

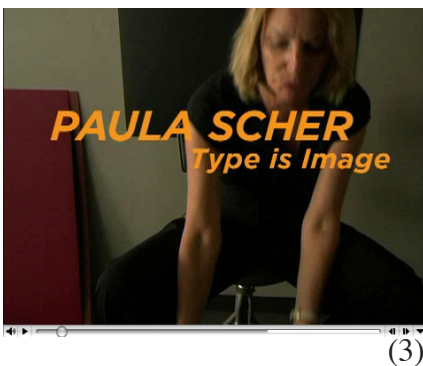
GR M10 Module 10: How do designers find their own voice?



“As art and design educators, there is no more powerful way in which to affect change in the world than through giving our students the power of vision and voice. In each course we teach, students study some aspect of how to create: to compose, paint, draw, set type, photograph and produce. We teach them how to solve problems, organize information, tell a story, and create clear and beautiful presentations. In the midst of learning these tools, students are usually clear about what to do with them, but often lose sight of why. Why paint, why design, why create? It is through this question of why create (what is the purpose?) that forces for change can begin to grow.



Unlike specific tools and methods, purpose is not something we can give our students. We can, however, challenge them with the question, and help them find ways to examine why they will create. At the core of this question is another question; what will they be putting into the world through their art and design? It is through this question that students can begin to consider the changes their work will bring about. In addition to a sense of purpose, an artist/designer who wishes to affect change in the world needs to develop the two most important tools of all: their vision and their voice”. Chris Chapin: Vision & Voice <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/vision--voice-design-education-as-agent-for-change>



EXERCISE: Vision and Voice

1. Visit:

<http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/vision--voice-design-education-as-agent-for-change> and read Chris Chapin’s article Vision & Voice: Design Education as Agent for Change.

2. Answer the following questions:

- In Chris Chapin’s opinion, why is designer’s vision important? How do young designers develop their vision?
- How do designers develop their voice?
- What does it mean for a designer to be an agent for change?
- Do design concepts and tools have power to be used to affect positive changes in some aspect of life?
- Do you agree with Chris Chapin’s ideas about the role of a designer as an agent of change? Why or why not?

3.. Then visit Hillman Curtis’s web site:

and watch his videos about the following designers:

Stefan Sagmeister (1):

http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/film_video/source/sag.php

David Carson (2):





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http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/film_video/source/carson.php

Paula Scher (3):

http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/film_video/source/scher.php

James Victore (4):

http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/film_video/source/james.php

4. Choose one of the four designers and describe their Voice, Vision and ideas about Change. I wrote the following brief about Milton Glaser as an example. I am also including three case studies from the previous classes.

Case Study: Milton Glaser (5) (6)

http://www.hillmancurtis.com/hc_web/film_video/source/milton.php

Vision

"Where am I going with design? That is a hard question because none of us has really the ability to understand our path until it is over. I've always believed that the life of a designer is a life that is very much between two sensibilities: that of a businessman and that of an artist. And everybody has a sense where they fit within that spectrum. And, if you feel close to the life of an artist, that has relationship to the life of art and culture which is essentially a benign role. My belief is that if you like Mozart and I like Mozart we already have something in common, so the likelihood of our killing each other has been diminished. The art performs this pacifying role in culture....I always quote a guy named Louis Hyde who wrote about primitive cultures where there is exchange of gifts that are not to be kept, but passed on, and the passing on is a device that prevents people from killing one another because they all become part of the single experience. This is what artists do: they provide that gift to the culture so that people have something in common".

Voice

"The most striking character is its randomness, its range, very often you could not say that the job was done by me, because there are jobs that require the absence of style, as well as those that require the presence of style. As a graphic designer my work is characterized more by drawings. More than many of my contemporaries I love to draw, love to illustrate, make pictures. For us who came out of the history of modernism, it might not be the appropriate way to work. Perhaps it is just not a comfortable way to work. What I want to say is that it would be hard for somebody looking at the range of things that I do to see a persistent pattern in them, except in the realm of drawing and illustration... where the choice of colors and forms are more obviously personal. I have the idea that there isn't any truth in style. It's very temporal, bound to the moment that we live in and the way we see things. If it's useful to you, fine, if not you move on to something else".

