GOOD HISTORY/BAD HISTORY [1]

by

Tibor Kalman, J. Abbott Miller, and Karrie Jacobs [2, 3]

It's been over a year since the end of the eighties. This gives us some distance, some perspective. The eighties are now, officially, history.

The eighties were a decade of comebacks: suspenders, mini-skirts, Roy Orbison, Sugar Ray Leonard .... But the really big comeback was history. We got rid of history in the sixties; saw what the world looked like without it in the seventies; and begged it to come back in the eighties.

And it did; it came back with a vengeance.

In design, history came back as well. Suddenly, there were countless books-big, glossy, oversize volumes-and starchy[4] little[5] journals[6] devoted to the history of design. Careers were constructed around this fascination. Conferences, too.

And there's nothing wrong with studying the history of design. In fact, it's healthy and smart, especially for design professionals. At the same time, the indiscriminate use of history has produced some really bad, unhealthy design. History in itself isn't bad, but its influence can be.

There are two problems with design history. The first is how design history is written, for how history is written affects how the past is seen and understood. How history is written also affects how the past is used. And that's the second problem: Most design history is not written, it's shown. There's a lot to look at, but not much to think about. Maybe this is because designers don't read. That particular cliché (which, like most clichés, has a basis in truth) provides a good excuse for a lot of hack work in publishing: collections of trademarks, matchbooks, labels, cigar boxes, you name it-volumes and volumes of historical stuff with no historical context. And since these artifacts are mostly in the public domain, unprotected by copyright, such books are a bargain for the publishers and a godsend to designers who are starving for "inspiration."

We seem to be locked into a self-fulfilling prophecy: Designers don't read, so design writers don't write.[7] Let's amend that: They write captions. Sometimes they write really long captions, thousands of words that do nothing but describe the pictures.
Books of design history that are packaged for a supposedly illiterate audience only engender further illiteracy. Visual literacy is important, but it isn't everything. It doesn't teach you how to think. And an enormous amount of graphic design is made by people who look at pictures but don't know how to think about them.

The study of design history is a way of filtering the past; it's a way of selecting what's important to remember, shaping it and classifying it. It's also a way of selecting what's important to forget. 8 In a way, historians are inventors. They find a design movement, a school, an era, and if it doesn't already have a name, they make one up: Depression Modern, The American Design Ethic, Populuxe.
Design historians construct a lens through which they view design-and we view design. This lens is selective: It zooms in on a subject and blocks our peripheral vision. What we see is a narrow segment of design history: one period, one class of designers

within that period. What we don't see is the context, both within the design profession and within social history.[9]

Design history provides us with terminology, a shorthand for thinking about the design of an era. We come across phrases like the "New York School," under which Philip Meggs, in his *History of Graphic Design*, groups innovators like Paul Rand, Bradbury Thompson, Saul Bass, Otto Storch, Herb Lubalin, Lou Dorfsman, and George Lois. The New York School is made up of designers about whom we've reached a consensus: Most of us believe they were the great designers of the fifties and sixties. Even so, looking at their work gives us a very stilted, narrow view of those decades. If we remember the fifties and sixties, then we know that most things did not look as if they were designed by Bradbury Thompson or Herb Lubalin. We know how elite the design represented by the term "New York School" is. And we know first-hand how selectively design history remembers.

The historical lens is both a way of seeing (or including) and a way of not seeing (or excluding). When we look back at eras that are beyond personal experience and memory, we become more dependent on what we see through the lens. What we don't see, in effect, didn't exist.

