NEW ADVENTURES IN WEB DESIGN
CONTRIBUTORS

THE HEADS OF STATE
Designers / Illustrators

For 10 years, Jason Kernevich and Dustin Summers have been working together as The Heads of State. They’ve created award-winning posters, book covers, branding systems, and illustrations for a diverse list of clients. In 2012, they launched Pilot and Captain, a design venture focused on creating products inspired by the golden age of travel. They live and work in Philadelphia, where they also teach graphic design and illustration at the Tyler School of Art.

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CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

Christopher Murphy is a Senior Lecturer teaching Interactive Design at the University of Ulster. He is also a practicing designer whose work spans a variety of media, informing his work as an educator.

Creative Review described him as, “a William Morris for the digital age,” an epithet he aspires to fulfil daily. He has his finger in a lot of pies including publishing the world’s most compact typography journal, ‘Glyph’ (http://getglyph.org), and building Get Invited (http://getinvited.to), a ticketing application that is focused on simplicity. He’s always busy, which – on balance – is a good thing.

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Creative type

Elliot is a designer, author, and speaker. He is the founder of typography magazine 8 Faces and one half of Viewport Industries.

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KEIR WHITAKER
Web developer and publisher

Keir is a Bath, UK based web developer. He is the co-founder of Viewport Industries, a small company focused on producing physical and digital goods for the web community including the recently published Insites: The Book. He also works closely with Shopify in the role of Design Advocate.

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Designer

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GERI COADY
Designer and Illustrator

Geri is a designer and illustrator in Newfoundland, Canada. She loves chatting about nerdy things, and has been seen both on the stage and in the crowd (where she’s most likely to have a camera around her neck).

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SAM HAMPTON-SMITH
Designer, Developer, Author, Photographer and Daddy

Sam is a freelance designer and developer based in Scotland. As well as client work, he teaches design at UHI and writes for numerous magazines. Sam trained as a print designer with a bank before setting up his design studio in 2001.

@samhs

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EDITORIAL

HELLO ONE LAST TIME. Yes, it’s the last New Adventures in Web Design, but not necessarily our last adventure. More on that later. First, let’s go back a few months.

Familiar tale: this nearly didn’t happen. Spring arrived and I was again unsure whether we could or should do it. You may recall that I’d toyed with the event being a one-off, but that Greg had convinced me we should go ahead. Of course, he was right. Without question, since Greg came on board my workload is less and the event much smoother, but even so I had my doubts about a third.

For some reason, I couldn’t picture it. I dreaded the months of work on top of existing and new commitments. I also had an irrational fear that something big could go wrong. As we go to press all is well, but perhaps apocalyptic snow drifts or a volcano will yet scupper our plans.

I also wondered what more we could offer within our relatively narrow seam of thoughtful design discussion with a web design audience. Numerous themes and topics have been done to death recently, and I was fearful of adding more noise, or simply putting on the event for the sake of it.

To add to my concerns, we got off to a difficult start this time. We launched six weeks later than planned. Some speakers had to decline our invitations. There have been unexpected cancellations and logistical problems. The list is long.

Still, like all worthwhile endeavours, everything suddenly came together. There’s a moment when the workload seems insurmountable but suddenly gets surpassed by a tsunami of excitement, and that’s worth every ounce of effort.

We’re especially grateful to Laura for joining the team and diving in to the less glamorous aspects of organising a conference. Her help has been invaluable, leaving Greg and I to focus on the bigger picture, specifically having silly ideas and designing stuff.

Jon is the only person to take our stage twice, and he was the first person we asked as his recent type explorations are wonderful. And, for the first time ever, we actually have code on screen, courtesy of Seb. But it’s no ordinary code, and we think it’ll be a great fit on the day.

I could justify every speaker, and talk more about our brilliant workshops, but space is tight. Let’s just say we love this lineup. The topics are varied, but we hope there’s a noticeable theme around taking risks, overcoming obstacles and making positive changes. If you’re restless or seek more rewarding work, we hope to push you closer to doing something about that.

THE PAPER

We’re thrilled The Heads of State found time to design our cover. I’ve long been a fan of their gig posters and book covers and finally met them last Autumn. I asked if they’d do it, and they said yes. Cool story.

You might also be wondering why we devoted a few pages to an interview with ourselves. Well, with this being our fanfare it seemed appropriate to reflect on our highlights and also expose where we failed. It’s an honest piece, but hopefully encourages some more of you to hold your own meetups, hackathons, sleepovers or even conferences. Huge thanks to Elliot and Keir for the probing questions.

We’ve also got our usual mix of illustration and articles alongside all the conference-specific stuff, expertly shuffled into newspaper form by our design backbone and best friend Oliver Wood.

FUTURE ADVENTURES?

After this week we make a little space for our friends at dConstruct, Reasons to be Creative, Industry, Build (also in it’s final year) and many more, plus overseas gatherings such as Beyond Tellerrand, Ready To Inspire, Interlink and all the other brilliant events, each deserving of your hard-earned money if our absence should make you weep.

Like the best bands we’ll quit before things decline. We’re not sure what the future holds, but New Adventures was always designed to work beyond just a traditional web conference, and it may well evolve into “New Something else”. For example, we’ve long talked of an online publication of some kind.

We’re also interested to see how creative folks from outside our expected remit play out to web audiences, which is why you’ll find the brilliant Wayne Hemingway on our lineup. He’s very much relevant to our themes, but also a litmus test with a view to bringing an entirely unexpected lineup of non-webbies to web audiences; sort of like Brooklyn Beta or dConstruct but without any techies whatsoever. I’d love to put film directors, artists, chefs and a variety of unexpected polymaths in front of you one day.

Conversely, there’s also talk of taking web design to non-web design audiences, such as graphic design and print crowds. I presented to such an audience in the US recently and found it incredibly rewarding to discuss the web with the sceptical or uninitiated. The web should seem welcoming and full of opportunity, but often it is misunderstood and undervalued by non-web designers. (Anyway, I “pinky swore” with Jessica Hische about this, so I guess we have to consider the idea.)