Change

My idea about graphic designers and social commentary is that this is part of the practice. I have always believed that because you have access to people's mind to communicate to people, there is a corresponding responsibility of being a good citizen - and also recognizing that you have the ability of transferring ideas from one point to another, that these should be the ideas that cause no harm".



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More Examples of Designers' Vision and Voice

Alexey Brodovitch (7)(8)(9) by Jeannine Blakefield (Fall 2007)

Vision

Alexey Brodovitch had thrived in the experimental environment that graphic design was experiencing in the 1920s in Europe. He came to the United States from France bringing with him a love of the Avant Garde simplicity of European art and design. He achieved new imagery with large, bled photographs, interesting cropped images, bold contrast, striking and clean typography, and elegant, open, white space.

Brodovitch was discovered at the age of 36 by Carmen Snow, the new director of Harper's Bazaar, while he was doing freelance publications as well as working as an art director for a few high end French department stores. She invited him to be art director of Harper's Bazaar which was to change the course of editorial publication design forever.

During his 25 year tenure at Bazaar, he not only brought a fresh vitality to every spread of the magazine, he would take the reader on a visual journey through large photographs of strikingly bold close-ups, juxtapose them by models dancing diagonally across a sea of white space and then across and through and down and around a rhythmic layout of type that mimicked the energies around it. Every page was touched by his vision and every page was a new experience.

Brodovitch promoted the idea that photography was the essential element of all magazine publications. It was not uncommon, however, to see him take a pair of scissors to some of the best photographs available to him to achieve innovative, new compositions that were unlike anything that had been seen in graphic design or photography thus far. He always created fresh, new, expressionistic imagery in his work. He cut up pictures, placed type around these croppings and mimicked edges to create excitement and contrast on every two page spread he laid out. He was not afraid to use blurred images that created the true feeling of motion or cut a model's head out of a page to focus the reader's eye on the material of her dress. Brodovitch knew how to broaden the range of the camera and the photographer's eye.

He was a true visionary who knew how to bring a higher level of sophistication to every design piece he touched and every designer he inspired.

Voice

As an art director and as a teacher, Alexey Brodovitch shared his vision with an entire generation of graphic designers, photographers, illustrators, and artists. He was said to be a great motivator who used sharp criticism to push any designer/artist to find their own greatness. Brodovitch never considered himself a teacher but a "can opener" able to open up his students and protégés to find their own creative genius. He was highly effective at bringing out the best in others as he demanded nothing less than perfection and brilliance from those around him.

In the studio, Brodovitch was said to be "obsessed with change." He wanted every design he and his collaborators created to be unique and fresh and unlike anything they had been previously designed. He did not wish to imitate the styles of others and was therefore imitated time and time again by his competitors. He always delivered publications that were loaded with graphic design innovation and he produced a generation of artists and designers whose greatness he inspired and unveiled.





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During his years of freelance work and teaching, Brodovitch found it necessary to bring clients and students away from “dreary conventions.” He was tired of seeing the boring repetition of the old ways of graphic design. He had new ideas to share and he was not the least bit shy about sharing them.

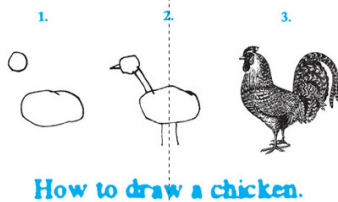
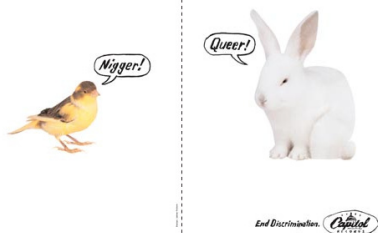
His criticism was harsh, but “under his special brand of guidance,” his students were able to “find ever new resources within themselves.” During his tenure, Brodovitch taught and inspired such talents as: Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, Art Kane, Henry Wolf, Bruce Davidson, Steve Frankfurt, and Rober Gage.