Meggs uses another term, "Pictorial Modernism," to describe graphics of the tens, twenties, and thirties that were inspired by certain movements in Modern painting — Cubism, for instance—but that did not depart altogether from the conventions of representation. We look through the lens of Pictorial Modernism and we see work by Lucian Bernhard or A.M. Cassandre, design we now think of as great. What we don't see is the angry, frightening graphics of a tumultuous era. We see a Modernism that's deceptively cool, deceptively pretty. Even Ludwig Hohlwein's posters for the Nazis are neutralized by a lens that isolates only aesthetic qualities.[10, 11]

Through this lens, we see Western European design, and design that was used primarily for selling expensive but tasteful luxury products-design that can be put to those same uses today. What we see through this lens becomes the design we know, and remember, and admire. [12]

Our ideas about what we see through the lens shape our ideas about contemporary design. A restricted view of the past creates an equally restricted view of the present. If we see the past as a series of artifacts, then we see ·our own work the same way. [13]

Graphic design isn't so easily defined or limited. (At least, it shouldn't be.) Graphic design is the use of words and images on more or less everything, more or less everywhere. Japanese erotic engravings from the fourteenth century are graphic design, as are twentieth century American publications like *Hooters* and *Wild Vixens*. Hallmark has as much to do with graphic design as Esprit does. Probably more. The Charter paperback edition of Eden's Gate is as much a part of graphic design history as Neville Brody's book.

Graphic design isn't so rarefied or so special. It isn't a profession, it's a medium. It's a mode of address, a means of communication. It's used throughout culture at varying levels of complexity and with varying degrees of success. That's what's important about graphic design. That's what makes it interesting. And it is at work every place where there are words and images.

But design history doesn't work that way; it operates with a restrictive definition. Graphic design, says history, is a professional practice with roots in the Modernist avant garde. Design history creates boundaries: On this side is high design; on that side is low design. Over here is the professional and over there is the amateur. This is what's mainstream, that is what's marginal. Preserve this, discard that.

For design history to be worth anything, it has to have a more inclusive definition of graphic design and a more inclusive way of looking at graphic design. Graphic design has artistic and formal qualities, and much of what's written about design focuses on these qualities. Design history becomes a history of aesthetics, of taste, of style. But there is another, more important history; it is the history of graphic design and its audience. It tells how political images have been crafted, how corporations have manipulated public perceptions, how myths have been created by advertising. This other history is the history of design as a medium and as a multiplicity of languages speaking to a multiplicity of people.

In focusing on its artistic and formal qualities, history has neglected graphic design's role as a medium. It has presented design as a parade of artifacts, each with a date, a designer, and a place within a school or movement. But each artifact marks more than a place in the progression of artistic sensibility. Each also speaks eloquently of its social history. All you have to do is learn the language.

Don't misunderstand. The formal evaluation of objects is okay, but it's tricky to evaluate objects from another era intelligently. Our aesthetic standards are different from those of the past. What looks cool to us today may have been embarrassing, regressive, offensive, or just run-of-the-mill in its own day. To look at artifacts without knowing what they were in their own time is to look into a vacuum.

We try to use contemporary language and standards to talk about design from the past. But do we mean the same thing by "modern" as designers did in the first half of the century? What was modernity in the nineteenth century? What did the Museum of "Modern" Art mean by the phrase "good design" in the 1950s? When and where did the term "white space" come into use? Did they have it in the Renaissance? Did it mean the same thing?

The lack of critical commentary in design and design history has produced an ambivalence toward language. Writing about design sometimes seems pointless or suspect, and design as the expression of the written language has been seen as a less-than" artistic" pursuit. Design becomes the composition of purely pictorial elements rather than the manipulation of both image and language. Design becomes mute. Anyone who has tried to design with dummy copy knows that hypothetical situations don't inspire brilliant work. Some of the best designers—Paul Rand, Herb Lubalin, Saul Bass, Alvin Lustig—are those who consistently engaged the editorial and textual dimensions of design.

The key word in bad design history is de-contextualization. A history of design artifacts is only interested in constructing an evolutionary chain of progressive design styles. In order to do this, the object must be extracted and abstracted from its context. The abstraction occurs because stylistic features are discussed apart from the content of a given work.

One symptom of this tendency has been the production of graphic design in which style is a detachable attribute, a veneer rather than an expression of content. This is nowhere clearer than in the so-called historicist and eclectic work which has strip-mined the history of design for ready-made style. And this brings us to the second part of the problem: the use and abuse of history.

Designers abuse history when they use it as a shortcut, a way of giving instant legitimacy to their work and making it commercially successful. In the eighties and even today, in the nineties, historical reference and outright copying have been cheap and dependable substitutes for a lack of ideas. Well-executed historicism in design is nearly always seductive. The work looks good and it's hard not to like it. This isn't surprising: nostalgia is a sure bet; familiarity is infinitely comforting.