TIME TO REFOCUS

Ahead of all that, we’re taking at least a year off from any New Adventures activity. Greg and I became full-time partners with Fictive Kin in early 2012, and our ongoing projects are incredibly rewarding yet challenging; they demand a great deal of commitment. Making this event happen on top of all that was insane. A huge thank you to our colleagues for their support.

But enough speculation and excuses. Today you’re all with us once again, completing a trilogy of events that we’re incredibly proud of. New Adventures in Web Design has given us many moments of pleasure and pride, and when ideas aired at our event permeate the web dialogue beyond the Great Hall and inform our practice, we get a little tingly, truth be told.

So thank you, to every single one of you who supported us across the three events. We’ve one last incredible day for you, and we hope sincerely that you’ll enjoy it as much as we intend to.

Simon Collison
@colly
January 2013
SPEAKERS & WORKSHOPS

Jason Santa Maria is the founder and principal of Mighty, a Brooklyn-based design studio. He is creative director of Typekit, a faculty member in the MFA Interaction Design program at SVA, former vice president of AIGA/NY, founder of Typedia, and until recently creative director for A List Apart, a magazine for people who make websites. He discusses design on his award-winning website at jasonsantamaria.com.

Wayne Hemingway is a fashion designer and co-founder of Red or Dead. With his wife Gerardine, he built Red or Dead into a fashion label of global acclaim. He is also chairman of the South Coast Design Forum, and chair of Building For Life. In 1999, having sold Red or Dead he set up HemingwayDesign, which specializes in affordable and social design. Wayne and Gerardine were both appointed MBE in 2006 for services to the design industry.

Jessica Hische is a letterer and illustrator best known for her personal projects ‘Daily Drop Cap’ and the ‘Should I Work for Free?’ flowchart. Just six years out of college, she’s been named one of Print Magazine’s New Visual Artists and an ADC Young Gun, one of Forbes 30 under 30 in Art and Design, and currently serves on the TDC board of Directors. She has been profiled in many publications, traveled the world speaking about lettering and illustration, and probably consumed enough coffee to power a small nation.

Jon Tan is a designer and typographer working out of Mild Bunch HQ, the co-working studio he runs in Bristol, UK. He co-founded the web fonts service, Fontdeck, and is a partner in Fictive Kin, where he works with friends making things like Brooklyn Beta and Mapalong. He also writes for publications like The Manual, speaks at events like An Event Apart, and works with organisations like the BBC. He can often be found wrestling with his two sons, and losing.
Stephanie Troeth is a user experience strategist who loves maturing ideas and making things real. She has worn many hats, including a product lead for a startup in digital publishing and a studio director at a digital agency. She is also known for her grassroots contributions to best web practices through the Web Standards Project and the W3C. Well-travelled, and living on her fourth island, she speaks several flavours of English, a few languages, and possesses an indescribable accent.

Tiago Pedras is a web designer, teacher and entrepreneurship enthusiast from Porto, Portugal. He’s worked around the web since 1998, has been teaching web standards and good design practices at ESAD, Matosinhos since 2006 and founded his own web studio TPWD. His main focus is about thinking and developing positive experiences for users and making the web a tool for a better world.

Tyler Mincey worked at Apple for 5 years managing the engineering development of the touch screen for the first iPhone and the iPod product line. These days he works with good friends at Fictive Kin, building new web and mobile products, organizing Brooklyn Beta, and trying to live a life he’ll be proud to tell his grandchildren about. Oh, and his friends call him ... Tyler.

Seb Lee-Delisle is a creative coder, speaker and teacher, working across platforms including JavaScript, Processing and openFrameworks. He works to bring people together with large scale installations like PixelPhones, interactive firework displays or glow-stick voting systems (Seriously!). His work has pushed the boundaries of what is possible both on and off the web, and won two BAFTAs with Plug-in Media, the agency he co-founded in 2004. A sought-after speaker, his recent Creative JavaScript / HTML5 workshop series sold out within hours. He also co-hosts the Creative Coding Podcast.

Michael Heilemann grew up in Denmark, studied in Scotland, married a Brazilian, and currently lives in New York. He spent a decade making computer games such as Hitman and Kane & Lynch, before a growing obsession with content management systems and web development lured him away from his day job. Michael is known to some as the creator of ‘Kubrick’, a WordPress template that went on become the default template for all versions of WordPress since 1.5. Michael joined Squarespace in 2010 as Interface Director and oversaw the launch of Squarespace 6 in July 2012.

Sarah Parmenter is a User Interface designer specialising in iPhone and iPad UI Design. Sarah works as both a consultant and a designer to various brands in the UK and abroad as well as speaking at web related events worldwide. Sarah recently picked up the .net magazine award for “Designer of the Year”.

Stephanie Hay is a content and UX consultant whose clients include Happy Cog and UIE. Her articles have appeared in A List Apart, UX Magazine, and Web Standards Sherpa. She has also spoken at conferences such as Interlink, SXSWi and FOWD London. She co-founded two companies, is a resident mentor at 500 Startups, and is shit at football.

Andy Clarke is a designer at Stuff and Nonsense. Jeffrey Zeldman (the Godfather of web standards) once called him a “triple talented bastard.” If you know of Jeffrey, you’ll know how happy that made Andy. Over the last 14 years, Andy has made designs for amazing clients and written two books, ‘Transcending CSS’ and ‘Hardboiled Web Design’, as well as giving over 50 conference presentations and hosted workshops and training for other web professionals all over the world.
**Jason Santa Maria**

The Nimble Process

Design processes vary from person to person but there is always room to improve and evolve the way we work. We have many tools that help us achieve polished designs earlier than ever now, but knowing which tool or method to choose when can influence the strength of our ideas. Is analog better than digital? At what point do you start working in a browser, instead of Photoshop? In this talk, learn from Jason how getting ideas out quickly through prototyping, sketching, and iteration can help you work and test more quickly, while also working smarter.

