

HOW TYPOGRAPHY & GRAPHIC DESIGN INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR

STEVEN HELLER & MIRKO ILIĆ

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HERE'S A FACT OF LIFE: YOU ARE CONSTANTLY BEING TOLD WHAT TO DO.

Don't deny it! (See?!) At all times, somewhere, someone is sending you overt and covert messages, often through media designed to control your behavior (and now there's more media than ever). In the film version of George Orwell's 1984 (with Richard Burton in his last role), the ubiquitous "Big Brother is Watching You" poster makes clear that on- and off-screen, Big Brother is always present.

This infamous saying was not a benign greeting from a benevolent "brother," but an official command to *obey*—or face the consequences. It was like all those posters we saw in school, telling us to do this and not do that—even the ones about staying healthy were rendered in a threatening tone and ominous style. Of course, Orwell's novel was about a fictional totalitarian nation, Oceania, and a faux omniscient leader, but too many real governments—past and present—have Big Brothers, or shall we call them demagogues. This gives credence to the fact that we are routinely told when, where, and how to behave—for reasonable and irrational reasons. We accept these dicta virtually without question.

Now, read on! Or else!

Many of our daily commands are communicated in the forms of graphic, environmental, and product design. We are conditioned to respond to the controlling missives we receive, and not inconsequentially, by the illustrative and typographic appearance of those missives.

Take the everyday act of crossing the street: It is dictated by terse commands—*stop*, *go*, *cross*, *don't cross*. *Alt!* Whatever the language, the orders are always comprehensible in print. If not the specific words (*berhenti* means "stop" in Malaysia)—or the alphabet (Cyrillic or Chinese)—then the colors (e.g., red for stop, yellow for wait, green for go), symbols (e.g., outstretched hands for stop), and sign shapes are often unmistakable

indicators. There is a wide range of *forbidden* (*verbotten*), *beware*, and scores of iterations of *never ever* or *never again* messages presented to us in picture and word—some of them are official, others are ad hoc—found everywhere.

Street signs are not the only graphic interventions that impact our behavioral consciousness and subconsciousness. Our lives are filled with typographic and pictorial decrees and warnings designed to either regiment, protect, or otherwise condition the everyday. So common (even inconsequential) are some, we often take them for granted—and might even ignore them entirely (who knows what *post no bills* actually means, or *employees must wash hands* doesn't apply to me). Other times they are so jarring (like the unambiguous word *quarantine*) we cannot skirt the implication, even if we tried. Short and lengthily worded commands, proclamations, testimonies, and directions have been essential to our hardwired behavior since signs and symbols were first scratched onto the Lascaux caves. "Watch Out for Wooly Mammoths!"

Designing commands is not, however, the exclusive province of graphic designers. In fact, when words are used to influence behavior, the niceties of typographic design are often sacrificed for the brutish immediacy of pure, untutored expression. Of course, typography is essential in getting most messages across, and designers are responsible, at the very least, for designing the typefaces, if not also how they are used. It is unlikely that the word *stop* would be typeset in a curlicue script —it just doesn't have the authority—but anyone, designer or not, can select a slab serif or bold gothic face to make the word (or statement) "scream."

The term *scream* (or *screamer*) is, in fact, a jargonistic description referring to extra-large headlines usually on tabloid newspapers. It further refers to those words—and images—that demonstratively influence the receiver or audience. Designers are well equipped to make the right typographic decisions to achieve this primal scream. But nondesigners, and this includes graphic arts and non–graphic arts professionals, also possess a naive capacity to make fundamental selections that achieve their goal.

When design is operating best, the audience is less aware of the design tropes than how the design functions.

It is a fairly safe bet that if you want someone to take a message seriously, then you must (emphasis on *must*) draw the letters big and bold or select a typeface with those same characteristics. It doesn't take a master of fine arts to do it. But a master of letterforms will do it better than someone who is merely selecting random alphabets—or so we masters of letterforms want to believe. When manipulating (or influencing) behavior of any kind through print, on signs, or on LED screens, the words carry the "song," but type and image are the "melody." These design elements are hooks that make good lyrics into great music. This metaphor is apt, because what is music but a means of altering behavior and triggering emotion?

