications.'*⁴

Usually people share two or more of these qualities. The weight of

each can vary depending on the context.

Activists like to explore, learn as they go, and wander the site working it out. They need good in-context navigation to keep exploring. For example, signposts to related information are optimal for activists. They can just keep going, and going, and exploring until sated.

Reflectors are patient and thoughtful. They like to ponder, read, reflect, then decide. Guided tours to orientate them in emergent sites can be a great help. Saving shopping baskets for later, and remembering sessions in enacted sites can also help them.

Theorists want logic. Documentation. An understanding of what the site is, and what they might get from it. Clear, detailed information helps a theorist, whatever the space they're in.

Pragmatists get stuck in like activists, but evaluate quickly, and test their assumptions. They are quick, and can be helped by uncluttered concise information, and contextual, logical tools.

I hope you find these ideas useful enough to bear in mind. If Henry Jenkins is right about games designers, I think he could also be right about all designers: we are narrative architects, designing spaces where stories will be told.

1 <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/narrative/>

2 <http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>

3 <http://mapalong.com/>

4 Extracts from Peter Honey and Alan Mumford's definition (1986). Expanded: http://www.pd-how2.org/2_8.htm



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AND THE MOON HELD THE POET

SUBJECTIVE ATTACHMENT IN COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

BY JASON CALE

Solitary creation gives birth to ideas with an umbilical noose; once nourishing, it now slowly strangles. How can we learn to cut the cord and free the creations we so personally create?

Ideas are not of independent origination, but manifestations of shared understanding. A successful design will communicate its purpose effortlessly: a button on a form, a handle on a mug and a plug in a bathtub should all convey intent. The form and function reflects the solution not merely the designer. To express ourselves fully through design is not the same as perceiving our designs as a reflection of self.

SUBJECTIVITY

As designers, we use experience and skill to create forms that aesthetically communicate and endure function. Our subjectivity, uniqueness and individuality are all contributing assets in our ability to generate ideas. But this can come at a price. Subjectivity is difficult to balance, experience becomes stubbornness, achievement can invite arrogance. Our pride and vanity can lead us

to stagnate by simply clinging to what we know and what we see as 'ours'. We ignore and starve others of contribution, failing to see that it is through others that our work will flourish.

We unconsciously weave our emotions, decisions and identity into everything we do, forgetting that our colleagues, clients and users are also vital contributors in the creation of our work. Tightly bound to our convictions and decisions, judgements become personal.

We should aim to release ourselves from the limitations of egotism, while acknowledging the importance of our individual experience; by contributing to a group effort we are not giving up our valuable contributions as individuals.

ATTACHMENT

We can also recognise our attachment to an idea as a form of control. Our desire to realise the best possible outcome often means a clumsy, brutish endeavour; grasped with both hands and narrow gaze. We take fewer risks, doubt ourselves

more and our experimentation is diluted by our own fear of failure. When working in isolation, our decisions become personal and others sense that. An idea created in isolation rarely invites constructive change from others — even when asked for — for fear of hurt feelings.

Seeing our work through the participatory eyes of the collective dissolves fear and ego, opening the possibility to try things we wouldn't have the confidence or insight to do in isolation.

Participants who actively share and learn together are able to communicate honestly and clearly. When something unexpected happens, they react, adapt and move on together. Anything done in isolation should be offered back regularly with the freedom to change without fear, as continually sharing ownership amongst all participants promotes collective responsibility for failure and success. Freedom in experimentation is built through confidence in failure without fear. Failure should be seen as an exploration of real value instead of

time lost. Rejection ceases to be so personal.

PERSONALITY, OBJECTIVITY

Our individual style and personality are important factors when working with others. We win work, build trust and reputation by being who we are so we shouldn't confuse 'letting go of ego' with renouncing style, conviction or the ability to stand up and say what is right or how we feel. A movement towards objectivity allows our ideas to develop organically with the help of others. Pure objectivity will never be fully realised, but we can create a space in which to deconstruct and rebuild our ideas together without fear or prejudice.

We have the opportunity to really see our clients, colleagues and users as equal design participants — realised through perception, interaction and even confusion. By understanding our subjectivity, and attempting to let go of our attachments, we are open to the possibility of a balanced vision — one that embraces collaboration with grace, elegance and maturity.



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ESTABLISHING A VISUAL GRAMMAR

BY THE STANDARDISTAS

Having a great idea doesn't always translate to a great design. Fantastic, original concepts can still end up as run-of-the-mill executions, merely leaning on recent trends and contemporary visual approaches. What is essential to any project is to define a visual grammar to clothe your idea and give it form, dressing it for the occasion, so that it stands out from the visual crowd.

