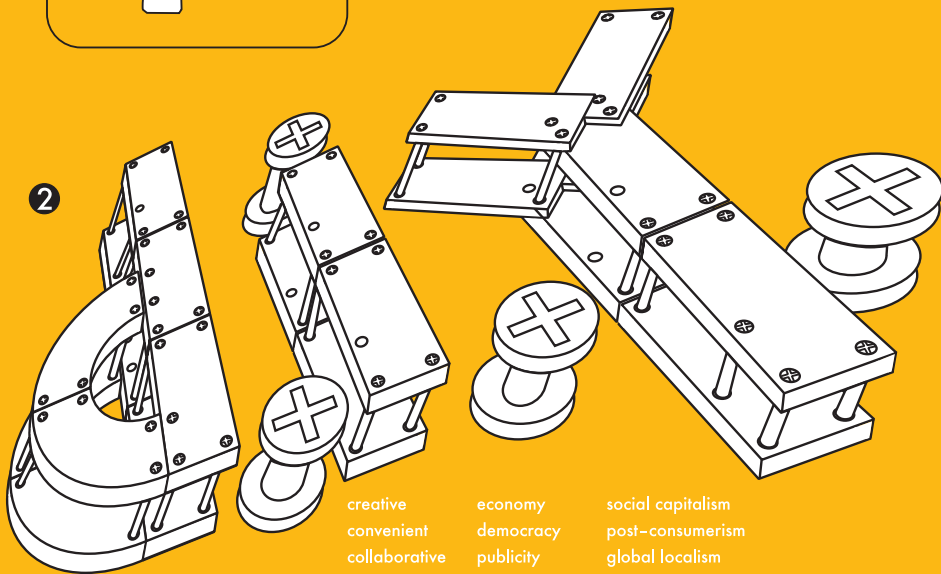
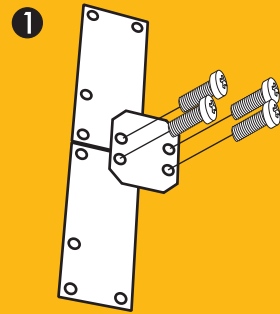


customize  
personalize  
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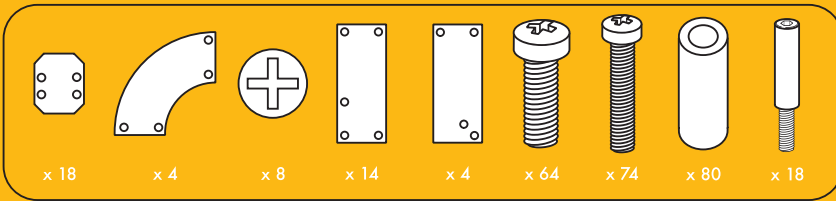


creative  
convenient  
collaborative

economy  
democracy  
publicity

social capitalism  
post-consumerism  
global localism

self-sufficiency  
self-education  
self-branding



# Why D.I.Y.?

Ellen Lupton

This book is for people from all walks of life who want to publish words, images, and ideas on paper, on t-shirts, on the Web, or anywhere else. Current technologies—from digital fonts and the Internet to full-service copy centers—make it possible for nearly anyone to produce their own graphics. Technology alone, however, is not enough. If you learn how to think like a designer, you will be able to clarify your ideas and pull together the materials, services, and software you need to make your concepts real. This book demystifies the technical side of small-scale publishing in various media while opening up your mind to the creative side of design.

**PUBLIC** This book is about producing media for a public. Your public could be large or small, intimate or anonymous. Consider, for example, a t-shirt. You get up in the morning and put on a shirt with a message on it. Throughout the day, people might recognize the band, the brand, or the style printed on your clothes. The people who see your shirt—friends, family, and strangers—are your public.