Design is symphonical, quietly melodical, romantically poetical, and let's not forget rousingly oratorical. Type and image, composition and arrangement, color and hue—choices that designers make all the time—can make a huge difference in how we receive the messages and, ultimately, take those persistent orders from others.

Admittedly, not all design is so demonstrative as to mandate behavioral submission or acquiescence. Decorative design is essentially more like wallpaper than a wall poster. Most book typography is meant to facilitate unhampered reading—it's not giving orders. Design is ostensibly a framing mechanism. In modernist terms, it makes order out of chaos. When design is operating best, the audience is less aware of the design tropes than how the design functions. And although we are obviously conscious of the look of things, the meaning of things is ultimately more important (well, most of the time).

The book you are about to consume (and *enjoy!*) is concerned with that aspect of graphic design that subsumes the look to the message, although look is of great importance regarding how the message is telegraphed and received. The genesis for this book derives from three different well-known design artifacts. Each, in its own way, demands attention and commands behavior:

- 1. The stop sign, discussed earlier, is the quintessential "attention grabber"; only the word *Achtung!* has equal force to make us "stop, look, and listen."
- 2. "Keep Calm and Carry On," the 1939 poster produced by the British Ministry of Information, initially intended to strengthen morale in the event of a wartime disaster. The designer is unknown and the poster was never really used. But it was resurrected recently and reproduced with a curiously calming effect.
- 3. "I Want You" is the 1917 James Montgomery Flagg poster showing Uncle Sam pointing his finger at potential recruits for World War I. The concept, based on other iterations in England, Germany, France, and Russia, effectively penetrated the collective psyche with graphic force.

Words and images fused together into a graphic artifact usually engender Pavlovian responses (show an ice-cold glass of beer under the word *BUD* and, if you like such libations, you will long for the taste). Each of the above examples forces us almost involuntarily to *think* and *act—stop* is a matter of safety; *keep calm* is a matter of sanity; and *I want you* is a matter of responsibility. We think and act according to our self-interest—and reflect after it is all over.

When Shepard Fairey created his now ubiquitous, generationally iconic *OBEY* brand, he was satirizing the power of design and advertising to demand obedience. Even the most liberal individual wants obedience from someone.

Of course, there is a range of critical responses to behavioral design. For this book the topics naturally organize into Inform, Advocate, Play, Caution, Entertain, Express, Educate, and Transform. You may (emphasis on *may*) ask, why these are the principles of this book. And we will tell you:

INFORM is, informatively, parallel to *educate* but not exactly the same. It involves tweaking the audience by bringing to light an issue, essence, or concern that requires contemplation.

.....

ADVOCATE is, perhaps, the most common of all because designers are often called upon to create messages that rouse an audience to support and therefore engage in an issue or event.

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PLAY is what every design does, whether knowingly or not. What is the moving around of word and image but a puzzle or game? This is the essence of the following sections; through play we learn, entertain, express, inform, and transform.

CAUTION is, doubtless, the most classic graphic design behavioral message genre. *Keep out, no trespassing, wrong way, beware of dog,* and other cautionary missives are designed to ensure health and well-being of one and all.

ENTERTAIN is, decidedly, the genre of behavioral design that everyone enjoys the most. No one is threatened by entertainment, which has various outcomes but one fundamental goal—to bring enjoyment.

EXPRESS is, curiously, the largest growth area, for more designers are using graphically designed words and slogans as a means of expressing personal beliefs, philosophies, and manifestoes with the goal of influencing others.

EDUCATE is, in fact, a combination of all the categories here, except specifically it is the rubric under which more detailed knowledge messages are shared.

TRANSFORM is an overlapping category whereby projects borne of play are transformations of what they originally appear to be. These pieces are sly and wicked, using visual puns and graphic manipulation to come in under the perception radar.

