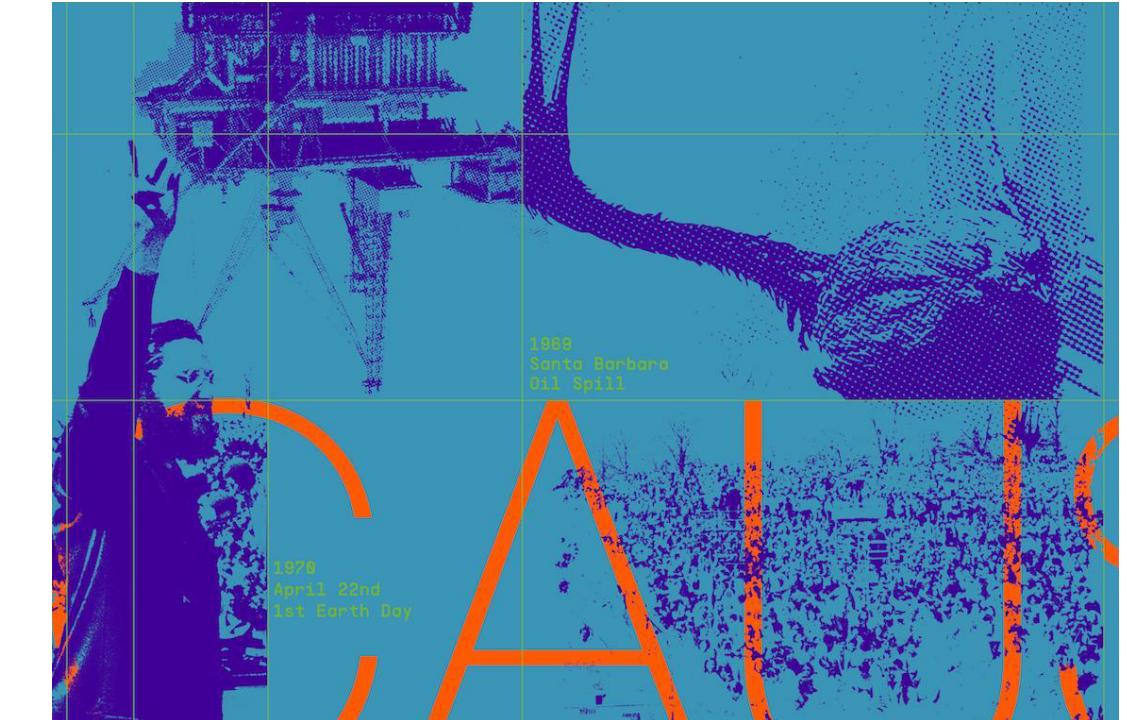


A few lines, one world: Gary Anderson and the Universal Recycling Symbol

Issue 1 — 10 July 2019
by Josh Bagines.