In this short tract, we'll explore a two-step method you can use to establish a distinctive visual language that sets you apart from your peers, often over-reliant on the latest visual trends.

After defining your idea – a topic we wrote about recently for *24 Ways* 2010, in an article titled *Good Ideas Grow on Paper* (<http://24ways.org/201013>) – you need to establish a visual grammar that's appropriate to the task at hand. The visual manifestation of your idea can take a number of forms and, as ever, an informed decision can only be reached by conducting research. So, how do you begin to define a visual grammar that's appropriate?

THE HUNTER-GATHERER

The first, and most important stage, is to look beyond the computer. In any project the over-riding temptation is often to fire up Mr Google, and enter the 'query of your choice'. The problem with this approach, however, is that the material you inevitably return is pre-filtered, passed through a mechanical sieve and defined by the logic of algorithms within a computer.

The key to finding a unique visual language appropriate to your idea, is to sidestep the mechanical filter and undertake the filtration yourself. The finding and sifting should be through you, not through

the industrial sieves of Messrs Google, FFFFound or Flickr.

At this stage, it's important to return to primary sources, visual stimuli that are informed by the ideas you've established. The easiest way to introduce new material is to return to primary research and, in so doing, uncover new, less explored visual approaches.

Whilst it's true that sites like Pattern Tap (<http://patterntap.com/>) can offer a valuable insight into established design patterns – something that, at the right time in the process, is extremely useful – the key at this stage is to look beyond the screen and find something new to inspire your visual approach. So, where do you start?

One technique we recommend is what we call the iPhone Rapid Scrapbook™ technique. This methodology, simple in its approach, is a powerful one for gathering visual stimuli. The procedure is simple and involves nothing more than an iPhone* and, dare we say it, a trip to the library.

Roaming around the dusty shelves of a well-stocked library is always a pleasure, and when using the iPhone Rapid Scrapbook™ technique with our students, we've found that the results without fail bring out unexpected and rewarding results.

The key here is to undertake applied research and use your camera as an impromptu digital scrapbook. By embracing this approach, the results will often prove serendipitous, chance discoveries of the sort rarely uncovered by the machine intelligence of search engines. Your idea should have focused you down to a field of opportunity and, like a hunter with his flint-headed spear, you should use your hunting tool, the camera, to gather visual raw material

centred around that idea.

All this should take no more than half an hour and the fresh visual inputs gathered should be enough to bring you to the next stage of our journey: the cataloguing and organisation of the visual inputs you've accrued.

THE LIBRARIAN

Once you've gathered a range of visual material, the next phase is to refine your collection by applying some organising and categorising principles. Looking at the material you've gathered, find common themes or linkages. This stage is critical and lies at the heart of discovering an emerging and cohesive visual grammar which can be applied in the service of your idea.

Like a librarian, the key is to take existing knowledge and apply an organisational framework to it. The librarian's role is to find commonalities and, in so doing, tease out connections. Just as in a library we can use the Dewey Decimal Classification (<http://j.mp/dewey-decimalssystem>) to group related elements, we can use this stage of the creative process to find common visual themes that might offer inspiration when moving from the idea phase into the design phase.

Our goal is now to 'clothe' the idea, to create a well-tailored suit that will do your idea justice and dress it in the attire that sets it apart from other superficial, off-the-peg approaches.

There are numerous systems for cataloguing and organising visual information. You might use iPhoto, Flickr or a giant Photoshop canvas. The outcome, however, is more important than the perfection of the process. Create your own system and find your own tools to apply your organisational logic. The principles you should consider

are simple: the goal of organising is to help your brain find connections that you can explore further in the design process; keep things simple, work fast and don't over-intellectualise.

The outcome of the process should be to define a series of visual or conceptual rules to govern the visual grammar that will best service your idea. Ask yourself: What design cues emerge from your research? What connections arise from your visual scrapbook? How might you apply the visual grammar that is emerging to your idea?

WRAPPING UP

To summarise, once you have your idea, resist the urge to clothe it in the latest visual fashions. Your goal is to stand out from the crowd, wearing a bespoke suit, finely tailored to your needs. The two, intertwined, techniques we've introduced offer you a way to discover fresh visual inputs and, in so doing, establish an appropriate visual grammar that ensures your work has its own unique, and appropriate, visual flavour.

By following these principles – going straight to the source through primary research and becoming the filter and, in so doing, discovering unexpected visual associations – you'll find the visual approaches you apply in the service of your ideas are enhanced, setting you apart from your peers.

We wish you well on your quest in search of the perfect visual grammar, now armed with the knowledge that the best place to begin that quest lies beyond the computer.

* You can substitute any camera of your choice, but the iPhone works very well, with a display that's well suited for a quick flick through the results of your hunting expedition.

ATTENDEES

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