So this criticism has nothing to do with whether the execution is good or bad, but with the question of use and abuse. It is possible to compare works that fall under the heading of" Modernism" (recognizable, well-known works by Modernist designers), and works directly influenced by these (well-known works by contemporary designers) which represent "jive modernism."[14]

There's a lot of confusion about Modernism these days, mostly engendered by the use and abuse of the term "Post–modernism." Jive modernism is not Post-modernism. In a way, it's the opposite. In architecture, Post-modernism has come to mean the habit of affixing pre-modernist stuff—classical ornament—to the facades of otherwise Modernist buildings. In graphics, the term has been used to mean just about anything, at least anything that departs from the most austere, Swiss-born, corporate-bred Modernism.

Jive Modernism is not a departure from Modernism. It's a revival, a way of treating Modernism as if it were something that was thought up by the ancient Romans, something dead from long ago. And in reviving Modernism,jive modernism is a denial of the essential point of Modernism, its faith in the power of the present, and the potential of the future. Modernism was an attempt to jettison the confining aspects of history. It replaced the nineteenth century's deep infatuation with the past with a twentieth-century optimism about the present and the future. Our infatuation with Modernism—jive modernism—is now an infatuation with the past.

The Modernists invented new formal languages that changed not just how things looked, but how people saw. Modernism was a heartfelt attempt at using design to change the world.[15] It succeeded. And it failed.

Modernism was optimistic about the role of design. Even the pissiest Modernists, the Dadaists and Futurists, believed that design has a responsibility to carry a new message. Modernism believed in itself, in its contemporaneity: It believed in the present.

Clearly, the aesthetic part of the new message was carried forward successfully. And that is Modernism's failure. We've learned the esthetics of Modernism by rote, and we repeat these lessons as faithfully and with as little thought as a schoolchild repeating the Pledge of Allegiance.[16] Modernism failed because the spirit of it, the optimism, was lost. Modernism without the spirit is Trump Tower. It's a fake Cassandre poster advertising Teacher's Scotch.

Contemporary work of that sort has a parasitic relationship to the past. Modernism is the host organism and jive modernism is the parasite that feeds off it. The relationship is one-sided and opportunistic. Like a real parasite, jive modernism doesn't care about what the host organism thinks. It doesn't care about Modernism's politics or philosophy or anything that might be below the surface of the look.

Jive modernism[17] gains—prestige, instant style, clients, awards—while real Modernism loses. Jive modernism has invoked Modernism as nostalgia. It's pessimistic about the present, which it rejects in favor of the past. Jive modernism is very useful in graphic design, in politics, in advertising, in fashion, in films. It feeds into a prevailing Reaganesque conservatism in America, which seeks solace in images whose familiarity is comforting. Modernism, which was once radical, is now safe and reassuring. And the amazing thing about jive modernism is, unlike other, sloppier, more sentimental forms of nostalgia, such as Art Nouveau, you can use it and still seem hip.

Jive modernism succeeds to the extent that it does because our conception of the bygone era it invokes is based on a stock of fuzzy, out-of-context imagery. We think of the twenties as the Jazz Age and the thirties as the Streamlined Decade. We know what we know mostly from Hollywood movies, television, and selected graphics. The vernacular, the eccentric, the marginal, and the minority have been filtered out of our collective memory.

Jive modernism turns up in some odd places, places where it shouldn't even be: Ralph Lauren advertising, for example. These ads generally involve a cast of characters who seem to have successfully colonized some third world nation and have now turned their attention to lawn tennis. But here they use what Meggs calls Pictorial Modernism. The look is an amalgam of Ludwig Hohlwein, Lucian Bernhard, and Joseph Leyendecker, mixed with some nonspecific heroic realism. It's not even very Modern (except when compared with most of Lauren's graphics). Mostly, it's jive. ·

But let's just suppose that a box designed for Ralph Lauren in the late 1980s with an illustration of a golfer in twenties dress, an early prop plane overhead, rendered in highcontrast style, really is an historical object: What kinds of questions should we ask if it were designed in 1927, and what should the questions be if it were designed in 1987? For starters, we should ask: *Who played golf in 1927, and what did it signify as a social activity?*

Upper-class white men being exclusive.

