

# first *things* first 2000

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## We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators

who have been raised in a world in which the *techniques and apparatus of **advertising*** have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable use of our talents. Many design teachers and mentors promote this belief; the market rewards it; a tide of books and publications reinforces it. Encouraged in this direction, designers then apply their skill and imagination to sell dog biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes, credit cards, sneakers, butt toners, light beer and heavy-duty recreational vehicles. Commercial work has always paid the bills, but many graphic designers have now let it become, in large measure, what graphic designers do.

This, in turn, is how the world perceives design.  
The profession's time and energy is used up  
manufacturing demand for things that are  
inessential at best.

Many of us have grown  
increasingly uncomfortable  
with this view of design.  
Designers who devote their efforts  
primarily to advertising, marketing  
and brand development are  
supporting, and implicitly endorsing,  
a mental environment so saturated  
with commercial messages that it  
is changing the very way citizen-  
consumers speak, think, feel,  
respond and interact.

To some extent we are all helping draft  
*a reductive and immeasurably  
harmful code of public discourse.*  
There are pursuits more worthy of our  
problem-solving skills. Unprecedented  
environmental, social and cultural  
crises demand our attention. Many  
cultural interventions, social marketing  
campaigns, books, magazines,  
exhibitions, educational tools, television  
programs, films, charitable causes and  
other information design projects urgently  
require our expertise and help.

We propose a reversal of priorities in favor  
of more useful, lasting and democratic  
forms of communication - a mindshift  
away from product marketing and toward  
the exploration and production of **a new  
kind of meaning.** The scope of debate is  
shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is  
running uncontested; it must be challenged by  
other perspectives expressed, in part, through  
the visual languages and resources of design.

In 1964, 22 visual communicators signed the original call for our skills to be put to  
worthwhile use. With the explosive growth of global commercial culture, their message  
has only grown more urgent. Today, we renew their manifesto in expectation that  
**no more decades will pass before it is taken to heart.**