WATER

THE CHALLENGE

FABRICA
WATER: The Challenge

Edited by Omar Vulpinari

A Fabrica Workshops project directed by Christian CaJuolle

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FOREWORD

by Cristian Cajuolle

A workshop is always a challenge, in the sense that it is driven by hope, it is a known fact that there will be surprises and the workshop leaders expect to learn to the same extent that they educate and motivate.

The choice of the theme of water and the focus on the fundamental and crucial nature of water for those who look forward to a livable future for the planet, or just a future, is for me above all a conviction and a need.

The response received from the team of leaders and the group of young people from different places and cultures represents the first grounds for satisfaction although it is not by any means the only one. First of all there was the pleasure of getting together and of getting to know the various persons who met and shared their knowledge, their aspirations and their creativity. Later there were several of those rare moments of excitement which enable projects to be built, developed and expanded and eventually converted into proposals and subject matter, even when it was thought impossible in such a short amount of time.

Gaining awareness in order to move towards remedying irresponsible actions was, finally, a common feature of all the approaches. There was even the risk of the Fabrica lake being drained by giant straws...

My memory of these days will be this vitality, this enthusiasm and this genuine generosity which have enabled the various projects examined to be developed. Above all the fact that, even when a project was based on the wish to fulfill a minor dream and grant a wish, it was totally sincere, driven by need and completely heartfelt.

Who knows – one of these projects may one day be reality.
BRIEF

Water: The Challenge

Water is one of the greatest challenges for humanity today, in the future this situation is set to become more acute.

The combination of climate change and the needless wasting of water has consequences for every human being now and more so in the future.

Water shortage will increase tension and imbalance between North and South, poor and rich countries and geographical areas.

The effects will be seen at all levels of society, agriculture and food, health and hygiene, natural resources and migrations, increases in the number of refugees and, obviously, more wars resulting of the fight for the control of water.

Today, the first point is to give the information about the facts, the challenges and to develop a conscience about the importance of water.

A central aspect to consider and to define is also the nature of the message: educational, political, militant. From that definition, we will decide a strategy (with political structures, associations, NGOs, and more) and think about the tools.

By bringing together image makers and designers, we will reflect on landscape and town and come to some proposals.

The issue of public spaces and indoor exhibitions (and their possible structure and organization) will be a central theme.

In our analysis we will consider a small town, a big city and the countryside.

Further points of discussion will be: images, their function and use, the relationship between impact and reflection, as well as words and images and the specifics of different «audiences».
PROJECT 1

The last straw?

Authors:
Mara Costantini
Paralai Taing Ronakiat
Alexandre Saumier Demers

Preliminary considerations
The biggest barrier in solving the water crisis is not people’s understanding of the issue, but rather their attitude towards it. We all know that more than half the world is running out of water, but why should we care? We realise that our lifestyle is exceptionally luxurious and that our consumption is unsustainable. We know that the earth is dying, but why should we care? Our infrastructure will continue to feed our desire for pretty things, for food, and for water, or will it not?

Concept
It is with this idea in mind that we have chosen to deliver our message in the form of an installation, placed directly in people’s comfort zone, making it impossible to ignore. Giant straws in the broken earth, the message is clear, the earth is dying. The multiple straws suggest that this act is a collective one, that we really are all participating in draining the life out of our planet. That if we continue to live this wasteful lifestyle, our days on this planet are indeed numbered.

Realization
We’ve chosen to place the installation in locations that are, to many people, unavoidable. On platforms at train and bus stations, on the side of the roads, on the busy streets. The advantage of these locations is that they are places in which people spend hours waiting. Once people have noticed the installation, there may be some time for them to ponder on the message that is being delivered.
Installations in public spaces
PROJECT 2

TAP water is good

Authors:
Cédric Ceulemans
Alizée Freudenthal

Preliminary considerations
Do you know that tap water is controlled everyday and declared perfectly clean? That out of 103 bottled water brands 50% are found suspicious, containing chemicals or bacteria? Do you know that 2 litres a day of tap water would cost you 3 euros a year and 2 litres in bottles would cost 300 euros a year? Did you ever realized that it took 3 litres of water to produce 1 litre of bottled water and that we only drink 1% of the water we consume? Can you imagine that last year, 100 billions US dollars were spent on bottled water and that only 30 billions dollars a year are required to provide drinkable water all over the world? With all that, do you wonder why 1 human out of 5 does not have access to drinkable water? Do you also know that with a little thing, you can make a difference?