**Tiago Pedras**

Responsive Teaching

We are used to the ever-changing dynamic nature of the web. It’s part of our jobs to keep accumulating fresh knowledge and to stay up-to-date with the new super-important ideas. The process of explaining this whole deal of “Web Design” to someone that is just starting out from a clean slate can be a daunting task, but it doesn’t need to be as slow and boring as every other old school class. Join Tiago as he explores if teaching Web Design can also be a responsive and adaptive process.

**Tyler Mincey**

Appropriate Tension

To solve meaningful problems for the people we care about, we need to excel at working together. Designing, building, distributing, and sustaining products require deep collaboration between an interdisciplinary team. Tyler will explore the characteristics of a team where everyone is a designer in their own right, and the requisite culture of respect and challenge, and of learning and teaching. With this experience comes the ability for a team to truly innovate, by moving constraints and not just designing within them.

**Michael Heilemann**

The Inertia of Ideas

There is a skill to listening to ideas as they unfold, both other people’s and your own. Michael will draw from his experiences in web development to present a brief guide on persevering through the chaos and darkness – and emerging victorious, before it’s too late.

**Stephanie Troeth**

The Beauty in the Impermanent

As designers, makers and creators, Stephanie states, we often think in terms of form and function – but, in this talk, asks us what about time? We tend to build and design as if time didn’t exist, as if everything were made of plastic that is to last for thousands of years. Could we perhaps learn from an ancient aesthetic movement that began in medieval Asia, and embrace impermanence in our digital world?

**Jon Tan**

Billboards and Novels

Journey into the science and technique of beautiful, functional type for the web. Jon will take you to explore the technical landscape of screen type, before a pleasurable detour into choosing good fonts for the work we face every day, and a final stop delving into science that will equip us to make the business case for beautiful web typography. By the end of your trip, you’ll have discovered the nuances of typesetting that can help employers and audiences get their work done, and enjoy what they’re doing along the way.

**Seb Lee-Delisle**

New Adventures in... Code!

When you mix creativity and code, exciting things happen. In this entertaining and down to earth presentation, Seb will show the best examples where creativity and code collide, and prove that it’s not that hard to extend your skills outside your comfort zone.

But Seb isn’t going to bully you into learning to code. Instead he’ll show you how easy it is to code some simple visual effects, and before you know it you’ll be a creative coder yourself. Expect some live (and therefore risky!) demos.

**Wayne Hemingway**

Wayne tells it like it is!

Legendary designer, Wayne Hemingway will be telling the story of how he and his wife Gerardine built Red or Dead into an international fashion label, from its humble origins as a stall on Camden Market, and then how they went on to create their current HemingwayDesign and Vintage brands across housing, interiors, products and fashion. Their story is one of bravery, risk-taking, vision and sheer hard graft.

**Jessica Hische**

Procrastiworking

Jessica Hische is a letterer — at least, that’s what she does to pay the bills — but aside from client work, for folks like Wes Anderson and Penguin Books, she has a second career as a professional “procrastiworker”. That is to say, someone that procrastinates from what they’re supposed to be working on by starting up other fun projects. In this talk, Jessica will explain why procrastiworking is the key to professional and personal happiness, take you through her process for side projects and client work from start to finish, and also talk about why sticking to plans or aspirations too strictly can be the quickest way to kill your enthusiasm.
SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY 23RD JANUARY

0800 .................. Registration
0900 .................. Workshops
1900 .................. Second Wednesday
2000 .................. Erskine Bowling

THURSDAY 24TH JANUARY

The Conference

0830 .................. Registration
0930 .................. Opening remarks
0945 .................. The Nimble Process ......................... Jason Santa Maria
1030 .................. Appropriate Tension ......................... Tyler Mincey
1100 .................. The Inertia of Ideas ......................... Michael Heilemann
1115 .................. Refreshments ................................. Courtesy of Hoefler & Frere-Jones
1145 .................. Responsive Teaching ....................... Tiago Pedras
1215 .................. Billboards and Novels ....................... Jon Tan
1300 .................. Lunch in a bag (provided)
1400 .................. New Adventures in... Code! ............... Seb Lee-Delisle
1445 .................. The Beauty in the Impermanent .......... Steph Troeth
1530 .................. Refreshments ................................. Courtesy of Hoefler & Frere-Jones
1615 .................. Wayne tells it like it is! ................. Wayne Hemingway
1645 .................. Procrastiworking ......................... Jessica Hische
1745 .................. Closing remarks
1930 .................. After-party (please wear your name badge)

FRIDAY 25TH JANUARY

1000 .................. Photowalk with Dan and Naomi
1300 .................. Frootball championships
A SHARED FUTURE

CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

The landscape of interactive design is one characterised by constant flux; it’s changing and evolving at a rate we have never experienced before. Few, if any, industries reinvent themselves yearly, monthly, weekly, etc. Ours is one of these industries. It’s an industry that, thanks to its global and connected nature, forces us to rethink the manner in which we shape and grow it almost daily.

With this relentless change, our industry faces a challenge to find fresh creatives, with the complex skillsets required to thrive and flourish, who underpin our rapidly growing sector. How do we create these people?

Many argue that education is broken and that a better route towards excellence is to eschew formal education altogether, in favour of hands-on experience learned en route. I think that’s an over-simplified and short-sighted view. Education – and educators – must play a critical role in the growth of our sector, helping to shape it and define it. I believe we can move forward faster, together, if we rethink education and the opportunities it offers our industry.

Education can take many forms – formal and directed; informal and self-directed – both have their place in a richer, reimagined learning environment. It’s never been a more exciting time to learn and it’s never been a more exciting time to rethink learning.

Formal education focused on interactive design needs to change, dramatically and urgently.

As an educator who maintains an ongoing practice as a designer, working day-to-day on hands-on projects, I believe that education must play a role in the growth of our industry, however, I believe education must change. All too often, academics are detached from the everyday reality of industry, cloistered in a comfortable world of theory and divorced from practice. That separation of theory and practice leads to educators who are often unable to equip their students with the real-world knowledge they, and our industry, needs today.

