Visitations Revisited, Reply by Louise Sandhaus

After getting a gander at the various responses to the "Visitations" rant appearing on blogs such as DesignObserver and Speak Up, as well as in the publication *Adbusters*, this potentially cranky old gal of the possibly-has-been generation would like to offer a few reflections and clarifications, particularly about "style" and "context" – the heavy hitters of that conversation.

First, to clarify the purpose of my travels (physically and psychically) to Holland and London (places I've visited regularly since late '94). I was trying to seek out ideas that might stir the pot during conversations at CalArts and in my own practice, as we/I consider where graphic design might be going and where we might want to take it. Graphic design is a growing, living, changing discipline that is shaped by and responds to shifting social, technological, and economic contexts. I was out to garner some insights on those conditions and the responses to them through work being produced.

Part of what surfaced was that postmodernism, and by association work that might be seen as formally exuberant, seems to be the "current generation's" whipping boy. It seems to have been reduced to and relegated to history as a movement of "graphic free-for-all" and "personal expression and experimentation" – a representation that shrinks a significant cultural change to a vacuous visual style.

Postmodernism was the liberating social force after graphic design had lost its connection to context, and visual form had been reduced to reflecting universality, simplicity, conformity, and the illusion of global economic and social stability. Postmodernism was the impetus behind the upheaval of values that had become detached from the reality of the times. That we consider context in the first place – the very thing that allows for graphic design to evolve – is what this "movement," now reduced to a has-been style, allowed. The baby has been mistaken for the bathwater.

This misunderstanding might also be at the root of the complexities in discussing the value of visual form. If visual form has become equated with stylization and graphic novelty, no wonder it's receiving so much hate mail. As *graphic* designers, we create the means through which ideas are seen, experienced, and understood (for better or worse). I don't know what stuff should look like. I only know that to ignore visual form is to concede that what we do doesn't matter; that the visual is not important and is not capable of the kind of manifestation of intelligence attributed to words. Not to mention the means of engagement that words have.