Realization
We created a visual identity for empty recycled bottles called “TAP”. The idea would be to translate the name in every country: “Il Rubinetto” in Italy, “El griffo” in Spain, “Le robinet” in France, etc.. Then, helped by an explanatory poster, we offered our own bottles to people in the streets of Treviso. They filled them with the water of the city’s fountains. In order to be disturbing and to draw attention to the project, we also proposed to sell the TAP bottles in shops, alongside the bottled mineral water.

Concept
This project is made to make you think about this little thing: stop buying bottled water and drink tap water. More than an awareness campaign, the purpose of this project is to be the first step towards a new daily habit.
Did you know that:

- Tap water is controlled everyday and declared perfectly clean.
- Out of 103 bottled water brands 30% are found suspicious, containing chemicals or bacteria.
- 2 litres/day of tap water cost you 3 euros/year.
- 2 litres in bottles cost you 300 euros/year.
- It took 3 litres of water to produce 1 litre of bottled water.
- We drink 1% of the water we consume.
- Last year 100 billion dollars were spent in bottles.
- It requires 30 billion dollars every year to provide drinkable water all over the world.
- 1 human out of 5 does not have access to drinkable water.

You can vote for the 31st article of the Declaration of human rights on www.article31.org

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TAP

Rubinette
Hanafé
Grifo
Çeşme
Wasserhahn
Aixeta
Robinet
Kraan
kpaH
Torneira
Tataku

You can fill this bottle with tap water and re-use it a few times. If the tap water tastes of chlorine, it's just a sign of its cleanliness and the taste will disappear if you let the water air for an hour. If you live in a hard water area, be sure that this poses absolutely no risks to your health, it is simply a matter of appearance.

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TAP

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Tap Water is good

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Installations in public spaces
PROJECT 3

Masses against water

Authors:
Rosaria Casolano
Lucie Boucek

Preliminary considerations
The basic idea was the relationship between the population all around the world, the consumers' behaviour and the quantity of water they need. This relationship can therefore lead to a problem even in developed countries.

Concept
Our goal was to visualize this aspect of the contradiction between water usage and population in a simple communicative way. In the thinking process we were inspired by artists like Bill Viola who work on a big scale to present global themes.

Realization
On river sides there will be projections onto the river walls. On the one side there is a video of masses of people that are moving against the direction of the river. On the other side there is a projection of a desert. Those two projections reflect into the water and might also overlap - people and desert overlap in the water.

The same principle can be projected onto walls of buildings on the riverbed, bridges or city gates situated at a river in big cities around the world.

This idea was taken further by projecting a video of a tap that is opened and closed by a hand, in correlation people on another projection become more or less.

Another idea was to use an hourglass as an installation in water and let it turn around. In the hourglass people and water are moving from one side to the other instead of sand. This can be a projection or LED installation.

Medium
We decided to work with projections because they can be integrated and projected in public spaces and therefore help to address a lot of people.
Video installation in London

Video installation in Prague
PROJECT 4

Save tears!

Authors:
Clara Rame, Namyoung An,
Daniel Greenfield, Francesco Oldenburg

Preliminary considerations
In the future water will become as prized a commodity as gold. Given that 887 million inhabitants of planet earth do not have access to safe drinking water, we are at a critical moment in the history of mankind in which raising awareness on water usage is paramount.

The 21st century city has been typified as a megalomaniac urban settlement with advanced systems of transportation, land use strategies, sanitation, utilities, and so on. Its Cardo and Decumanus, or its intersecting main streets, have celebrated this urbanty by means of an orgiastic spectacle of light and movement that incorporates elements of signage, advertising and information display.

Concept
Given this condition of the urban, we thought it critical to intervene in these urban intersections to allow for maximum visual exposure and maximum appreciation. Using the innate symbolism associated with water drops, our campaign “Save tears” is both a metaphor on the pain the earth is enduring, with its association with the act of crying, as well as a literal allusion to the precious value of water.

