



The Future Has Always Been Upon Us.

While we may have moved along technologically over the eons, human-kind essentially remains the same. We simultaneously reach for the stars and cry that the sky is falling.

By Matthew Clark / *Applied Arts Magazine "By Design"*

Firmly in middle age, I have been through a fair number of “game-changers” in my career. Starting in a print shop in 1989, I would spec type from a type catalogue, send it out to a Linotype typesetter, pick it up the next day, and cut and paste the old-fashioned way: by literally cutting with a knife and pasting with our hand waxer. We had a stat camera for reproduction and image screening, and a plate exposure unit. That’s right—no computer whatsoever.

In the next 15 years, I would go from a studio that shared a single computer among five people (I was the only one who really knew how to use it), with our colour work, retouching and proofing handled by an outside supplier; to having every member of a design team having their own desktop computer and being expected to be an expert typographer, layout designer, photo retoucher, production artist, with all high-end proofs being handled internally.

And now, we are expected to be ePub experts, develop interactive projects, apps and—basically—do it all. But you know what: I still do the exact same thing for a living. We always have, and I’ll tell you why.

“Your career lies before you. Don’t make the mistake of considering it to be an easy course. It won’t be. It will, however, be rewarding to a truly creative person who welcomes a constant challenge.”

*Commercial Art Careers,
Art Directors Club of Montreal, 1963*

It was 1988 and I was graduating from high school and going into pre-med at UBC. Art was, I thought, nothing but a fantasy career and possible future hobby. You can’t make money doing art, right? Maybe it was the lack of design reality TV at the time, but I had no idea about graphic

design or advertising. Until I met Bob Buckham, my grandfather’s best friend and former art director (and president of the Art Director’s Club of Montreal) in the “mad man” glory days of the 1950s.

In discussing art and design, I used the word “aesthetic” in my first meeting and watched Mr. Buckham cringe. He kindly corrected me that art direction had very little to do with aesthetic, but instead was about intelligence, insight, persuasion and ideas. “Aesthetic,” to him, was the lowest of lows. The “surface,” or even the medium, was not the point, but those higher and more intelligent values. Knowing what I know now, I couldn’t agree more—but I didn’t really understand him at the time.

“It took millions of years for man’s instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to even vary. It is fashionable to talk about changing man. A communicator must be concerned with unchanging man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own.”

Advertising legend Bill Bernbach

My nearly 10 years at DDB made me a love-hater of Bill Bernbach. I am more of a love-lover these days, as I think his insights are truly (and intentionally) timeless. This is an adman’s insight into the craft and purpose of advertising, and the fact that we must focus on enduring truth, not fleeting fashion.

But at the same time, Mr. Bernbach acknowledges the importance of honing these insights into meaningful, relevant and current expressions: *“To keep your ads fresh, you’ve got to keep yourself fresh. Live in the current idiom and you will create in it.”*



“Samius says to Cornelius: Go hang!”

Graffiti on Pompeii Wall, circa 100 AD

Flash back to 1985, and it was my first time in Italy. My visit to Pompeii was one of my pivotal life moments. At 15, I understood for the first time that nothing—literally nothing—has changed in a significant way for humanity in thousands of years. Pompeii had speed bumps in the street to slow down those “darn kids” who were racing too fast. There was a roadside fast food joint, lurid and humorous graffiti, and this liberal society embraced brothels enough to even allow phallus way-finding signs to be carved on the street corner paving stones.

Add to this to the writings of Plato about education, youth and justice; ancient Egyptian stories of the difficulty disciplining wayward children; and even laws from the ancient Babylonia Code of Hammurabi regarding property and social conduct. You’ll see that humanity has always been simultaneously striving for social and technological advancement, while also crying that the sky is falling.

The constants throughout history remain our humanity: love and hate; generosity and greed; contentment and ambition. Anthropologically speaking, we are unchanged. Technologically speaking, we’ve moved along—a bit. Yes, we’ve moved from cuneiform to pixels, from the oral tradition to Facebook, and from illuminated manuscript to ePubs. But that’s really only in the details.

Technology is, as always, marching along apace. But the world, and our profession, still needs smart, insightful, clear and creative people. Be one.

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