There are many shared traits between sections, but the constant throughout the work is playfulness—what Paul Rand called the "play-principle." When most effective, play entertains, but also implies the power and process of playing or experimenting with form and its impact on the audience.

Much of the design works or artifacts in this book are, more or less, driven by words. Although what we call behavioral or behavior-influencing design is not all words (sometimes pictures are indeed worth 1,000 or more words), the majority are not just word based but word and picture integrated. Some of the typography is simpler—more minimalist—than others that are elaborate—at times metaphorical. Images play a defining commanding role too, but only insofar as they are well integrated with the words and type.

Language is our foremost concern in this book. How the design language(s) formally and informally interact and intersect with a message in such a way that the audience's behavior is altered, the result being a passive or active response—but a behavioral response nonetheless.

Not all design tells you—or us—what to do or how to feel or when to think, but much design attempts to get under the skin and into the mind. This is a survey of some of the most effective of these over the past five years.

WE WANT YOU TO READ THIS BOOK! OH YES...NOW!



 $ar \cdot tic \cdot u \cdot late$

UNDER STAND

INFORM

Graphic design focuses our eyes and mind on what is already instinctively hardwired.

"Knowledge is power," Sir Francis Bacon wrote in 1597. So, to inform an audience through designed messages is to impart knowledge, which enables self-condfidence and strength that leads to power. What better way to influence behavior than to inform. Right? Therefore, this book begins with a chapter devoted to designing frames for the presentation of valuable (and not so valuable) information. This is the broadest of the book's categories, since by definition the graphic designer's single most important job is to inform.

By processing information the receiver has the ability to stop, go, think, do—we hope.

Often, however, information is just so much noise, empty and unnecessary. Or it is propaganda, manipulated and untrue, but made to be important. Or it is a hawker's pitch, the goal of which is to stimulate commercial, political, or social obedience. Knowledge may be power, but information is not a priori powerful. And yet whether true or false, meat or fluff, smart or dumb, when information is presented in a designed context with the intent of drawing attention, it is given authority that it either deserves or not.

The designers represented in this section use various means to present complex information simply or complexly. Some are aesthetically striking, like the poster series for Ugly Mug Coffee (page 25), which uses discordant and variegated wood types in a particularly pleasing typographic composition to present wordy pitches on the efficacy of drinking java. Some are typographically dynamic, like the series of event posters for Nouveau Relax (page 32), which superimposes over photographs of everyday situations—fish market, subway station, streetscape—signs announcing art and culture activities.

Environmental super graphics are also a favored way of informing. The Eureka Tower car park garage (page 38)

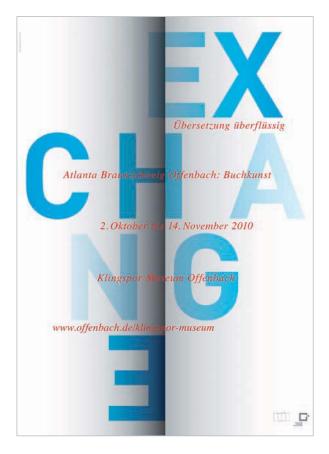
is a illusionary game, whereby key words—UP, DOWN, IN, OUT—are rendered at mammoth sizes in primary colors. But that's not all; from certain angles they are read perfectly, yet from others they are distorted to give the illusion they are posted in air. Another form of environmental graphic is not super but it is exceptional: for POEZIN (page 21), a veritable poster is made out of colored gaffing tape on a hurricane fence. This one-of-a-kind "rendering" is photographed for the final piece, but anyone seeing the original will doubtless be drawn in by its unconventionality. The POEZIN campaign also extends to painting information on human bodies and clothes in such a way as to grab the eye and not let go.

Along the same lines, mixing body art and taping messages to an environmental surface, the poster campaign for "Something Raw" for Theateer Frascati in Holland (page 17), is comprised of bodies and faces evocatively plastered with the event information using adhesive materials. The idea for presenting information on the human body started with tatooing, evolved into the less permanent sandwich board signs, and then in 1999 Stefan Sagmeister etched information for an AIGA lecture into his body with a razor blade, the bloody scabs became the lettering.

