This isn’t graphic design although the ADC says it is:
This series of station IDs was made for VH1 Networks. It was written and storyboarded by us.
The end result is like little scenes from movies. It seems to have little to do with graphic design.
Yet, when we (ignorantly) submitted it to the ADC show in the Graphic Design category, it won a gold medal.
What does that mean? Maybe the medium dictates what is graphic design. Maybe the judges were overworked. Maybe the pieces were just more entertaining than all those brochures, stationary systems and print ads.
This isn’t graphic design but illustration, although actual illustrators might disagree:
These are concept illustrations made for MTV’s Sunday Stew programming block. They were all made by graphic designers.
These are stills from the final piece. They look almost like the concept art, except that we had to recreate all the photos we found on Google.
Okay, so maybe it’s not illustration (because that field seems almost exclusively defined by editorial applications). But it’s not graphic design either (because there’s no type). It’s not animation, at least in the common sense (because it doesn’t have characters or a story). What is it?
This looks like graphic design, but it’s pure film making:
These are storyboards for a station identifier. The story is set in an airport.
### Departure Gates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flight</th>
<th>Dep</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Gate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMF 1354</td>
<td>7:55</td>
<td>On Time</td>
<td>Port-au-Prince</td>
<td>22B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMG 832</td>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>UMG 831</td>
<td>8:05</td>
<td>On Time</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>15A</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF 1012</td>
<td>8:15</td>
<td>On Time</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNS 45</td>
<td>8:20</td>
<td>Boarding</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMG 189</td>
<td>8:25</td>
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<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>16B</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNS 51</td>
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<td>Caracas</td>
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### Claim 6

<table>
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<td>IMF 1012</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMG 83</td>
<td>DAKAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF 1596</td>
<td>NEW ORLEANS</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF 1014</td>
<td>MOSCOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF 1537</td>
<td>TOKYO</td>
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</table>
We hired a production designer to build a set that included large glass panes and back projections.
We collaborated with a stylist to invent this futurist folklore look.
There seems to be a lot of graphic design in this piece, but the techniques and collaborators are strictly based on parameters that are established in film production.
If this was an album cover, would it be graphic design?
I think the reason why network clients give these jobs to graphic designers, and why professional organizations think of these jobs as graphic design, is because the industry is set up that way, and because those structures never seem to change.
If it’s done for a network, it’s graphic design, no matter what technique you’re using.
This should be graphic design although the AIGA says it isn’t:
In 2002, we designed this poster series for a Coca-Cola commercial, commissioned by ad agency McCann Erickson.
We used only our own typefaces and handlettered the rest.
We decided to submit them to an AIGA competition in the Typography category.
The AIGA declined the entry saying the posters were not designed for the marketplace and thus not eligible for the competition. I think that’s odd. First, they were designed for and paid for by a client (which is more than you can say for a lot of self-promotional stuff that wins awards). Second, we didn’t think they should be judged as posters but for their typographic qualities.
What the AIGA did suggest is that we submit the entire commercial instead. What’s confusing is that we also directed the spot, picked the location and did the production design, styled the talent and provided a four-second animation sequence that uses type as well. What part would the judges have looked at?
What’s more graphic design: The posters on the wall, the film making or the animation?
What’s more graphic design: The posters on the wall, the film making or the animation?
This is not graphic design, but film making and visual effects. But who directed the type?
We directed this car commercial on location in New Zealand, with cranes, helicopters and a crew of 50.
We also designed the type that shows up everywhere: Other vehicles, clouds, buildings, facades, birds are all made of letters.
Who would you give this job to?
We could only get these kinds of jobs after we proved ourselves as film makers. We realized that we needed to compete with other commercial directors, and not with other design companies. It never made sense for us to aim lower or to limit ourselves.
I think the reason why agencies give these jobs to film makers, and why professional organizations think of these jobs as film making, is because the industry is set up that way, and because those structures never seem to change.
If it’s done for an ad agency, it’s film making, no matter what technique you’re using.
Graphic designers (think they) can do it all. But as they move into other professional fields, those areas are not uninhabited.
So what if, instead of a graphic designer making films, you wanted to be a graphic designer making type?
Better get some practice.
You’ll have to be as good as these guys.

(Bernard Edmonds)

A successful agate predicts the spread of ink on paper and effectively keeps legibility under less than ideal conditions. Fascinated by the visual aspects of these entirely functional compensations, Christian Schwartz designed Amplitude, an extensive sanserif series for text and display that turns function into style: deep angled cuts keep small sizes readable, while adding character at display sizes. FB 2003
You think you can do graphic design one day and just make images the next?
All of these guys have spent ten years developing their visual languages.

(Jasper Goodall)
All of these guys have spent ten years developing their visual languages.

(Nick Knight)
All of these guys have spent ten years developing their visual languages.

(Stefane Manel)
You want to design and sell T-shirts?

Video killed the radio star.
Better learn how to make patterns. Their T-shirts are better cut than yours.
What then is graphic design good at?
Tjalie Robinson: Didi in Holland
Gelderse Culturele Raad
Cover works are Russian cigarette cards conveying a sheet of cards bearing two photographs of the Indonesian Didi, a lady looking both east and west. The colours are red, white and blue, but feels like an old imperial flag.
Voor de omslag is gebruik gemaakt van een karton waarop twee foto's van de Indonesisch-Nederlandse schrijver zowel in oostelijke als westelijke richting kijken. De kleuren rood-wit-blauw verschijnen, maar bleek, als van een oude Koninkrijksvlag.

Tjalie Robinson: Didi in Holland
Gelderse cahiers
In graphic design, the one craft to care about should be typography. Because nobody else does.
When it comes to formal languages, graphic designers have a broader range at their disposal than other visual artists (partly because they dabble in so many different directions). Graphic designers can use type or image or type and image, they can use see-say or metaphor, they can use lettering, photography, diagrams, icons, symbols, writing, doodles, illustrations, photographs of illustrations, doodles of symbols, letters that look like things, things that look like letters – you get the idea.
In everyday use, “graphic” sometimes means clear, bold and simple. Only graphic designers can distill a multi-national corporation into a single mark. Film makers, on the other hand, take a “boy-meets-girl” or a “rat-in-the-police-department” story and blow it out into a $120 million extravaganza.
Futurism
Graphic designers have a broad interest in understanding the mechanics of popular culture, paralleled maybe only by people in fashion or advertising. Architects and product designers are on their own undisturbed long-term trajectory, illustrators are focussed on their own language, most film makers worry less about innovation than about story, but graphic designers really seem to care about what’s next. That interest fuels the desire to invent the future rather than imitating the present or, worse, recreating the past.
Thank you.