And then we should ask:

Who played golf in 1987, and what did it signify as a social activity?

Middle—and upper—class white people, including a growing number of female executives, being exclusive.[18]

What did the artist of 1927 intend by rendering the image in this high-contrast style?

Here we can answer that, in 1927, it was a progressive, state-of-the-art style. It was also a way of incorporating color and the look of photography without the expense of photography.

What did the artist of 1987 intend by rendering the image in this high-contrast style?

Here we can answer that it was a way of achieving a retro look by referring to what was once a progressive, state-of-the-art style. The decision not to use a color photograph

carries with it certain anti-technological associations. These associations are useful because they support the sense of Ralph Lauren products as hand-crafted rather than machine-made.

What did the image of the airplane signify in 1927?

Progress.

What did the image of the airplane signify in the late 1980s?

Quaintness.

Jive modernism thrives on our collective memories of the past. The Ralph Lauren design works because it plugs into an existing network of personal associations and recollections. It's effective. It's also a cheap shot.

Is this a problem? Well, if jive history is so successful that it replaces both the past and the present, then future historicist design will be double-jive-history, twice removed from the original reference.

We'll be living in hyper-jive.

Bad historicism reduces history to style. We learn no more about the historical forms being used than we learn about music from a lounge musician playing note-for-note reproductions of the hits. Bad historicism reduces Cassandre, Lissitzky, Mondrian, Schlemmer, and Matter into names to be dropped or designer labels to be conspicuously displayed. The history of design becomes a marketplace where we shop for style-the proverbial marketplace of ideas. We pull a style off the rack, we try it on. If it fits, we take it.

Now, the point of this article is not to argue against the appropriation of ideas. And it's certainly not to argue against influence. Designers can borrow ideas from other media, contemporary ideas or historical ideas, and transform them into good design ("transform" is the key word here).[19] Cross-pollination is an important and legitimate aspect of how culture works.

What we're arguing against is design that cashes in on history. We object to contemporary designers who take ideas that might have been radical seventy years ago but have since become legitimate-more than that, endearing and very, very safe-and reuse those ideas without even reinterpreting them. We're not opposed to historical reference: Just as there is good history and bad history, there is good historical reference and bad historical reference. Reference means just that: You refer to something. It gives you an idea. You create something new.

Real Modernism is filled with historical reference and allusion. And in some of the best design today,[20] historical references are used very eloquently. But those examples were produced with an interest in re-contextualizing sources rather than de-contextualizing them.[21]

There's an important difference between making an allusion and doing a knockoff. Good historicism is not a lounge act. It's an investigation of the strategies, procedures, methods, routes, theories, tactics, schemes, and modes through which people have worked creatively. If we have any monuments in the history of design, they should be the basis for critical evaluation.

We need to learn from and interrogate our past, not endlessly repeat its recipes. What we can learn from Constructivism is not type placed at forty-five degree angles and the reduction of colors to red, white, and black, but freedom with word order and the

lack of strict hierarchies in the typographical message. We need to look not at the stylistic tics of Modernism but at its varied strategies. We should focus not on its' stylistic iterations but on its ideas.

How can we change bad history into good history? How can we change bad historical reference into good historical reference? We need fewer coffee table books and more ambitious design writing. We need as much time spent on the editorial conception of books as is spent on sexy layouts and glossy photography. We need to ask the right questions. After all, good history is a matter of asking good questions.

While we have access to the individuals who have been influential in graphic design, we should ask the questions that can't be answered by the work alone, questions that can't be addressed directly or empirically, but are elusive and genuinely historical. They are questions such as: What is it about this piece of design that we can't understand because we are not part of the culture in which it was produced? What did the style of this image communicate to its audience? What was the relationship of the designer to his or her client? If this object is an example of good design at the time, what was considered bad, or banal, or mediocre? What aspects of the image have become transparent to the eyes of a contemporary viewer?