Information can be presented in a straightforward manner, like the poster "Osam Sati Rada, DVA Sata Pozorista" (page 31), though bold type and neutral graphic elements. The posters for Take One movie rental service (page 22), include a bold headline, like "You can have sex in a theater, but can you cuddle?" against a bright orange field. Or a more demonstrative typographic treatment draws attention.

Informing is tricky insofar as it is important not to overpower the information with conceptual cleverness or typographic conceit. This is way the advertisements for Nissan Shift (page 23) using custom street signs to promote its "free" GPS and air-conditioning is so smart. The signs, produced in the manner of European street markers suggest the alternatives to a/c: Heat Road, Humid Avenue, Sizzle Street, Sweaty Boulevard. In the most sublime way, these keywords trigger discomfort in the reader, forcing them to appreciate the value of free air-conditioning. Sure, many other car companies offer the same amenity, but this campaign gets under the skin.

Informing is the job of graphic design. Causing the receiver to act or alter behavior based on that information is the goal. But turning the information into truly useful knowledge is icing on the cake.



03 EXCHANGE Atlanta—Braunschweig—Offenbach: Buchkunst

Client: Klingspor-Museum Offenbach

Designer: Uwe Loesch

Uwe Loesch shifts from abstraction to classic readability with ease. This poster informs as it delights through its optical playfulness.



Sensaway Typeface

Designer: Áron Jancsó

Photographer, Illustrator, Typographer: Áron Jancsó

Sensaway is an infinite contrast typeface designed for display purposes. Dispersing the letterforms in this poster forces the viewer to focus on the individual shapes.



UNCG Confluence Symposium

Client: Barbara Campbell Thomas Studio: Typografika

Art Director, Designer, Photographer: Erik Brandt

The layers of information on this poster illustrate the notion of confluence. The discordant types and bars of color area are both a mash-up and a logical means of directing the eye.



For a Green and Free Iran

Client: Green Bird/SocialDesignZine

Studio: Typografika

Art Director, Designer, Photographer: Erik Brandt

To commemorate Iran's Green Party, this is a joyful layering of information and party slogan. It engages those who advocate freedom and entertains those who enjoy a startling image.





June in Močvara, October in Močvara

Client: Club Močvara Studio: Slobodan Alavanja Art Director. Creative Director: Slobodan Alavanja

For these posters for programs at Club Močvara, the quilt of type and color is so aggressive that despite its cluttered appearance, it demands the viewer to stop and do.



5 x Berlin

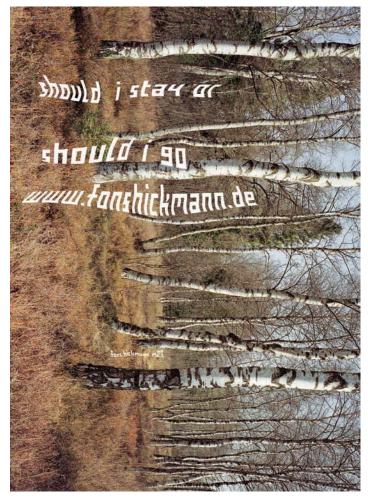
Client: Festival de l'affiche de Chaumont

Studio: Fons Hickmann m23

Designers: Fons Hickmann, Markus Büsges, Gesine Grotrian-Steinweg

Photographer: Nina Lüth

The Festival de l'Affiche et des Arts in the French city of Chaumont is known as one of the most important graphic design festivals in all of Europe that presents a poster art exhibition. The theme in 2006 was Berlin's design scene, so Fons Hickmann was invited to design the festival poster, the accompanying book, and the exhibition.