Academia – for far too long isolated in its ivory towers – suffers from numerous problems, not least an often wilful dislocation from the coalface of industry and a pace of change that is self-servingly glacial, where innovation is all too often crushed by over-hierarchical structures which stifle the agile approach we need to embrace to keep pace with the rapid changes our industry is undergoing.

To address our industry’s needs we need to dissolve the boundaries that exist between academia and industry and forge partnerships that enable us to progress more quickly, evolving a richer curriculum that serves not only industry now, but industry as it might become.

We need to build a shared platform for the future, equipping the designers and developers of tomorrow with the skills they need to thrive and flourish in a landscape we can, in the here and now, barely imagine. We need to equip them with a rare quality: inquisitiveness.

How might we shape a shared future? One answer might lie in widening the pool of educators contributing their knowledge within an educational environment. Working hand-in-hand, academia and industry might develop mentoring programmes, pairing younger, emerging practitioners with older, experienced practitioners. There exists a rich seam of knowledge within industry that we could tap into to create richer learning experiences that are more engaging and, crucially, fit for purpose.

Our community – one characterised by sharing – offers us a rich pool of potential mentors from which to draw. Academia should embrace this talent.

In his excellent book ‘Mastery’ (http://j.mp/greeneonmastery), Robert Greene explores the dynamic of the mentor-protégé relationship, encouraging a return to a master-apprentice model of learning. Greene states: “Mentors streamline the process [of learning]. They invariably had their own mentors, giving them a richer and deeper knowledge of their field. Their knowledge and experience become yours; they direct you away from unnecessary side paths or errors.”

Mentors draw from lived experience. They can help shape and facilitate learning, acting as catalysts for change, enriching learning by moving beyond curricula and sharing the lessons of life. Mentors needn’t be ‘designer celebrities’, they simply need experience and a willingness to share and nurture the next generation of talent. By embracing the mentor-protégé model we can weave a rich tapestry of learning, for the benefit of all.

We only have so long on this earth and we should strive to make a difference.

As Trent Walton put it in his excellent article, ‘You Are What You Eat’ (http://j.mp/waltononpractice), the average US citizen can look forward to just 28,616 breakfasts in their lifetime. When you start to think about it – remembering the breakfasts you already have under your belt – you begin to realise time is a limited resource, and you need to make every day count.

Time is finite, we cannot escape it. As Steve Jobs so eloquently put it, we should strive, “to make a dent in the universe,” but perhaps we can – and should – make a larger dent, by working collectively, embracing a collaborative approach towards shaping our industry and its future.

We all, regardless of background, have a duty to help shape our industry. The old-fashioned, and largely unhelpful, chasm between academia and industry isn’t working and we should seek to bridge this divide to shape our collective opportunity. We all have a responsibility to find ways to close the gap; our industry needs to shape these new models of learning.

By taking an active role in education, we can all play a part in the development of our industry – and we should. We need to rally together to collectively shape our future. We are navigators. We are shaping what comes next, mapping pathways that others follow; let’s embrace the opportunities and make a difference. This is our industry. This is our responsibility. Public. Private. Academia. Industry. Let’s dissolve the boundaries and work together to shape a shared future.

The Mentor-Protégé Relationship

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Quality ideas, fantastic design, brilliant development, tireless support. eCommerce experts you can work with.

jh
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@wearejh

Celebrate!
British type design
Manually hinted, screen optimised
Preview on your website for free
Pay only for the fonts you need, when you need them
The world’s leading independent web font service.
fontdeck.com
TEN YEARS OF MISADVENTURES

DANIEL BENNEWORTH-GRAY

2004

Look at me, I have a weblog! Just what I need! It’s like what that Plastic Bag fellow has. The opportunities are endless. I’ll chronicle life in 21st century Britain, like Samuel Pepys two-point-oh (everything is two-point-oh these days). BinkytheDoormat.com: my own personal soapbox from which to tell everyone about the brilliance of Johnny Boy’s You Are The Generation That Bought More Shoes And You Get What You Deserve. It’s vital that I get on board the Johnny Boy thing now. They’re going to be massive and I want to say I was there, there at the beginning. This is a new dawn. My words will echo through the ages. I am popular culture. I am the news. Fourth estate, I am in you.

2005

Blogger is brilliant, but … that’s weird. I’m sure comments are enabled. Where are all my comments? Surely all my millions of visitors want to eloquently respond to my witty outpourings? Does nobody care? Maybe if I just have a quick redesign of the site, that’ll help. Just a bit of a refresh, a bit of a fonty tweak here and there, then I’ll have an elegantly designed vessel that’ll last me for years. No need to touch it again, just focus on writing posts. It’s all about the content. And the comments.

2006

Wordpress is brilliant, but … shitting-bastardingly crappy-crappy-HTML-bastards. It’s all very well writing all these words for my loyal audience of (it turns out after some investigation) quite literally dozens, but if I can’t make that heading there line up with that banner there, it’s all a waste of time. SHIT IT. And, oh good, yet another obnoxious comment on that Frances Bean Cobain post. How utterly wonderful. I don’t know why I’m even bothering with this. I should be focusing all my attention on my new MySpace page. Now that is a thing of true beauty.

2007

It’s been three years now and not a single person has congratulated me on naming my blog after an obscure REM album track. And looking at these new-fangled analytics (as if that’s even a word), it would appear that the vast majority of my visitors are only here because they’re looking for the lyrics to that song. I’m basically putting a lot of time and effort into disappointing people who have trouble with Michael Stipe’s enunciation. Well, it’s a niche I suppose. From now on I shall cleverly title each of my posts with the name of an REM song. Or maybe I’ll just put the bloody Binky the Doormat lyrics on here and be done with it.

2008

Typepad is brilliant, but … well, it’s not that flexible, design-wise, is it? It’s making the fort nighttime redesign of my site (now newadventures- ingraphicdesign.com – it has a certain ring to it, no?) awfully difficult. I should probably write a post at some point. Maybe I’ll write a post about redesigning the site! I shall make this a blog solely about this blog. I’ll blog about blogging about blogging until it’s nothing but HTML white noise. Or maybe I should have a little break before I go insane. This blog is sucking my life away. I need something less time-consuming. Wait, what’s that over there? “Twitter”, you say?