Good design history is interested in the finished product not as a point of perfection bound for the Museum of Modern Art but as the culmination of a process. Because of this, good design history pays attention to the fringes of design as well as the mainstream, and to the rejects and failures as well as the award-winning examples.

We need design history that does not see itself in the role of a service to the design profession, but as a history of ideas. Such a design history would tell us not only who produced something when and for whom, but would situate the object in a historical moment and would reveal something about the way design works on its audience.

A good history of design isn't a history of design at all. It's a history of ideas and therefore of culture. It uses the work of designers not just as bright spots on the page but as examples of the social, political, and economic climate of a given time and place. This isn't really much of a stretch. Good history in general presents ideas in context in a way that teaches us more than how things once looked. It is not just a roster of names, dates, and battles, but the history of how we have come to believe what we believe about the world. Likewise, good design history is not just a roster of names, dates, and objects; it is the history of how we have come to believe what we believe about design.

The biggest difference is this: Bad design history offers us an alternative to having ideas. Bad design history says, here, this is nice, use it. Good design history acts as a catalyst for our own ideas. Good design history says, this is how designers thought about their work then, and this is how that work fits into the culture. Now, what can *you* do?

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Endnotes

1. The title should tip readers off to the fact that this is a polemic: more concerned with *having* an argument than with *making* an argument. In keeping with this strategy, the authors exploit appealingly succinct, unqualified pronouncements that are the hallmark of devil-may-care glibness. JAM
2. This speech was written by Tibor Kalman and J. Abbott Miller. It was then rewritten by Karrie Jacobs. The finished product, the speech given by Kalman at the "Modernism & Eclecticism" symposium (sponsored by the School of Visual Arts in New York City in February 1990), was full of highly debatable points. But since Tibor delivered the speech, he took the flack. The rest of us were able to sink down in our seats and watch from a safe distance. Now all of our names are attached, so we are doing the only prudent thing. We are qualifying and modifying. We are writing footnotes. KJ
3. After Kalman's presentation, some members of the audience felt left out in the cold from the rough draft that filled the room. The version of the talk published here is no less rough, yet it includes annotations which clarify, modify, qualify, deny, reiterate, and eliminate aspects of the original. JAM
4. This little word seemed to cause consternation during the discussion period following the presentation. Perhaps this is the perfect moment to check [Webster's] dictionary.

   Starch *n.* (15c) 1: a white odorless tasteless granular or powdery complex carbohydrate $(C_6H_{10}O_5)_x$ that is the chief storage form of carbohydrate in plants, is an important foodstuff, and is used also in adhesives and sizes, in laundering, and in pharmacy and medicine 2: a stiff formal manner: FORMALITY 3: resolute vigor TK
5. *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Art* (circulation: 5000, trim size: 7¼" by 10"); *Design Issues* (circulation: 1500, trim size: 7" by 10"); *The Journal of Design History* (circulation: 750, trim size: 6" by 8½"); *TV Guide* (circulation: 15,800,000, trim size: 5" by 7⅛").

   Well, maybe this could be understood as a negative reference. It's not intended that way. If the journals were less starchy, they might not provide the kind of pure academic study that's actually needed in this area. If they were physically larger, chances are they'd only get glossier with bigger and better-reproduced artwork, which isn't the point, either. If the circulations were larger, these journals would be taking ads, worrying about their "reader profiles," and probably lowering their standards. None of this is desirable. In short, we think these journals are pretty good, and we like them. TK
6. One man's starch is another man's complex carbohydrate. The journals designated by Kalman as "starchy" are not part of the same commercial enterprise as "big, glossy, oversize volumes." Academic journals—particularly *Design Issues*—represent, in fact, alternative models to the kind of history writing criticized here.

   In its first year of publication (1984), *Design Issues* published Clive Dilnot's two-part essay "The State of Design History," which laid out many of the crucial problems facing the development of design history. Specifically, Dilnot called attention to the narrow focus on professional design activity, the emphasis on solitary genius-creators, and the fetishization of design as a "value" expressed through style.