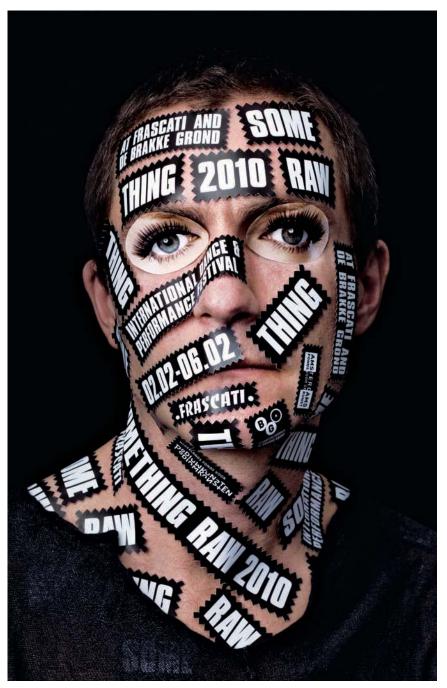


Should I Stay or Should I Go

Client: m23

Studio: Fons Hickmann m23 Designer: Fons Hickmann Photographer: Simon Gallus

This announcement for the new website, fonshickmann.com, gives the facts and nothing but the facts—and a forest of birches, too.





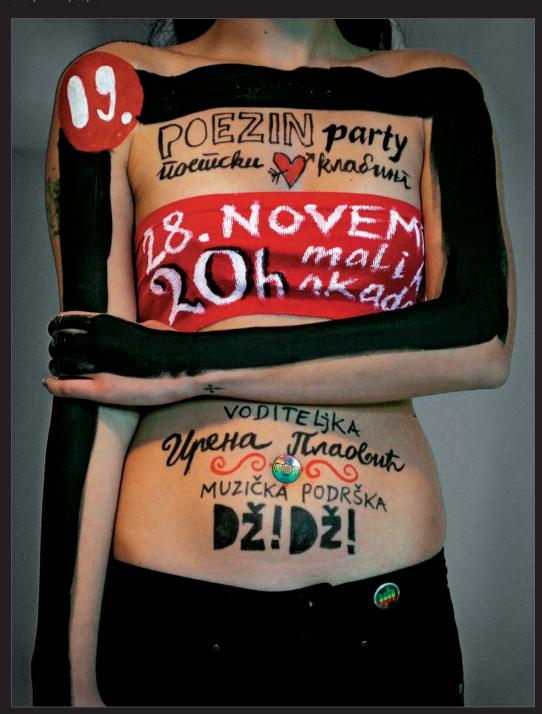


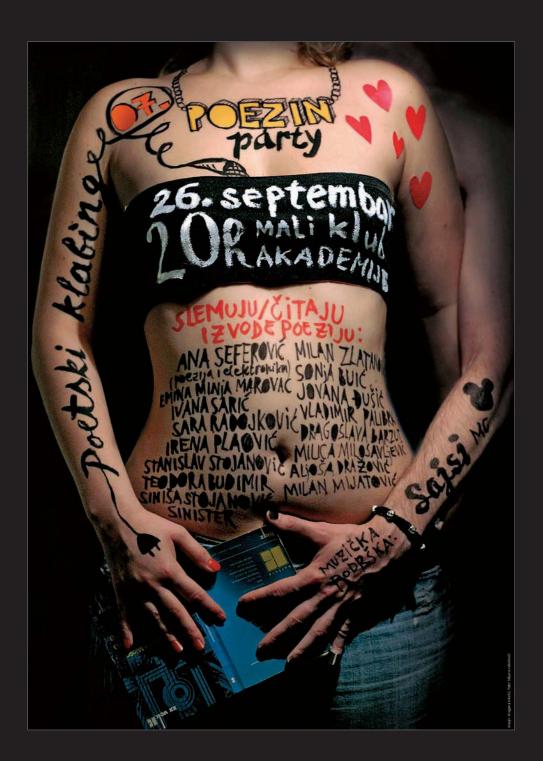


Something Raw

Studio: De Designpolitie Photographer: Arjan Benning

The body is a depository of so much information. It is also a blank slate. This is a striking canvas on which so much can be applied in so many ways.