Realization
The first part of our proposal is articulated as traditional advertisement in large format prints and/or LED screens mounted on the faces of buildings and pre-existing billboards. The second half of our project is invested in a more pedagogic spirit by distributing “poster-stickers” throughout the city. The latter is envisioned at a much smaller “human” scale, for example in the corridors of shopping malls, public transportation stops or sidewalks.
Interactive sticker billboard

Detail  Front  Back

Pealed adhesive tear drops from the interactive billboard can be used as button badges, fridge magnets and stickers.
PROJECT 5

Water not found

Authors:
Claudia De Angelis, Guillermo Brotes,
Ijeoma Okonkwo, Laila Azizi,
Thomas Giddings, Valerie Gudenus

Preliminary considerations
A lot of people all around the world are either not aware of the world water crisis, or feel that it does not affect them or that their actions will not have any impact on it. “Water not found” is aimed at the general public who use the internet on a daily basis from their homes, places of work and on their mobile phones.

Concept
“Water not found” is a project to raise the awareness of the increasing global water crisis. In an annual guerrilla internet campaign in association with World Water Day on the 22nd March we aim to highlight not only the increasing problem of access to sanitary drinking water that already affects many people around the world, but also the challenge of water shortage that undoubtedly will soon affect us all.

Realization
People who are not aware or feel unaffected by global water issues are unlikely to actively search out information; in order to create an impact it is necessary to interfere or disrupt their daily internet routines. Three major websites have been chosen to illustrate possible online campaigns, as well as a public space intervention that could be watched around the globe via web cam.

To continue interactivity and awareness beyond this annual event we would launch a worldwide search for photographs that interpret individual themes of “Water not found” that could be uploaded and viewed on the website. Users could vote for their favourites and the Top 30 images could be exhibited with a prominent gallery such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris.
Tweeter application

Environmental guerilla action: before and after
Official website
OCTOBER 9

WILL WE FEEL SOMETHING? I DON'T THINK SO...

PROJECT 6

October 9: Will we feel something? I don’t think so...

Authors:
Adam Patterson, Bryce Lich, Ludes R. Basoli,
Lorenzo Fanton, Maia Ruth Lee

Concept
While the underlying plot (that a small community has been abandoned by a radical governmental programme to allow enough water for those in the bigger cities) is hypothetical and abstract, the current realities of those without water in Africa, coupled with Western Governments’ historical ability to make inhuman and selfish decisions, do not rule it out entirely. Our short film aims to portray the desperation of two men who choose to poison themselves with the last remaining water they have, rather than suffer the consequences of death from dehydration. This is revealed towards the end of the film with aims to impact on man’s complete dependence on a resource we take entirely for granted.

Realization
We chose to deliver our message about water through a short film. As a dynamic group with varying skills that supported this type of focus and output, we began with scripting a simple dialogue. This would form the base narrative of the piece, showcasing the final moments of the last two men in a small town, drinking their last bottle of water. We adopted a mix of stationary establishing shots and hand-held movement to highlight the deterioration of what initially seems a normal situation. As a group we felt it important to deliver suggestions of meaning but not spoon-feed the audience to encourage independent thinking, powered with an overall emphasis on our need for water.

Medium
Above all else we chose this method of production for its potential in terms of output versatility. This ranges from the Internet possibilities such as viral video, Youtube, and Vimeo, poster campaigns in designated and alternative spaces, optional dvd distribution with newspapers and still images for any other printed matter. We feel this represents the maximum potential in a continually evolving media environment.
OCTOBER9
WILL WE FEEL SOMETHING? I DON'T THINK SO...

http://www.actober9.org

Screenshots from the film

Promotion

On-line

Off-line
Today we will try to understand what has happened to the photography market in regards to magazines and the web. What is the role of the image in the media today? The picture is everywhere; it’s created by everyone and that makes a big mess, especially because the work of professional image makers and amateur image makers is no longer the basis of communication/information. We are at a point where the scene is quite chaotic for a lot of reasons; economic reasons, conceptual reasons, political and technological reasons. But I continue to think that photography, which has been the reference and the memory of the 20th century, still has interesting possibilities and applications if it is conceived with the understanding that television and the internet also exist.

Let me make a simple example, let’s say I meet a student, for instance in Fabrice, maybe 20 or 25 years old, and he says: “I want to be a photographer”. What response should I give, how should I teach this student - how should I push this student further? I think that the first responsible answer is to tell him that it’s going to be seriously difficult and that he’s obliged to be much more clear about what he wants to do with photography than previous generations of photographers have needed to be. That’s one point. The second point is to make absolutely clear to him that he has to know about the history of photography, but he also has to know about cinema, about literature, about the other fields of expression in order gain a knowledge base from which to situate himself and his work. And you have to tell him also that the most difficult thing he will find from the beginning is how to project, how to produce his work.