   Apart from the forum such journals provide to designers, writers, and academics, they are a means through which design and design history may be recognized by other disciplines as a worthwhile arena of study. The status of design in relation to other established disciplines matters if one hopes to affect the institutional structure of design education and design within general education. JAM
7. There are, of course, exceptions. KJ
8. It's arguable that the influential texts on graphic design history (Meggs *A History of Graphic Design*, Remington and Hodik's *Nine Pioneers of Graphic Design*, Muller-Brockmann's *A History of Visual Communication*) have focused on the sunnier side of the street. The persistent forgetting of (refusal to notice?) the "shady" side of the street (advertising, propaganda, forced obsolescence, the designation of "vernacular" forms, the relationship between designers and the client class they serve) needs to be viewed critically, and in relation to the way in which the expanding bank of design history is being put to use. JAM
9. The line of argumentation throughout this essay finds its "low sodium/high carbohydrate" antecedent in Clive Dilnot's statement that "the essential field of design's meaning and import ... is *not* the internal world of the design profession, but the wider social world that produces the determining circumstances that lead to the emergence of designers." (Dilnot, "The State of Design History," *Design Issues* [Spring 1984]:14) In our presentation, we tried to bring this theoretical point home through specific examples of graphic design and references to what we think are familiar texts on design. JAM
10. These references to Hohlwein seem to have gotten Phil Meggs, author of *A History of Graphic Design*, into a nettle. You'll no doubt be reading his spirited response in a forthcoming issue of *Print*. However, the authors stand by this analysis and suggest a re-reading of the aforementioned tome's pages 299–300 (including captions) to better enable the reader to decide which analysis is correct. Perhaps future editions of Meggs' book might be revised to include a broader discussion of not only Hohlwein's pro-Nazi views, but the development of the most powerful logo ever: the swastika, which was apparently designed (presumably for a big fee) by a local corporate identity firm. TK
11. Philip Meggs considers Ludwig Hohlwein's career (including his involvement with Nazi propaganda) within the over-arching framework of "Pictorial Modernism." The question remains: Are stylistic features an adequate means to describe the role of design in society? Or is Hohlwein and the style of graphics he helped to establish better understood as an especially important part of a historically evolving relationship between images of power and governmental sponsorship of such images. What about the recurrence and resonance of this style in American mass media then and now? JAM
12. Between all these lines we are asking: What about all the other design? The newspapers, the ads for hemorrhoid products, retail handbills, License plates, signs, diplomas—all the stuff people saw everyday. Where is that history? TK
13. In fact, this is exactly the way we look at out own work, as artifacts out of context, reproduced in annuals. KJ
14. Examples of jive modernism:

    Compare a Herbert Matter poster from 1934 promoting Swiss tourism, and an ad designed by Paula Scher for Swatch watches in 1986. Scher's Swatch image self-consciously mimics the Herbert Matter poster, not merely uses it as a point of departure. This is a familiar strategy (see Duchamp's Mona Lisa). However, the contextual displacement effected from Swiss tourism to Swatch watches is not particularly thought-provoking.

    Possible explanations why a Paul Renner poster (*Bayerns*, 1928) was swiped for the cover of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Carin Goldberg, book cover for Vintage Books, 1985) include: 1) Joyce wrote parts of *Ulysses* in Zurich and even died there; 2) Joyce employed

mimicry and parody in his writing; 3) "Bayerns" and "Ulysses" each have seven letters; 4) the letters "B" and "U" each have both straight and curved forms; 4) things look good when they're tilted.

Charles Spencer Anderson reworked a matchbook cover by an unknown designer in the 1930s into a promotion for French Paper (1989). Might there be a connection between the extent of twenties and thirties nostalgia in graphic design and the fact that works produced before 1941 are considered in the public domain?

An A. M. Cassandre poster for a steamship line (1931) and Fernand Léger's painting *The Syphon* appropriated in an ad for Teacher's Scotch (Agency: Eisaman, Johns & Laws, 1990): This is only fair since Cassandre himself strip-mined Léger so frequently, and since Léger's *Syphon* is itself based on a small advertisement for Campari that appeared in the French newspaper *Le Matin*.