2009

Tumblr is brilliant, but … WE’RE SORRY, 2009 IS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE. OUR ENGINEERS ARE WORKING QUICKLY TO RESOLVE THIS ISSUE.

2010

Squarespace is brilliant, but … what am I blogging about? My site has a catchy new name – swisscheeseandbullets.com (those previous URLs were just far too obscure) – but it needs focus. Now I could either focus the content on a specific subject matter (I’m a graphic designer … maybe I should write about graphic design? No, too obvious), or I could just worry about what the site looks like. Yes, that’s it. Content and legibility be damned, pure aesthetic is where it’s at. From now on, it’s minuscule type and monochrome images only. Even if I’m blogging about a rainbow exploding out of a peacock’s bum during Mardi Gras, it’s going to be accompanied by a black and white picture. Ideally of some concrete. In snow.

2011

Oh good crikey, Stephen Fry just tweeted a link to my blog! Look at that spike in traffic! I’ve made it. For one afternoon, thousands upon thousands of people from across the globe visit my site for a few seconds before realising they don’t actually care that much about how proud I am of my charitable facial hair. This is incredible! This is what it’s all been for! Oh boy, this must be what accomplishment feels like. I might call my mum.

2012

Time to get to the bottom of this whole ‘responsive design’ malarkey. Right. So. Where do I start? Something to do with percentages and decimal points and … hmm. At some point in the last ten years I really should have learnt how to code. I can design and write all I want, but I code like an obnoxious tourist, madly gesticulating and shouting a handful of inappropriate foreign phrases until something, anything happens. Another solution: rather than make my site responsive, I’ll just redesign it every three hours, and then visitors will just assume it’s responding to them in some exciting new dynamic way. Next year. Next year I’ll learn how to code. Or maybe I’ll buy a fresh developer brain off eBay and make some kind of casserole out of it, rich with nutritious codey knowhow. Or I could leave it. Yes, probably that option.

2013

Here we are. Everything looking ship-shape and Bristol fashion. A fine archive of posts, a design I’m happy with, and a nice grown up boring URL (danielgray.com) that makes sense to those who just don’t understand clever pop-culture references (philistines). And so to work! Let the words pour forth from my eager fingertips – the Johnny Boy revival starts here! But … hmm … maybe just a little fonty tweak first … just to make sure it’s perfect …
CREATIVE FLOW AND THE STATE OF DISCOMFORT

SAM HAMPTON-SMITH

I find myself, once again, devoid of ideas. I sit and wrack my brain for a creative solution to a user interface problem posed by a client, and there’s nothing there; no suggestion of even an ounce of creativity flowing through me. The deadline is fast approaching, and I need to get started. I glance at the clock, my heartbeat chasing the seconds hand around, and feel my chest clench just a little. I start sketching out something rough in the hope that inspiration will hit. It feels formulaic, nasty.

In fact, some of my best work is completed when I don’t know about you, but it’s at this point of the proceedings - when all hope and optimism is lost, and the pressure’s really on - that I return to my training and work through in a logical progression. What are the end goals, why, how, when? Mostly this becomes intuitive as you develop your craft - you don’t need to sit and analyse to the same degree as when you were a student, but if all else fails going back to the most basic steps of this time-honoured procedural approach to generating ideas might not be the most glamorous stage of the design process, but it works.

And, as you might expect, I come up with the goods and live to tell the tale. Not only that, but what had started out as despair ended up being a bit of work I can be genuinely proud of.

On reflection, those times I think I know the answer before the question has been properly explored often leads to work I’m less happy with. In fact, some of my best work is completed when I’m striking out at a solution I can’t quite grasp. I know there’s something to be found there, but I haven’t planned every detail, and there’s no discernible finesse to the process. The pressure of deadlines certainly help to provide focus (without them I’d ponder and postulate for far too long), but it’s that key moment when the panic dissipates and clarity emerges which really interests me.

Every designer yearns for that same feeling: the sense of relief and pride in an elegant, unique and liberating solution. No longer are you hunting for inspiration. Instead, your personal ‘Eureka!’ moment is revealed bit by bit as you work.

Eventually I got to wondering, “How can I create an environment where I don’t have to wade through the crap to get to the euphoria?”

For me, when that perfect moment takes hold all else takes a back seat. I know it’s all going to work out well when I find myself desperate to visit the lavatory, but put off my relief until I’ve “just completed working up this mockup” (in fact, a 2010 study found people with a full bladder were better able to make decisions related to impulse control, like throwing down Helvetica and telling the client you’re done). Or, I’m sitting in a noisy coffee house, my fellow customers throwing slightly menacing glances as I sit at a table scribbling notes but I find it hard to pause and make room for others. Or worse still, cramped up on a plane or in a bus, with barely the room to open my MacBook without getting jabbed by fellow passengers’ elbows. Put simply, when that urgent sense of direction and purpose takes hold it doesn’t seem to matter what the environment is, I can’t put off the realisation stage. It has to happen there and then.

It won’t come as a surprise to you that, as somebody working in a creative field, it helps to absorb ideas from the wider world. There are real, demonstrable benefits to be gained by exposing yourself to something other than your office decor. New, fresh ideas and perspectives are just demonstrable benefits to be gained by exposure to something other than your office decor. New, fresh ideas and perspectives are just waiting around the corner for you to discover. Of course, this isn’t at all unprecedented; Paul Cézanne drew inspiration from living and working alongside poverty in Paris during the 1860s and 70s, when he had the option to fall back on his substantial inheritance.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his book Flow, explains this as the meeting of two requirements to achieve peak creativity. Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a tendency towards keeping the comfortable and the status quo, made up of instincts for self-preservation and saving energy – such as having a comfortable home office or the reliable tools for our work - but also an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk, to foster curiosity. We need both. The first requirement needs little encouragement but the second can wilt if it is not cultivated. If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are placed in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behaviour is easily extinguished. Sustaining high levels of curiosity, of being outside our comfort zone, is the starting point of greater creativity.