Part I: Introduction



Part II: Gary Anderson



Part III: Two Degrees Creative



Part IV: Sustainable design



Part V: Renewal



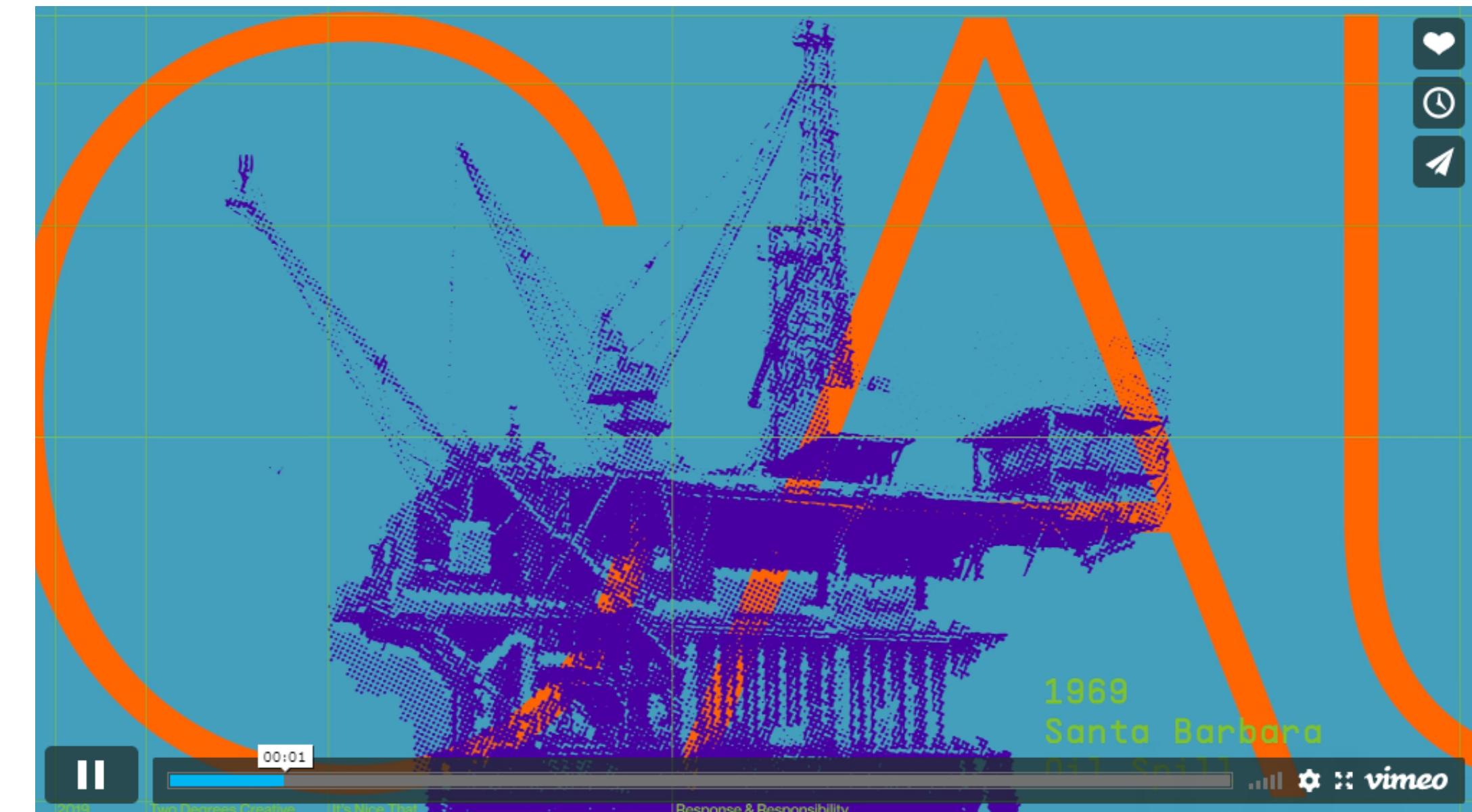
Part I: Introduction

22 April 1970 gave us Earth Day, the now annual event that fights for a greener, cleaner planet for all. Founded by the improbably named environmental activist Gaylord Nelson, it was a direct response to a gigantic oil spill, which had seen an estimated 100,000 barrels of crude oil soak the shores of Santa Barbara, California, the previous year.

Aware of the increasing mobilisation of the US's ever-growing student population as agents for change, Nelson knew that if he could get them on board with his (for the time) radical views on pollution and the importance of finding environmentally friendly solutions to emerging ecological problems, the nation's politicians and policy makers would have to pay attention. In theory, at least. As recent placard-heavy [Extinction Rebellion](#)¹ protests have demonstrated, sometimes the best way to get the world's attention is with a bit of immediately intriguing design.

Enter the Container Corporation of America. Then the biggest manufacturer of corrugated boxes in the US, the CCA was spearheaded by art-loving industrialist Walter Paepcke and had a reputation for being at the forefront of corporate graphic design. Just months after the first Earth Day, American college campuses found themselves plastered with a poster that asked aspiring designers with an interest in the environment to produce a symbol for future use on products made from recycled paper. Said symbol would be a public domain design, meaning that any company that wished to make it clear that they considered recycling a vital part of their manufacturing process could do so simply, easily and clearly.

Walter and his CCA colleagues had recruited an all-star cast to judge the competition, with the likes of Saul Bass² and influential IBM designer Eliot Noyes sifting through the 500 or so entries. The prize was \$2,500 and a fellowship to attend the 1970 International Design Conference at Aspen. The event was marked by strife and protest, with actions being staged by young designers who demanded a greater industry-wide engagement with social, political and environmental issues. The old guard awarded the prize to a young, relatively



Ryan McGill, 'Genesis' on Vimeo — Poster and animation by Two Degrees Creative, showing the timeline of the environmental movement, from the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, to the 1970 Earth Day, which led to the design of Gary Anderson's recycling symbol.



It's Nice That 2019, ['Photographer Chris Bethell gets inside the Extinction Rebellion protests for Vice'](#), 9 May.

Part II: Gary Anderson



Part V: Renewal

believea—has its own unique, Coke-specific recycling logo.

Despite that, things are getting better, and we're more aware of the consequences of a collective refusal to take recycling seriously than ever before. In an age of increasing climate literacy, we're beginning to grasp the fact that recycling is an immediate and easily understood means of engaging with the climate crisis, more aware of how it plays a fundamental role in the need to take individual responsibility for our own actions whilst also pushing for collective culpability on the part of governments and businesses.

So next time you make the effort to put a tin in the right bin at home or the remnants of a climate protest banner in the correct receptacle at the end of another long day of marching, think of Gary Anderson and those few little lines that wanted to change the world forever.

Related articles



[“We’re all part of the problem”:](#)
[Christopher and Graeme Raeburn on the future of fashion](#)

Issue 1 / Opinion — 31 July



[Extinction Rebellion on the creative industries: “What is the cultural sector even for?”](#)

Issue 1 / Features — 24 July

Next in this issue



[Nine points for tackling the climate crisis — without falling into despair](#)

Issue 1 / Features — 10 July