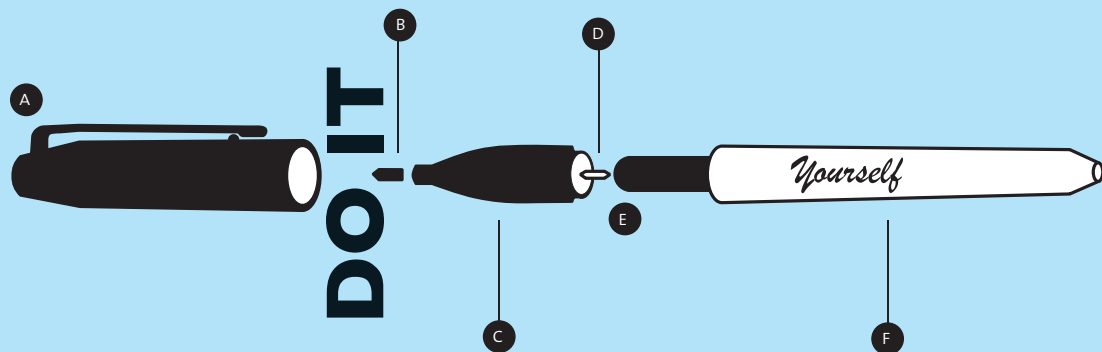
one shirt and sell them to other people, or you could give them away or trade them for other stuff you want. You could post your design on the Internet so that people could download it for free and use it themselves.

One day, you will walk down the street and see someone you don't know wearing your shirt. You will have reached your public in a new way.

People get most of their shirts from stores. Buying shirts and other products is one way of engaging the world of design. Deciding what styles you like, or what messages you want to share with other people, or what bands or companies you want to advertise on your chest, are all decisions about design and communication.

When you create your own shirt graphics, you decide exactly what you want to say and how you want to say it. You could make more than





**DO-IT-YOURSELF** is everywhere. Around the world, people are making things themselves in order to save money, to customize goods to suit their exact needs and interests, and to feel less dependent on the corporations that manufacture and distribute most of the products and media we consume. On top of these practical and political motivations is the pleasure that comes from developing an idea, making it physically real, and sharing it with other people.

Imagine a band whose members all have day jobs. They want to promote their music, but they can't afford to hire a publicist or design agency. One guy in the band has a great visual sense, although he has never called himself a designer. (Let's call him Bob.) He does awesome marker drawings and likes to write and draw on the band's jackets. At shows, he's often asked to write on other people's clothes.

If Bob could make a poster and figure out how to get it printed, the band would save money they didn't have in the first place. If they could transfer ideas from Bob's poster to other media (press kit, CD packages, stickers, t-shirts), they would be building their own unique visual brand, one that expresses the personality of their group. They could make a Web site where people could download songs along with Bob's graphics.

Having learned to do this stuff once, they have the power to change it whenever they need to. And maybe they will want to help the start-up candy store down the street learn to produce their own graphics, too.

For people who have grown up in the digital world, the impulse to make and share one's own media is second nature. Using the Web, artists and writers publish everything from full-fledged on-line magazines to first-person blogs. Rising dissatisfaction with the music industry has led some recording artists to sell CDs directly to consumers via the Internet, bypassing the costly layers of promotion, distribution, and retailing that constitute the traditional music business.

The D.I.Y. movement relies on and stimulates public dialogue. The techniques of self-sufficiency are expounded in countless books, magazines, workshops, and Web sites. People learning new skills often want to share them with others, as seen in Web sites featuring homegrown tutorials on design, animation, and other subjects, as well as online forums, chat rooms, and bulletin boards where visitors can learn from each other. In the process of sharing their practical know-how with other people, they build a community of individuals joined together around shared interests.

**DESIGN** is art that people use. From the house you live in to the clothes you wear to the magazines you read, every human-made object has been designed. Graphic design is a particular area of design practice. Conveying ideas with words and pictures, graphic designers create logos, books, magazines, packages, posters, Web sites, film titles, signage, and other media.