You know that for half a century the press was a major producer for documentary photography. That’s totally finished. Photographers feel lucky when the magazines pay a small amount of money and accept to give space, to publish their work. So the young photographer has to be clearly conscious that he will have to try to find money in places other than the press. He also has got to know that today it’s absolutely necessary to think about kinds of distribution, other than the press, other than the printed media. Of course exhibitions and books are important, but also the internet. And probably more than anything today, and for tomorrow, multi-media products, mixing still images,
video, sound, text documents: I think that for a young documentary photographer it’s at the same time difficult, but also a great opportunity. The future is to be really a journalist, a journalist who conceives the final state and the final structure of the product he wants to deliver. And this needs to be very clear from the beginning.

Also what’s unfortunate, and must be very clear to him, is that today there are too many photographers, too many talented photographers, in every country.

Which responsibility should we have today? I believe you saw, in the 1970’s, the best period of photography in the past century; the spirit and the ideas were extraordinary. Can you tell us something positive about that period? And can you compare that with what’s happening today? Because you have the memory about what was, and a view on what can be.

I think the really extraordinary thing about the 1970’s was that there were a certain number of photographers who were at the same time good journalists, really concerned photographers, and visually talented. And those photographers had the chance because at that moment television was not in the majority of homes and television wasn’t reporting in foreign countries.

For example, without those photographers, the problem of thousands of people, dying in Africa, because they had nothing to eat, and they had no water, would not have been known to the world. And those photographers had immediately 8, 10, 12 pages in the biggest magazines, magazines that had circulation of around 1 million copies in France, in Germany, in the United States, in England, like Paris Match, Life.

These magazines were giving space to reporters and they were giving space because of the quality of the work, and the importance of the information, and also because they were the only ones providing this information.

Is it, Mr. Caujole, that you are talking to us about innovation, not about innovation in technology and the invention of digital photography, but innovation of the mind, about how to show the work, how to investigate the work? How many photographers have worked in the past, as photojournalists and as journalists is this the general idea?

Yeah, first we have to know that a certain number of photojournalists stopped and went to work with television, for example, because they were no longer making their living with their photography, but their photography was just—and I respect them a lot—documenting a situation without having a real project for information. So the moment that someone like Depardon began to write, to include writing about his feelings, about himself, with his photographs, this was a change in the approach and the possibility of documentary photography. He is still documenting things. He’s in Beirut, but he thinks about what he left in Paris, and he writes about it; which was a big shock for a profession where the photographers officially had no doubts, they were always imagined to be strong, going on one plane after another—from one war to another conflict.

But is photojournalism already dead or will it be dead in a few years?

Now: what is a photojournalist? That’s the old question about the name, of those people who have been documenting the events of the world. Reporters, photojournalists, documentary photographers, etc. I don’t think its dead, if I don’t think about the name, you know,
the title. I think there is an approach, an engagement, which makes some people want at the same time to testify about the situation of the world; to document it, to try to make people concerned by those situations they themselves are concerned by. And they will continue to do it. I think what’s not dead is the attitude, the desire, the patience for doing it. The question is however, how is it going to be possible to do reportage photography, and to make a living from it.

The book “Telex from Tehran”: can you describe that work in the context of what we saw recently in Tehran?

“Telex from Tehran” by Gilles Peress, was published 30 years ago, when pictures of that kind were not published in the press. And what’s happening today is totally different; today the power in Tehran wants to control images, there is almost nothing that could come out. There were images of a kind; but not a serious base of information. The images were used by television all over the world and by the press, because it was a necessity, there was nothing else, but think seriously if we had, as professionals, a choice, between those images and other images - for example the ones of Gilles Peress today, we would consider the ones of Gilles Peress much more important in terms of documentation, information, position, etc., than the ones which are unfortunately necessary but produced by amateurs, sent and received through twitter. The positive thing is that it proves to the dictators that today we will always have pictures coming out, even if they want to suppress them. That is the positive thing but if we have to consider those pictures for what they are, they are just a kind of disparate manner of testimony and documentary. We continue to have a problem with ‘who was that poor woman killed’, up to now we don’t know who she was, we saw pictures of a woman killed, we saw obviously pictures of policemen in civilian clothes beating the people, absolute terror and horrible things; but afterwards; how to build information from those pictures... those pictures are absolutely important to attract the attention of the public about the situation in Iran, that’s absolutely obvious - but after that, not one of the big questions about Iran, is answered. For example; who has the power in Iran? Recently I was speaking with an Iranian photographer who was in Paris for an exhibition, and what they all say is that they would like to make work, about the power, about the ministers, about meetings; but they are not allowed to do that.