Change

Alexey Brodovitch revolutionized graphic design in many ways. His versatility had a lasting impact on magazine pages, posters, books, advertisements, typography, interior design, and photography. He caused a generation of designers and publication audiences to see graphic design in a new way. He was a master of his trade who was able to see a variety of graphical elements sewn together in a brilliant setting of emotion and splendor. He reeled the reader in and made her feel what he wanted her to feel about fashion, for example. He was able to manipulate this target viewer by making her crave fashionable clothing because she loved the fashionable way of life that he presented. He used sophisticated white space and elegant typography to make material fashions seem sophisticated and elegant.

An irony in Alexey’s life is that an air of political revolution in Russia is what forced him to leave his homeland and eventually come to the United States, but had these events not occurred he would not have created a visual revolution in the world of graphic design. In 1930 he was invited to create an art advertising department at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He created one of his famous design laboratories, “whose flame of inspiration was carried to other cities and was to illuminate new pathways of personal vision in the decades to come.”

During the 25 years that Brodovitch was art director of Harper’s Bazaar, “(he) brought an entirely new sense of orchestration, scale, pitch, flow, line, accent, and form to the magazine.” “The magazine’s effect on editorial design, style, conception, taste, and visual intellect continues to resonate throughout the broad compass of editorial design.” Alexey Brodovitch’s legacy lives on today as an inspiration to graphic designers everywhere.



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James Victore (10)(11) by Lisa Towers (Spring 2007)

Vision

While it would seem that Victore’s vision is to stimulate political change, and to wake people up to what he sees as harsh realities, in an interview with Aaron Barker for DSV “Rough”, he states that he does not “try to provoke with his work”, but rather he tries “to find the truth”. He elaborates that the “truth” is what sets you free. His voice is driven by the lack of discussion for the “pox infested blankets” as he puts it, in the video produced by Hillman Curtis as part of the Designer Series. Though insistent upon screaming metaphorically about political issues, Victore does not read the newspapers, or watch the news on television claiming he does not even own a TV. This seems to contradict his political convictions in that one wonders how much he understands world events.



Voice

Victore voices his vision by wielding the proverbial club with spikes. His first attempts at voicing his opinion were made with the street posters. Convinced of the importance of his messages, he sometimes financed the production costs of them. Later he began to turn to non-profit groups whose causes were in line with his own, offering his free design services. The group would then absorb the costs. He finds it important to get response from his designs, and feels he has not done his job if he does not go all the way with insisting on that response.

Change

The general impetus of Victore's work seems to be about stimulating change. Like a politician he campaigns tirelessly for what he believes in. However, unlike the politician, the direction of that change is left unaddressed by him. His platform is empty. When asked whether or not he feels he should be responsible for supplying a possible solution, Victore responds:

"My job as a designer is not to give people answers. It is each member of society's role to consider what they can do to help. We all have our own ways of contributing to society. Some give money, some donate time, some march. We live in a free society, people can choose to be a contributing part of it, or not. It is not up to me to decide for others. My role as a designer is to ask difficult questions. To create conversation, to raise awareness and stimulate excitement on a debate. To get college students to think, like you." (Email reply- 4/26/07)



- (11) Indeed, it would seem that Victore's only goal to is to make us face societal demons. He has done so cleverly and successfully. However, in a world wrought with a dismal looking future, we are becoming immune to the attacks on our senses. It would be refreshing to see signs of hope from influential people such as Victore, and perhaps he would better serve his causes to spend some degree of time thinking past societies evils, to see solutions. Perhaps James Victore needs to take a class at the Art Center College of Design in Bespoke Futures

Tord Boontje (12)(13) by Devon Sorenson (Fall 2007)