Cézanne’s peak of creative energy came from knowing he had a comfort zone, the cushion of his inheritance, and deliberately putting himself at a distance from it to embrace curiosity and see life from a different perspective.

Most interesting to me, I have found that the more comfortable the environment the greater that final realisation becomes. Ideas seem to flow more successfully and translate themselves more clearly into my design work. It’s almost as if by putting myself in uncomfortable surroundings, I’m forced to focus more fully on the problem at hand and engineer the final, purified and distilled, delicious solution. The adrenal system kicks in and my brain achieves focus, and moves into the ‘flow state’ Csikszentmihalyi sought so extensively to define.

I’m not advocating banging nails into your temple but a little bit of non-physical discomfort needn’t hurt the creative process, and I’m increasingly of the opinion that it has the opposite effect. To be clear, we’re not talking religious flagellation here; there’s absolutely no need to whip yourself daily to fully connect with the design gods, although – you know – if it works for you...

And I’m not at all sure that repeatedly stubbing your toe in a vain attempt to stimulate the moment of clarity would have the desired effect. No, what I’m getting at is that it can help to take yourself out of your comfortable office chair, and move into unfamiliar surroundings where you don’t feel so restful or relaxed. Put yourself on edge enough to really focus your mind, and revel in the rich vein of opportunity this can produce. Challenge yourself by immersing in new environments and difficult working situations where you don’t feel comfortable. Not only will you reap immediate creative rewards, but you’ll also further your own learning and personal growth.

1 Tuk, Mirjam A., Trampe, Debra and Warlop, Luk, Inhibitory Spillover: Increased Urination Urgency Facilitates Impulse Control in Unrelated Domains (2010)
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INSOMNIA, CUPCAKES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TRILOGIES: THE NEW ADVENTURES STORY
WE APPROACHED SIMON when we hosted Insites: The Tour in the summer of 2011, and his honest and remarkably frank interview had everyone in the room enthralled. When it came to putting together Insites: The Book, we called on Simon to share his personal story once more, this time in print. Now, for the third (and final?) edition of the New Adventures paper, we conducted a very special Insites interview with Simon and Greg, who offered their thoughts on the journey that has been New Adventures.

INSITES: Let’s start at the beginning. Wasn’t it 2010 when you came up with the original idea, Simon?

SIMON: Yeah, June 2010. I had insomnia, and at 5am I jumped up with a start. All of a sudden I knew I wanted to make this happen. I’d had some good experiences at a few events abroad, felt inspired, and wanted to create a new platform for design discussion. Specifically, designing for the web but ideally high level, intelligent discussion.

INSITES: What about the risks of doing an event in a ‘crowded space’ like the UK.

SIMON: I didn’t really think about any of that initially; that all came naturally. The first thing I did was sound out the speakers that very morning. I had ten people in mind who I believed could do something meaningful. I was scared though, so I thought I should ask speakers with some gravitas. And Elliot. [Colly laughs, Elliot mumbles “Bastard”].

SIMON: But there was Jon Tan who hadn’t spoken in the UK on that scale before, and it was Greg’s first talk in the UK. So there were a couple of fresh faces. I had their agreement in principle and rough dates, then the next day I went to the Albert Hall and booked the place. I walked into the auditorium and looked at the size of it and the number of seats, sort of shit myself, and then I just gave them the deposit before I could change my mind.

INSITES: So, the event was always going to be in Nottingham?

SIMON: Yeah, that was easiest, but also I know this city from a creative perspective. I know there are good people doing great work here. Plus, it was a reaction to the fact that most events are always in capital cities. Or Brighton, the furthest possible place from everybody in the North. [Everyone: Laughter] In the most expensive hotels as well … and it doesn’t even have a sandy beach. I don’t really get it.

Nottingham is surrounded by numerous cities, full of good practitioners who care about what they’re doing and want to inquire deeper into their discipline; interested in pushing themselves but also the whole community. So, it struck me that it might be possible to sell that hall out. I like that folks from Leicester, Derby, Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds and so on can just come down for the day. What I didn’t expect was attendees from Chile, Australia and America.

INSITES: How do you encourage themes without dictating what the presenters should talk about? How do you foster that atmosphere?

SIMON: I hope it is different. If you compare it to something really unique and hard to describe like Brooklyn Beta then New Adventures is quite formulaic. I guess there are two things. The first are the people, the goodwill of those who come to the event. None of them are trolls, they all speak thoughtfully on Twitter during the event and many write reflectively about the day afterwards. They really seem to get behind it, and I get a sense that everyone wants it to work, which I think is really supportive, and I love that.

As for topics, we don’t ask for details straight away. We gently coax out certain ideas through discussion, and we always describe this as an opportunity to try something different with a supportive audience. All the presenters see each others ideas and when everything is ready we release the topics. There is a gentle curation, for want of a better word.

INSITES: Why do you think this audience in particular is so supportive?

GREG: I see no reason why it’s not the same people who go to other events. But the reason they may be different at New Adventures may be because the whole vibe is different. Whether it’s the microcopy on the site, or the way people feel when they arrive on the day, or Collison doing his introductions. I dunno. It’s just like there’s lots to learn from lots of different things and they all equate to a different atmosphere.

And as Collison said, compared to Brooklyn Beta it’s a formal event, but it’s very human orientated; a very friendly event compared to some others.

SIMON: I agree about details like site copy. Greg has often pointed out a new conference site and remarked ‘Have you seen how bad the
GREG: Totally. Imagine if you worked for a big digital company and they sent you to this conference. It’s almost as if they’d be embarrassed to mention the importance of the community aspect. It’s probably unlike the forty other events they get sent to each year.

SIMON: I like to think of somebody in a shirt and tie, with a briefcase, ending up at New Adventures and feeling totally confused. I’m not saying that we’re particularly off-the-hook but, you know, everyone is there in plaid or self referential design-joke t-shirts, gorging on cupcakes and laughing at swear words. It’s definitely not a corporate event.