If you had to choose three things in your life, just three, what would they be? [Probably no image.] ah... the diary of Kafka, a small sculpture of Buddha from Cambodia, and the last one... to see my grand father.

So where will we see the pictures in the future: in galleries, on the computer, on paper... where?

Everywhere, we are going to continue to see pictures everywhere, and I am not sure that this is good news, because it’s going to continue to be very confused, because the problem is not that we see pictures everywhere, but that we see every kind of picture everywhere.

Christian Caujolle is a world-renowned photojournalist, art director and curator. He worked at the French newspaper Libération from 1978 to 1986, as first as a writer and picture editor and then as chief editor in charge of photography. In 1986 he founded the photo-agency Vu and in 1998 the connected gallery, Vu. In 1997 he was the art director of the Les Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie in Arles and has then been invited as curator to several photo-exhibitions [Foto Biennale in Rotterdam in 2000, PhotoEspaña in Madrid in 2001, South Eastern Asia and Korea Section at Biennale “PhotoQuai” at Musée du Bui Brâny, Paris in 2007] and was the art director of the first photo festival Photo Phnom Penh in Cambodia in 2008–2009. He collaborates with various magazines and newspapers, such as Internazionale (Italy), El País Semanal and La Vanguardia (Spain) and Clarín (Argentina) as well as with the website artefot.fr. Among his publications are works about Sebastião Salgado, Paolo Pellegrin, Jacques Henri Lartigue.
Meditations upon a Fabrica assignment / By John L. Walters, editor of Eye Magazine

The big issue
What a big subject! Water is everywhere, molecules of H2O in our bodies, clothes, food, drink and nearly every aspect of our environment. Lack or excess of water can be an extreme source of interest and anxiety, depending on your geographical location. On a trivial, daily level, there are decisions about whether to wear a raincoat or take an umbrella; whether one needs to water an absent neighbour’s plants or let nature deal with them. The difficulty of requesting tap water in a snooty restaurant.

My friend in Colorado has a cabin in the Rockies, and her biggest worry is that a neighbour might be stealing her water. The levels in her tank have been falling dramatically. She quoted an American magazine article speculating that future wars would be fought over water rather than oil. Our wasteful, unthinking attitude towards this most basic and vital component of life was one of the big issues at the heart of one of Fabrica’s recent student assignments.

There have been some provocative design initiatives linked to water in recent months. The AIAA Aspen Design Challenge (aspendesignchallenge.org), judged earlier this year, was an admirable attempt to bring together thinking about the subject in the form of an international competition.

‘One of the challenges in the water area,’ says juror Peter Gleick, of the Pacific Institute, ‘is the failure to understand the problem, and the forms of the problem and the forms of solutions.’

This put me in mind of Angela Morelli’s MA project ‘The Global Water Footprint of Humanity’, carried out in collaboration with the Water Footprint Network (waterfootprint.org) whose mission is to promote a ‘transition towards sustainable, fair and efficient use of fresh water resources worldwide.’ Morelli’s design project, incorporating a book, Flash animation, maps and models, is a visualisation of the impact of human consumption on the natural water environment. Morelli’s little blue bookmark reproaches me with the information that the cup of tea I am about to drink required the consumption of 30 litres of water. A cup of coffee uses up 140 litres; a T-shirt 2700.

Any design project that deals with a big issue such as ‘water’, or, say, ‘windpower’, or ‘urban rage’ will have to deal with large
amounts of information, hard statistical facts and figures, the outcome of patient research. The designers will also have to tackle the thinking, the theories and ideas that lie behind the research. Graphic designers are often keen to involve themselves in ‘personal research’, and carry out independent projects, yet we know that the best work usually comes from collaborations with specialists. For an ambitious social or ecological project, designers can play a significant part within a team if they and their colleagues are prepared to engage with design as a verb rather than a noun.

