



w e m u s t a l l g e t r e a d y n o w

You will know when it comes. We hope it never comes but we must get ready. It looks something like this. There is a bright flash, brighter than the sun, brighter than anything you have ever seen. If you are not ready and did not know what to do it could hurt you in different ways. It could knock you down hard, or throw you against a tree or a wall. It is such a big explosion it can smash in buildings and knock signboards over and break windows all over town.

According to Steven Heller, avant-garde must be a malevolent, redefining, counter-culture powerhouse to even be considered avant-garde at all. After all, it stands to reason that without offending contemporary sensibility, no real change can ever be made. Avant-garde. This gallant beast, once seen rampantly terrorizing the art world, has come to join the cryptid ranks of Sasquatch, Nessie, La Cupracabra, and Teddy Ruxpin.

It seems that the current trend is one of assimilation. The acceptance so sought after by early avant-gardes has backfired in an unforgivable magnitude. See, somewhere in a dark, dusty, bare-walled cubicle, someone wearing a three-button shirt tucked into the most conservative pair of jeans he could find for Casual Friday figured out how to defend his lord's noble kingship of pop culture from the evil clutches of avant-garde. And so, as the legend goes, this man was promoted to upper management and MTV stopped showing

music videos in favor of counter-culture inspired programming.

Well, that's great for us, right? As designers, this opens to us an entire world of source material that would have, in a previous life, gotten us fired from our hard earned, cushy jobs. And that's fantastic, but we've managed to lose a couple of vital organs in the process.

Design is all about solving problems. We convey messages as effectively as we can within the constraints given to us. But when impediments are lifted, the overwhelming amount of options at our disposal becomes suffocating. Besides, what the hell is the point of solving a problem with limitless solutions?

Furthermore, there are some of us that are here for reasons other than building up solid enough credentials to get into an advertising agency (go ahead and laugh, but I bet someone else near you is making a conscious effort to avoid nodding his head in

agreement, lest he be ridiculed by the rest of us bloodsuckers), and those of us who would like to leave some of imprint on the creative world are rapidly losing hold of the most valuable tool we could ever hope to draw from our bag of tricks. The ability to knock someone flat on his ass in a swift blow of pure, unexpected shock.

Aside from our new, corporate-sponsored credence, we have one other major issue to deal with. We are facing a new era of critical apathy. It would seem that there's a little angel floating around telling everyone to love thy neighbor and to stop being so negative during critiques. While this seems to have largely eliminated those pains in the ass that are against *everything* just so no one mistakes them for being part of "the machine," it's become exceedingly difficult to garner any valuable critical feedback. "Oh, that's *nice*. I *like it* and it *appeals to me*, but I guess if I *had to* pick out something bad about it, the leading could be a *bit tighter*." Jesus Christ. Maybe I'm just

showing my age here, but I really miss the brutal critiques I used to get back in high school and early college years. The worst part is that I can't even explain where this newfound pansification has come from. In fact, I thought I'd just become bitter and jaded before reading Rick Poyner's "The Time for Being Against."

Now that I've managed to join the ranks of millions who write biting, witty essays on emerging problem X, yet never offer solution Y, Z, or \emptyset prime, what am I going to do about it? I don't have a damned clue, to be quite honest; there are too many possibilities. I am willing to bet, however, that something out there is festering beneath some poor sacrificial lamb's warm woolen coat, something so terrible that it will blind us if we look directly at it and knock us to the ground if we don't, something so incredible that it will change the way we look at *everything*. And I can't fucking wait.

Duck and cover. That's the first thing to do. Duck and cover. The next important thing to do after that is to stay covered until the danger is over. Yes we must all get ready now, so we know how to save ourselves if the atomic bomb ever explodes near us. If you do not know just what to do, ask your teacher when this film is over. Discuss what you could do in different places if a bomb explodes. Older people will help us as they always do. But there might not be any grown-ups around when the bomb explodes. Then you're on your own.

angel rivera 2008