GREG: People take holiday days to come to New Adventures if they can’t persuade their company to send them along. That’s pretty cool.

SIMON: With topics, I like that we can talk about web design from a broad perspective and not be too microscopic about the nuances and tools. We can think about the bigger picture, and look for bold outcomes. I like to think most of our speakers are on a level with the audience and vice-versa, and we’re all in it together.

INSITES: What about the affordable price. Did you ever approach it with a view to making money, or was it purely covering costs?

SIMON: You’ve just reminded me of a tweet I saw the other day. Referring to us, she said “Oh god why are these conferences so expensive this is ridiculous.” I followed the conversation and she carried on, saying “Yeah, I’d be happy paying £20.” [Laughter].

And I worked out that if that were the case I’d need four-thousand people crammed in the hall to cover the costs. There’s often a misunderstanding about these things. That tweeter might be charging £500 for the websites she builds, and might have a very different understanding of expense in the business of web design. To some people, even £125 is just too much money for too little return. That’s that.

The first year tickets cost £80, the lowest possible price. I just did some basic sums, no big cash-flow sheet, and added a little contingency. I actually made £3,000 profit, but spread across five months to run a conference around my other commitments; I don’t think anyone would begrudge me that. Conferences can be affordable. I joke about Brighton, but dConstruct is one of my favourite events; thoughtful, unexpected talks, some interesting community stuff, and it’s still very affordable. Obviously you have to mortgage your house to spend a few nights in Brighton, and a pint of crap lager is £4, but you know, it’s worth it.

With our tickets I just thought: if I were a freelancer working in my bedroom in Bradford and I can’t usually afford to go to conferences but I can get a train down to Nottingham and back and pay £80 to see great speakers, I’d do it. And people did do it.

INSITES: I agree. It was accessible both in price and location. What were the big wins and harsh lessons you learned?

SIMON: There are very few negatives. Things can happen that make your heart sink. We lost power on stage once but nobody noticed because it was in between talks. On the first day we had to start half an hour late because we didn’t manage the badge collection well and everyone was hungover and turned up ten minutes before we were due to start. When you’re on a tight schedule that’s very bad. Also, there were a couple of talks I wasn’t happy with, where speakers changed things or surprised me in a bad way.

It’s a situation where six-hundred people each give you some of their hard-earned money, and I feel that creates a contract that you have with each person. It’s a situation where six-hundred people each give you some of their hard-earned money, and I feel that creates a contract that you have with each person. That feels like a burden for two or three months, and I’m desperate not to disappoint anyone, but you can’t please everyone and that’s something I’ve absolutely learned, beyond just New Adventures.

In a nutshell, you build in contingency and try your best but inevitably things go wrong. And if you’re working to a six-hundred person scale, when things go wrong they can go wrong in a big way. But most people will just ride out the rough edges, it’s okay. It’s all a learning curve.

INSITES: You obviously felt happy enough to do it again for 2012 and you brought Greg on board. Greg, what kind of situation were you in at the time and how did you decide to get involved? I’m assuming it was over pints?

GREG: I think it was over pints as all good decisions are made in that way. I think I had left Erskine. Is that right, Collison?

SIMON: That’s correct, it was April 2011 when we got drunk and you convinced me to do a second event.

GREG: We hadn’t hung out for a while because he’d been traveling everywhere and we’d just started working on Fictive Kin projects together. So, we just met at the pub and I ended up getting drunk and Collison was talking about New Adventures and why he was doubting doing it and I can’t remember what I said to him. But I remember thinking …

SIMON: It was basically do you want another pint? Do you want another pint? Do you want another pint? Until I’d had enough pints [to say yes].

GREG: Thats standard Collison tactics. If you don’t want to be alone just keep buying him pints and he will stay at the pub.

INSITES: Simon, did you realise you could only do it if Greg helped?

SIMON: The first New Adventures was hard work, and I’d also had that big fight with PayPal to get my money released. I had to borrow £25,000 off an Australian who I’ve never met. It was, at times, a nightmare. There were so many things that made me think I just couldn’t go through all that again. But also, I thought if I do two then I’ll have to do three because you can’t just do two. Imagine only two Star Wars! Or only two Godfathers. Actually, only two Godfathers would be a good thing.

I’d begun to settle on it being a one-off. I was wrong, because there were things niggling at me that I wanted to improve, but I couldn’t do it on my own. I found it quite an isolating experience and having all the weight on just my shoulders was very stressful. I needed a partner. So, yeah, Greg convinced me.

GREG: I was generally really drunk throughout the first New Adventures. I couldn’t remember anything, so I wanted to have another party where I remembered stuff. And the only way that was going to happen was if I offered to help.

INSITES: So now it’s the third one. Is it the last one? If so, why? Is it going to re-form in a different shape?

SIMON: It’s 100% definitely the last New Adventures in Web Design. I personally can’t see another, although I’d love to have an annual party with six hundred brilliant people in my hometown. It’s amazing when Four-square is actually useful for four days.

Right now I can’t imagine what else there is from a high level design perspective that we could do with web designers speaking to...
web designers. It needs to change.

One idea that we’ve spoken about is where we’d have a lineup of film directors, artists and illustrators and people like that talking to web designers. That’s not entirely unique but it would certainly be new for our region. But also, I like the idea of web designers speaking to a non-web design audience, spreading our knowledge to new audiences like print and traditional design folks. It could morph into something like that.

We really need to take a break, think about it, do a Glastonbury and let the grass grow. Come back to it afresh and probably change it somehow. What do you think, Greg?

I’d love to make more papers. That’s the beauty of a newspaper; the essence of them is throwaway, even if it does have intelligent stuff inside, it’s still disposable. Greg Wood

GREG: Yeah, I’d love to keep the brand alive. I think it’s really important to do that. If you just do three events and call it quits and there’s no New Adventures ever again, I’m not sure how much impact that has. But if we do something new with it and continue to evolve the thing, I think that’s pretty important.