Vision

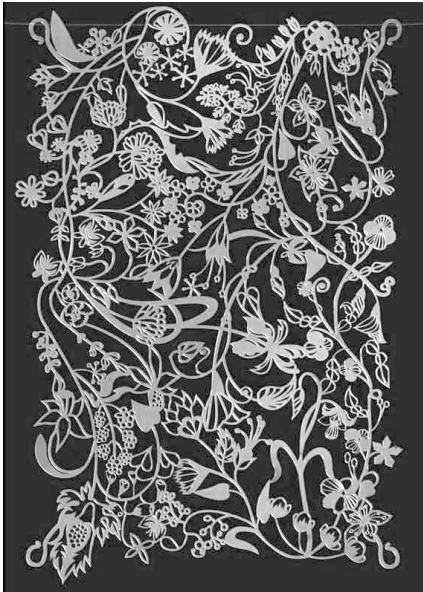
Throughout his work, Tord Boontje explores juxtapositions of the old and new, naturalism and technology. He harnesses advanced technologies to unexpected materials. Tord has developed a romantic and poetic aesthetic, depicting nature combined with a flair for vibrant color.

Tord is adopting a philosophy that seeks to link design with emotion that is broadly accessible and enticing. For Boontje modernism does not mean minimalism, contemporary does not forsake tradition and technology does not abandon people and senses. He makes constant references to nature and although technology is subsumed into the final product, Boontje consciously pursues his vision using the latest production and material technologies.

The highly detailed and intricate patterns that Boontje works into much of his designs, such as the photographically etched-steel Wednesday Light, can only be achieved with modern technology and materials, often manufactured directly from digital files. He is fascinated by the potential of recent changes in manufacturing technology, but for him, technology is only a means to an end. His interest in craft,



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such as embroidery, remains a strong inspiration.

Voice

A key benefit of modern digital production methods is that they enable cheap mass production, which is a major concern of Boontje's. He designs objects that are intended to be lived with. "I think if they are priced at the top of the market then they would lose that idea," he says. "Only by making them really available can you achieve that idea of making." Such thinking is consistent with his incredibly successful Garland lightshade for Habitat, a cheaper version of the Wednesday Light that retails at £15 (and brings little in the way of royalties).

The practical origins of this thinking lie in a project he started just after leaving the RCA. Rough and Ready was a personal reaction to slickly designed expensive furniture. "I started to get really annoyed with the sort of stuff designers were making and I thought, 'That's not how I live, that's not how I want to live'." Rough and Ready is a utilitarian range of furniture made from easy-to-find and recycled materials, and Boontje released the plans free of charge so that people could make it for themselves. "It wasn't viable as a commercial project unless you changed it so much that there wouldn't be any point any more," he says. "It would be an expensive chair. So by giving away the drawings it was a new way of getting around that problem." This open source approach has led to Boontje sending off 33,000 to date. While he says he doesn't ask for people to send him pictures of their results ("I think it's best just to let go"), the pride he has in how the project has progressed is evident. "Each chair is different and personal, and if it breaks you know how to fix it. It goes against so many things that we take for granted in a consumer society." He also looked at consumer attitudes in transGlass, a company he formed in 1997 with his partner Emma Woffenden, a glass artist who shares his studio. The project creates beautifully cut glassware from recycled wine and beer bottles – radically transforming them from waste to luxury products.

Change

In 2000 Boontje and Woffenden gave birth to their daughter, Evelyn, a period that Boontje directly attributes to the inspiration behind the new style he developed with the Wednesday Collection. "I think I started to think much more – when you get a child you go through this kind of nesting instinct, something very basic, very human," he says. "It really makes you aware of what you want your home to be like and I realized that my idea of home is not like a box or a cube that you live in, it's something completely different, it's warmer, more organic, and full of nature, casualness and pleasant." After Evelyn was born he had little work going on, but at the end of 2000 he was given a commission by the British Council to do an installation at their Prague offices. Already the beginnings of a new direction were developing and he had to warn the British Council that the show might be very different to what they might be expecting. But they were OK with it. It was a bit of a leap of faith for Boontje as well: "At that point I was so trained to avoid decoration – you didn't really embrace it, to try to translate it into something forward looking was a big step for me. It also seemed really mad to be doing that kind of work but I really enjoyed it and I thought that at least I'd have a nice exhibition in Prague with it. I wanted to just see where it went. I had no idea where it would go."