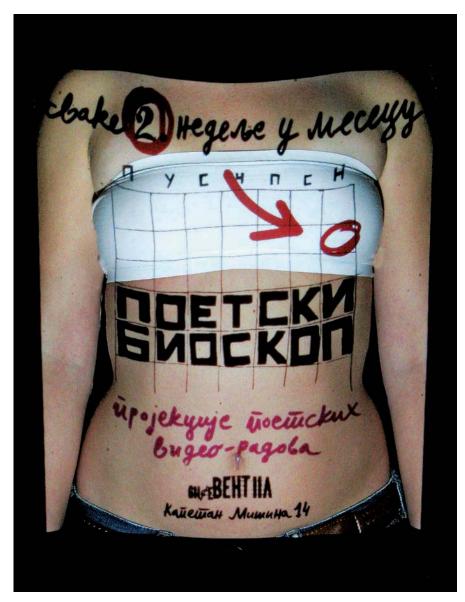
Poezin Posters

Client: Poezin

Art Director, Designer, Photographer: Dragana Nikolić

Photographer (Poezin poster 07 and Poezin poster 09): Biljana Rakočević

These posters were made for the poetry event Poezin party (a.k.a. Poetic clubbing). They were made as a combination of body-painting, handwritten typography on bodies in different poses, with a certain requisite. This poetry event includes performance, slam, and all kinds of engaged contemporary poetry.

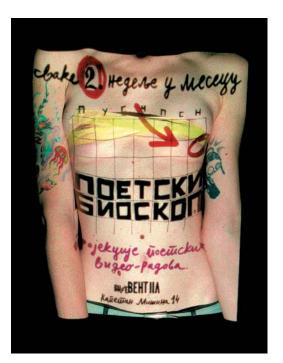




Client: Poezin

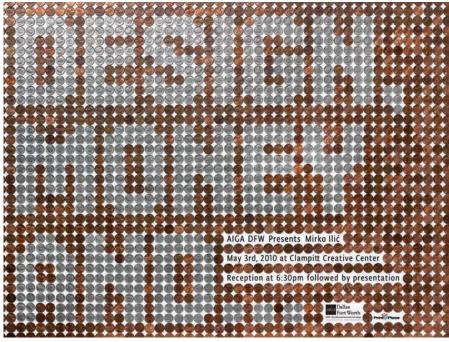
Art Director, Designer, Photographer: Dragana Nikolić

Three posters for the Poetic Cinema (Poetski Bioskop) were created by transferring one drawing via video projector on three bodies. Poetic Cinema is a monthly event that shows projections of short poetic films and videos.











Design. Money, and ...

Client: AIGA Dallas Studio: Mirko Ilić Corp.

Designers: Mirko Ilić, Eytan Schiowitz Art Director, Creative Director: Mirko Ilić

Photographer: Matthew Klein

This poster announced a lecture about the relationship between design, money, and politics. Because design is in a poor state, everything was made out of loose change.

Poezin XP

Client: Poezin, Belgrade, Serbia Art Director, Designer, Photographer: Dragana Nikolić

Posters for the poetry event Poezin XP. This event includes performance, slam, and all kinds of engaged contemporary poetry. These are two of a series of open-air design posters done on wire fences all over the city with tape and felt pens. The surroundings and weather become part of the posters. And similarly to yellow police line tape, they mark a specific place—a special zone for poetry.













Cell, Cuddle, Date, #2, Pause, Undies

Client: Take One, Video Club

Studio: garcía+robles

Designer, Photographer: Victoralfredo Robles

Art Directors, Creative Directors: Oscar Rodríguez, Victoralfredo Robles

Facts can be communicated in various ways. The clever quotations, in this otherwise staid campaign for a movie rental service, hit the nail on the head.









Nissan, Heat Road, Humid Avenue, Sizzle Street, Sweaty Boulevard

Client: Nissan

Designer: Igor Miletic

Art Director: Tomislav Jurica Kačunić

Creative Director: Bruketa and Žinić OM/Moe Minkara

Photographer: Tomislav Jurica Kačunić

Copywriter: Daniel Vukovic

Using the street vernacular, in this case street signs, to convey messages about the Nissan automobile. is a means to inform and entertain.