SIMON: Last year we were talking about New Adventures having a new life online with a fresh approach, something like A List Apart but really open where anyone can write about their ideas and often, but it’s too early to say. I’d like it to have some sort of legacy, I’d like it to evolve, but I think we need to take it out of the auditorium for at least eighteen months.

INSITES: The papers are an interesting aspect because they embody the same spirit which goes into the conference. What roll do you foresee for the papers? Would you like them to be highly regarded and cherished, and are they going to live on beyond this last conference?

GREG: I’d love to make more papers. We could just make them whenever we want. That’s the beauty of a newspaper as opposed to books and magazines. The essence of them is throwaway, even if it does have intelligent or exciting stuff inside, it’s still disposable. That’s the medium. I just love making it because I love sharing this knowledge and if people throw it away, they throw it away and if they keep it, they keep it. It’s got a real punk rock thing about it. I think it’s pretty exciting and pretty intriguing.

SIMON: Some people preserve them in the polythene bags, but I’m like Greg; I like the idea of people reading them on the train half folded and then sticking a cup of coffee on top of it. Keeping it, but not feeling precious about it.

As an extension of the conference, it’s nice because it gives us the opportunity to commission a few extras. So you’re on your way home and you can keep having the New Adventures experience. You can sit on the toilet and read something by The Standardistas. I think that it’s really nice to have a tangible object from a transient conference. It’s also really nice from a print perspective because you never know how things are going to turn out; each bundle is slightly different.

INSITES: So, there’s going to be a gap in January 2014. If someone came to you with an idea for their own event, what would you say to them?

SIMON: I’d be very encouraging, but I’d ask some key questions. For me it’s similar to someone who wants to get on stage and speak, which is commendable but do you have something to say; a line of inquiry which interests you. Do you want to draw conclusions and share this with people? Do you have big questions? If so, consider speaking.

I think it’s similar with events. If someone wants to put on an event for the sake of it or for personal gain I’d be concerned because I think you really need to love the idea of an event or meet-up, whatever it might be, and have a real purpose.

The motivation for doing it has to be the biggest factor. You want that dialogue, or you want to create a platform for certain people. You must want to create something you believe in, that fits with your own principles.

For something on the scale of New Adventures it’s a good idea to test yourself organising something else, whether it be an event at work, or project manage something significant. If it’s a smaller meet up, something which happens once a month in a bar and you have a couple of speakers, it’s not such a logistical nightmare. You can do it, and you can do it well. But in any case, you can’t just wing it. It has to be from a perspective of doing something you love.

Simon and Greg were interviewed by Keir Whitaker and Elliot Jay Stocks via Skype on 4th January 2013.
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BOOKMARKING

ROBIN RENDLE

I swear I use no art at all is a secret, work-in-progress love letter to book design by the author Joost Grootens. Borderline autobiographical in nature, the author revisits his notes and diagrams of the dozens of printed materials and thousands of pages he published over the years, each meticulously and elaborately detailed. He carefully outlines his working method and process whilst exploring hidden patterns in the data. But before we can enjoy this particular book for ourselves Grootens requires something of us. He asks only for a small contribution.

He asks that we mark the book.

Many of the pages are bound shut together and so the only way to read them is to potentially risk damaging the content by ripping the seams apart. In order to examine Grootens’ work we’re asked to leave clues and traces of our reading.

You might pre-emptively roll your eyes but this is not ‘just another artisanal book’ by a contemporary graphic designer. This act of page ripping adds something to the experience rather than becoming an annoying gimmick. First, we’re obliged to slow down and consciously take part in the unbinding. Second, the book is physically different since we began. Our mark is on it for good and so, to some extent, Grootens prepares the material within, but it’s up to us to finish it.

As few books consider how the reader might contribute to the final work, our tools for marking a text with our own ideas might feel limited. Books with small margins or uncomfortable bindings, or perhaps unchallenging, tried and tested designs also do little to help us to remember the book in the future, or for it to stand proudly on our shelves today. On the other hand, we can immediately see the benefit when the actions and decisions of the reader are reflected by the form of the book.

This might all be mistaken for sentimentality, but these feelings have little to do with the hallucinogenic loveliness of print. It’s about ownership. It’s about remembering where you were, and perhaps who you were, when you read something.

Reading and marking on the web is different. We sneak in and we sneak out again. We spend our time between modules and subsections, gliding from one component to the next like ghosts. The little impact that we might have on a site is taken up by the next person that sneaks in after us. Our comments are buried, the archives are hidden and the contents within are nothing short of paralysing.

Things are improving though. What was once considered daring typographically is now the status quo; web fonts are infinitely more powerful and exploratory, the sheer quality of our screens is phenomenally better, whilst those once common and useless elements of a webpage seem to have finally met their maker. Unfortunately, although reading experiences on a screen have improved exponentially over the past five years, the same cannot really be said for marking, highlighting and recording a text. Our travels and readings leave only the faintest memory of our presence, our likes and thumbs are now tools for advertisers instead of trying to be the digital equivalent of a pen and pencil. On a similar note, Grootens wants the marks and traces of the reader left intact. He wistfully describes why:

“Architectural representation has always interested me more than the actual buildings. It is through representation that the architect’s ambitions are articulated and show us who he considers to be his peers. Sketches, models and the way in which buildings are photographed or described all evoke the published collective memory of a profession.”

Our journeys through our voluminous, digital shelves, and all of the sketches and models, our beliefs and perceptions of the current state of things, are left to the wind if we compare them to our physical libraries teeming with notes and scribbles. And so there’s much work to be done in the spaces between reading, writing and marking on a screen. Yet, although it appears our relentless questions will always outpace our ability to answer them, this time is certainly not wasted, as they lead us to the penultimate question that we’re forced to ask ourselves: Are these problems the inherent qualities of the medium, or are they the byproducts of unimaginative minds?
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The Manual is a tri-annual journal with a focus on designing for the web and who we are as designers. It’s not about tutorials, tips, tricks or trends, but rather aims to give a home to deeper explorations of our work through stories behind the why of web design.
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