Most professional designers studied design in an art school or university art department. This book is no substitute for such training, and it makes no claim that it will turn you into a design professional. (We do hope that some readers will be inspired to study our field in more depth.)

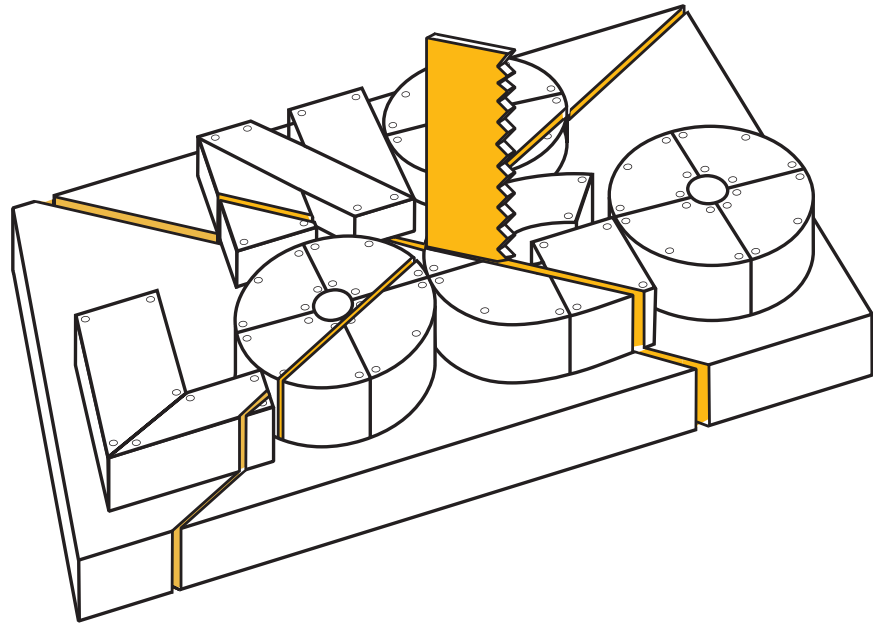
As a D.I.Y. design guide, this book will show you how to mobilize some of the technical and visual languages of design for use in your own life—to spread your own ideas or to promote your own band, club, church, school, or community group, or simply to make interesting things to wear and share with your friends. If you get really good at doing it for yourself, other people might ask you to do it for them, and you will be on your way to becoming a designer in the professional sense.



**WHY THIS BOOK NOW?** This book was produced by students and faculty in the Master of Fine Arts program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). We hope to broaden design awareness by spreading knowledge of what we do.

Compared to law, medicine, or architecture, whose formal discourses date back to antiquity, graphic design is a newcomer to the professional scene, appearing in the early twentieth century. As a medium closely connected to popular culture, graphic design has had a tough time defining itself as an autonomous academic discourse. One could say that for graphic design, the barbarians have always been at the gate. We *are* the barbarians, the bastard children of the fine arts. We are the publicists and popularizers, the people of the street. You don't need a license or a set of initials after your name to become a graphic designer. Indeed, you don't need special permission from anyone to put something on paper, or on a shirt, or on the World Wide Web (as long as it's your own work or in the public domain).

Public interest in design has grown over the past twenty-five years. The rise of "desktop publishing" in the 1980s delivered digital design tools to the general public. Although some designers worried that secretaries equipped with Times Roman and Microsoft Word would obliterate the design profession, the field got bigger rather than smaller. Not only could administrative assistants bring visual order to internal publications, but managers were starting to shape their own documents, and were even becoming their own secretaries, just as graphic designers had become their own typesetters and paste-up artists. The processes of production were bubbling up through the corporate soil.



Desktop publishing made people more attentive to design values. Learning to edit and format text electronically helped them recognize the quality of professionally produced design and typography. As the cost of print production went down, expectations for design went up. Everything from memos to flyers to in-house newsletters could now be executed with some level of sophistication instead of being shoved out naked into the world. Some of this was done in-house, but a lot of it was produced by professional designers.