Isotype founders Marie and Otto Neurath used the concept of the ‘transformer’ for the process involved in shaping and communicating specialist information for a non-specialist audience. As Erik Spiekermann writes in his Eye 73 review of The transformer (Hyphen Press) by Robin Kinross and Marie Neurath: ‘Like journalists who take facts and prepare them for their readerships, designers have always been transformers. Whatever we do to the information we shape, we influence its reception by transforming it.’ This is not a trivial matter; the visual presentation of facts about big issues such as global warming, violence or the economy can play a big part in changing public perceptions and attitudes – and, ultimately, policy and behaviour.

**Transformation**

We associate isotype with pictorial diagrams (and The transformer contains many fine examples of graphic clarity) but one could argue that the concept and role of ‘the transformer’ can be applied to every aspect of visual communication, from framing the initial brief to the final execution – whatever the medium, and whatever the techniques employed.

Designers have ever more tools and channels at their fingertips – interaction, animation, typography, illustration, art direction/photography – so the opportunities are greater than ever.

On the one hand, these can be opportunities to miss the point – and to waste the client’s time and money. But on the other, there’s chance to explore inspiring and poetic forms of expression and communication, to make things better. The choices facing young designers can be bewildering: contemporary design practice can seem like a monstrous mixing desk with so multiple inputs and outputs, bristling with knobs, faders and meters. When you edit a magazine, you see the results of this confusion, with many unfocused personal projects that fetishise the processes and raw materials of design. This problem isn’t confined to any particular area – you see one can see purposeless ‘design fodder’ in every area of endeavour, from letterpress to Flash websites, from posters through character design to perfect-bound booklets.

If we agree that design is not art, then it follows that a each graphic design project must have some purpose, a brief, a clear goal at its heart. If Erik Spiekermann is correct in saying that designers are like journalists, then their designs must tell a story.

At the Aspen Design Challenge, designer and juror Brian Collins articulated the challenge well: ‘We’ve got to find ways to reframe what we see … we need new stories, new narratives, new myths.’ He was talking about water, but he could be talking about any number of present-day problems that demand the attention of graphic designers.

**Innocence and experience**

And this is where I reveal my own prejudices, because I believe that making a magazine is all about narrative, about telling stories. Despite the fact that most writing requires a degree of creativity, journalism is not ‘creative writing’. And, despite the personal involvement (and sacrifices) demanded by editing a publication like Eye, making a magazine is not self-expression.

Some editors may view their magazines as a vehicle for their obsessions, but that’s not my idea of fun – or profit. When a writer friend once observed that it must be nice to have a title that you could fill with whatever took your fancy, I responded by saying that I didn’t regard a magazine as a personal outlet. Magazines, journals, newspapers, fanzines … are for their readers. Editors constantly learn from everyone: their contributors, their collaborators, their detractors and fans. A magazine can be a kind of university, a coming together of knowledge and scepticism; of innocence and experience. And a circus, where the editor is a ringmaster, dealing with clowns as well as high-flyers.
Journalists who work on newspapers and magazines tend to talk about ‘stories’ as a matter of course. Individual pieces might be caption reviews, opinion pieces, critiques, long essays, short picture essays, and so on, but each of them is a story, and each must have something to say. And though Eye is in some respects closer to a journal, or a book (and often has more content that comparable books), the magazine format and ethos is one that we take seriously.

All editors are bombarded with ideas for their titles: from public relations professionals, writers, photographer, friends, and colleagues. Everywhere you go there are helpful suggestions along the lines of: ‘You should put this [or that] in your magazine.’ In the case of Eye, we are often approached by designers who say something on the lines of: ‘What do I have to do to get my work noticed by Eye magazine?’ To which one answer might be: ‘Tell us a story.’

However that story is best told by a sympathetic, objective writer – a journalist, historian or specialist who is in a position to put the work into context, whether social, political, commercial or aesthetic. Such writers will be partial and opinionated, but they have a role to play in mediating the work and the ideas for a wider audience. The reader can calibrate their response to the critique through their knowledge of what the critic has said before. You can disagree with the critical position while appreciating the ‘grain’ of the critique.

Yet designers who write – if only very occasionally – can also contribute a huge amount. Writing can help you understand the process of transforming the elements of design practice into words, which can be essential when dealing with colleagues, clients and collaborators. In magazine culture, it brings a practitioner’s perspective to design criticism. Speaking personally, I wish that more designers would propose articles for Eye. Interestingly, as Adrian Shaughnessy points out in Design Culture (Unit Editions), writing about others can be an indirect but positive way to promote your practice: ‘I noticed that if you bleated about yourself no one noticed. But if you talked about things other than yourself, people sometimes listened.’