A poster for a 1929 Soviet film called *Living Corpse*, based on a play by Leo Tolstoy (Design: Grigory Borisov and Pytor Zhukov) and a record cover for Jerry Harrison, *The Red and the Black* by M&Co., 1982. *The Red and the Black* is the title of an 1831 novel by Stendhal. Jerry Harrison is an American musician. None of this explains the connection between revolutionary Soviet film posters and Romantic French literature. Perhaps Warner Records has a subversive, left-wing agenda? JAM

What's going on here? Theft? Cheap shots? Parody? Appropriation? Why do designers do this? Is it because the designers don't have new ideas? Is it glorification of the good old days of design? Is it a way to create a sense of old-time quality in a new-fangled product? Are the designers being lazy, just ripping off an idea to save time and make for an easier client sell?

I can only speak for the last example. It was designed by M&Co. in 1982; and in this case the answer to the questions above is yes. This is a mistake we've all made. Students of art and design are taught to copy as a way of understanding a process so they can better understand the way to evolve their own styles. But you're *supposed* to outgrow this. This is included by way of purging our own guilt about a cheap-shot copy. TK

Think about how much graphic design relies on quotation. Not just the lifting of historic styles, but also the lifting of contemporary styles. In fact, this may be how period revivals happen. One person mines and everyone else swipes.

If we were being better historians, we wouldn't just discuss Renner and Goldberg or the original charming graphic and the Anderson charming graphic; we'd also discuss the imitations of the imitations, the faux Goldbergs and Andersons. If we were being good historians, we would really show you bad history. KJ

15. This remarkably general discussion of "Modernism" rhetorically lumps an actually divergent set of ideas and practices, not all of which are so utopian. Not all Modernists were (and are) of the Howard Roark variety (see Gary Cooper as Howard Roark as Frank Lloyd Wright in King Vidor's version of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*). Other facets of Modernism were melancholic, dystopian, and deeply pessimistic. Yet this pessimism still reserved a role for art and design as a mode of criticism. For a discussion of different aspects of Modernism's critical potential, see Peter Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). JAM
16. Actually, I think it's more complicated than this. I think there are several layers of historicism. On one hand, there is a self-conscious use of Modernist style, and on the other, there is a use of Modernism that occurs almost naturally because Modernist style has been incorporated into the generic language of design. KJ
17. And every other nostalgic device. KJ
18. People play golf for many reasons, yet the decision to market clothing by associating it with golf highlights the popular understanding of golf as a country-club activity. JAM
19. "Transform" is the key word on any side of a debate about the use of historical sources. The argument rests on opinions about how effectively, creatively, or cleverly historical sources are "transformed" by the designer. The very same set of comparisons we've used here to make our point about the abuse of history could, in the hands of someone else, be used to argue the vitality of contemporary designer's use of historical sources. This essay attempts to distinguish different varieties of and motivations for using historical sources: It argues for self-consciousness about what it means to transform. JAM
20. e.g., by Tom Bonauro, Rick Valicenti, the photographers Geof Kern and Bruce Weber, *Spy* Magazine, etc. TK
21. There is an almost automatic sense of indignation when a vanguardist, political form of art, design, or language is used in a different context and for different (typically commercial) ends. The indignation arises from the fact that the original meaning gets lost, subsumed, or sugar-coated under the pressure of the new context. In architecture, preservation councils protect buildings considered significant so that new construction and planning do not violate the buildings' original contexts. We don't have such things in graphic design: Trademarks and packages are updated without regard for their status as icons of our consumer landscape. This is partly why there is so much nostalgia in design and design history.

    But the anxiety about style as a detachable attribute—the uneasy feeling that in much design, form is cleanly separable from content—relates to the fundamentally ephemeral status of graphic design as a sign system. Graphic design is a medium enabled by the possibility of making new signs out of existing verbal and visual elements. Thus, recontextualization and decontextualization are at the heart of the enterprise. Design functions because signs of any sort (colors, textures, typefaces, etc.) do *not* retain meaning across contexts, but are adaptable, mutable, unstable, and vulnerable. JAM