In the 1990s, when desktop publishing collided head-on with the World Wide Web, design became a multimedia enterprise. PowerPoint emerged as a basic job skill for middle managers, and just about anyone could hang a virtual shingle out on the Internet.

Retailers were becoming more design-oriented as well, as Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, IKEA, and other companies expanded their markets by offering housewares and home furnishings that felt both contemporary and familiar. These clean, accessible products became emblems of a design-conscious yet easy-to-implement lifestyle.

A big influence in the new taste-making has been Martha Stewart, who built a small catering business into a powerful family of publications, products, and media. Her magazine, *Martha Stewart Living*, provides D.I.Y. instructions for achieving beauty and hospitality in the home. Martha Stewart's editorial sensibility influenced other magazines as well as numerous catalogs and Web sites, from Williams-Sonoma to Home Depot. Inspired by Martha Stewart but seeking to express new points of view, magazines like *Real Simple*, *Readymade*, and *Budget Living* have each staked out their own territory in the arena of lifestyle publishing.

Growing alongside the awareness of design has been an anti-consumerist discourse, exemplified by the Canadian magazine *Ad Busters* and the book *No Logo*, written by the Canadian critic Naomi Klein. Raging against the corporate machine, these publications gave voice to communities of citizens disgusted by the exploitation of international workers and the destruction of natural resources represented by the endless onslaught of branding and advertising.

#### THREE POINTS ON THE STATE OF DESIGN TODAY

1. Many people today have achieved high levels of design awareness and visual literacy, in areas ranging from fonts to furniture.
2. Across society there is unprecedented demand for and access to the tools of self-publishing. People want to make (and share) their own media.
3. Many consumers wish to be less reliant on the corporate empire of signs, desiring to redirect the flow of consumption for their own purposes.

We have thus arrived at a compelling turn in the evolution of design consciousness. The general public is more aware than ever before of the values and languages of design, from graphics to architecture to automobiles. At the same time, many consumers, especially younger ones, distrust the global corporate economy upon which mass production relies. Furthermore, they do not identify with the gracious perfectionism of Martha Stewart or with the tidy traditionalism of Pottery Barn.

A writer whose work helped inspire the making of this book is Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), an Italian Marxist who was jailed by the Fascist regime for the last eleven years of his life. His posthumous *Prison Notebooks* expressed a new model for the socially engaged thinker, whom he called the “organic intellectual.” In contrast to the “traditional intellectuals,” who were tied to formal entities such as the church, the state, the academy, and the mainstream media, the new “organic intellectuals” were doing their work in the context of trade unions, clubs, cafes, political parties, the independent press, and other emerging institutions.<sup>1</sup>

These organic intellectuals could merge physical and mental labor, building “new modes of thought” out of acts of doing and making. Their skills would be both technical and theoretical. To start an independent newspaper, for instance, requires knowledge of how papers are printed and distributed as well as knowledge of how to write.

Gramsci argued that all people are intellectuals, but that only some take on the public role of an intellectual within society. Likewise, we might say that everyone is a designer (a particular kind of intellectual), because all people make decisions about their environment, their personal appearance, their media consumption, and so forth. To manipulate the messages and materials of design in an active, public way is to take on the social role of the designer. Following Gramsci, we prefer to define design as a *social* function, rather than as a profession or an academic discipline.

Gramsci believed that organic intellectuals would emerge from institutions of practical learning, where thinking and doing are connected. These organic thinkers function, in turn, to educate others: they inform, explain, persuade, inspire, organize, promote, and instruct, engaging in a process of exchange and interaction through which publics are built.

The authors of this book, a group of graduate students and faculty, have each brought a body of experience to the editorial table. By asking what other people might want to know about what we do, we have expanded our own knowledge.

1. Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p3–23.