It is seldom enough for a designer to say: ‘Here’s my great work, come and pay tribute.’ This applies whether you are a one-person practice or a huge design
agency. At some point the designer, or someone in their team, will need to tell a story. This point was made quite forcefully in a piece for the Eye blog by Mike Raddcliffe, who runs the London recruitment agency Represent. His article ‘Trouble getting through the door?’ [http://blog.eyemagazine.com/?p=236] attracted a great deal of attention because he proposed that designers reconsider the way they presented their work in the light of the story it told about them:

‘Many designers fall in to the trap of not understanding how to tell the story of their work. They simply display their work as an archive and try to make it look as pleasing to the eye as possible. They often fail to make three fundamental points. The first is to explain the brief for each project in their folio. The second is to show the design solutions they provide. Third is to illustrate the benefits provided through the design ... every piece of design is itching to tell its story.’

A portfolio that merely showed a succession of good work, Mike argued, would never engage the interest of a potential employer or client. It should show the work in a way that demonstrates a narrative shape and direction to the designer’s career.

Nurturing the blog

Having said so much about telling stories, now have to quality, and possibly compromise my own position on the subject. In the summer of 2008, shortly after taking Eye magazine into independent ownership, we launched the Eye blog, blog.eyemagazine.com. At present, we aim to publish at least five blogs a week. So in addition to the slow-burning, continuous work required for our carefully prepared, beautifully produced quarterly, we have to keep ‘feeding and watering’ the blog – it’s a very hungry organism.

This means that we have to take a different approach to selecting, accepting and publishing stories – in British journalistic terms, you might say that the Eye blog is more ‘tabloid’ in its approach. Sometimes, the ‘story’ is little more than a picture; at other times it can be a long academic essay (see the articles by David Crowley and Leslie Atzman). And there are blog posts that return to ideas and subjects already featured in print; for example we are about to publish an interview with Joe Sacco, whose documentary work was featured in Eye 32 and Eye 44. Some of the most popular blog posts are responses to events, such as Sara Martin’s recent piece about Pentagram’s Paula Scher, an edited ‘show and tell’. And the blog can feature embedded videos and links to sounds and animation that we can’t possibly show in the printed magazine. But we’re still making it up as we go along, and there’s plenty more to learn.

Perhaps the most exciting elements of editing the Eye blog are its immediacy and the chance to work with new writers: it has become great way to discover new writing talent, and even self-described ‘non-writers’ who have something to say. It’s fun, too. And though most design publications need their share of ‘eye-candy’ and arresting visual images, we still need to tell those stories. Thanks for listening to mine.

John L. Walters

British-born, London-based writer John Walters has edited Eye, the quarterly international review of graphic design, since 1991, and launched the Eye blog blog.eyemagazine.com] in July 2008. Walters studied maths with physics and began his career as a jazz composer and record producer before moving into journalism. In the 1990s he was a founder of the award-winning audio journal Unknown Public, and freelanced for several newspapers (Sunday Times, Independent) and magazines (The Wire, Architectural Review) before joining Eye. He writes about music for the Guardian and occasionally broadcasts for BBC Radio. In April 2008 Walters led a management buy-out (with MD Hannah Tyson and art director Simon Esterson) of Eye, which is now published independently by their new company Eye Magazine Ltd. Walters is the co-curator (with Catherine Dixon) of a one-day conference about design and music at the St Bride Institute, London on 29 January, and he is a member of the jury for the 24th International Biennale of Graphic Design Brno 2010.

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WATER: The Challenge

A Fabrica Workshops project
directed by Christian Cadjoule

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Fabrica is the communication research center of the Benetton Group.
The title of this workshop and lecture program is rooted in Fabrica’s heritage of cross-cultural creativity for social concern. Its precise definition however emerges directly from a recent debate between Fabrica’s researchers that had the specific objective to identify common interest platforms for future studies.

Environmental, social and relational themes are central to human ecology, a transdisciplinary field using holistic approaches in the search for harmony between people and their natural and created environment but mainly between people and their societies.

Along these lines Fabrica wants to investigate, experiment, catalyze, document and disseminate how contemporary communication, design and artistic expression can contribute to helping people solve problems and enhance human potential, within near and far environments.

The workshop series brings to Fabrica international creatives from all fields of communication, design and technology who share a common desire to apply innovation to social improvement.