



SINCE THEN

Delivered at the AIGA National Design Conference, Boston 2005

I can hardly remember what I spoke about at our first conference 20 years ago, but I do recall repeating my mother's spaghetti recipe, which for those of you who weren't there, was the most appreciated piece of information I presented.

First, put a 1 pound package of Mueller's spaghetti in a large pot of rapidly boiling water. Allow to cook for 45 minutes to an hour, or until most of the water has evaporated. Add half a bottle of Heinz tomato ketchup, and a half pound of Velveeta cheese. Continue cooking until all the contents have amalgamated. Allow to cool and de-mold from the pot. Divide into 1 inch slices and fry in chicken-fat.

When I was in my early teens, I went to a neighborhood Italian restaurant in the Bronx, and ordered spaghetti. The waiter brought me a bowl of strange-looking stringy things covered with tomato sauce. "No, no," I said, "I ordered Spaghetti, SPAGHETTI!"

.....

What has happened to our field since our first conference 20 years ago cannot be considered without examining the more troubling question of how the world has changed—since I have less than 15 minutes, I will not attempt to objectively summarize that question, but say that speaking subjectively, the world seems more fragile and imperiled than it did in the mid eighties. Perhaps the world always seems at risk. In my lifetime, I've witnessed a world war, the Holocaust, McCarthyism, Vietnam, Korea, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the Cold War—and in these times, AIDS, genocide in Africa and Bosnia, 9/11, global warming, the war on Iraq, the acceptance of torture, the Patriot Act, the tsunami, the devastation of New Orleans and the gulf coast and overshadowing everything else in our minds—the emergence of international terrorism.

The political exploitation of the fear of terrorism is as alarming as terrorism itself. It has caused me to examine my role as a citizen and to think about whether designers as a group have a dog in this fight, to use a pungent down-home cliché. Our dog in this fight may be human survival.



My personal response to this condition has led me to become more active in civic life. As designers, we've been concerned about our role in society for a very long time. It's important to remember that even modernism had social reform as its basic principal, but the need to act seems more imperative than ever.

After 9/11, I produced a poster that was distributed around the city by students from the School of Visual Arts as well as wrapped around a million copies of the Daily News. It seemed to reflect what all of us were experiencing after the tragedy. Of course, the design problem, in the case of personal interventions, is how to become visible...how to enter into the bloodstream of the culture.