

## Design as Idea: Bob Gill

Imagine a mathematician who knows that the answer is 128, before he knows what the problem is.

This is how I feel about how most graphic designers think. They love choosing colors, pushing type and images around, drawing in a particular style and applying the latest graphic tricks to their next job, regardless of whether they are appropriate or not. They get these tricks from a Culture which brainwashes them and gives them preconceptions of what is “hot” and “trendy.” Most spend their time trying to emulate what “edgy” work is *supposed* to look like.

But just think, if we want to begin every day by doing original work, looking forward to having an exciting creative experience, how can we rely on what the Culture tells us, when it tells all of us the same thing? This is what my presentation is about.

The vast majority of designers and illustrators think they know what is always “good,” and always “bad.” I hope my presentation will demonstrate that it is much more interesting and rewarding *not* to know what “good” and “bad” look like, before we know what we are supposed to communicate. When I get a job, regardless of how familiar with the subject I am, I resist the temptation to think I know enough to start designing. I research the subject as if I know nothing about it. I try to experience it for the first time. I don’t sit at my computer or browse the design books in my library. If it’s a logo for a dry cleaner, I go to a dry cleaner and hang out. I listen. I observe. I ask questions. I’m not sure what is the best way to spend my time there, but I know I should stay until I have something that I honestly think is interesting to say about dry cleaning. I call this “the statement.” I don’t think about what the logo should look like.

**I listen to the statement. It will design itself. Well, almost.**

Here are two examples from my latest book, *Bob Gill, so far*, of how the process works for me:

**Problem:** logo for a company that repairs computers and donates them to schools and charities.”

**Statement:** “A computer is a terrible thing to waste.”

**Solution:** Sounds like a quotation. I ask, “who might be the most interesting person to have said that?”

“A computer  
is a terrible  
thing to waste.”  
*William Shakespeare*

**Problem:** magazine illustration, “Jazz.”

**Statement:** “Jazz is improvisation.”

