

Snowstorm Brainstorm: A series of Snowboard Graphics

The idea that snowboard deck design needs to be covered in corporate logos for commercial advertising purposes is, in my opinion, completely mind-numbing and uninteresting. It is expected and generic, given that we all live in a culture that bombards us with corporate branding everyday. As a tool that, for most riders, becomes an extension of their body while in motion, shouldn't the purpose of the board's graphics be to connect with the rider emotionally and visually? Believing that snowboard graphics can have a conceptual direction aside from purely aesthetic qualities, I aim to create three snowboards that raise questions about the relationship between board graphics and the riders riding the snowboards.

The series of snowboard graphics I am designing goes beyond current corporate board design and attempts to illustrate what I believe an advanced rider can identify with— graphics that represent real experiences (jumps, landings, speed, and height) and emotions (confidence, focus, fear and composure) familiar to the riders using the boards. Can a twenty-something year old rider who is proficient in the actual execution of the sport really identify emotionally with a board design solely dependent on a company's logo (See img. A)? Believing that riders cannot connect with such shallow graphics, these three boards use expressive typography to illustrate phrases, such as “He came flying out of the air, playing with fate,” (Board 1 titled *Mind Game*), “when the feelings get real, loosen up dude” (Board 2 titled *Real Loose*) and “I'm missing the link between brain and instinct” (Board 3 titled *Mis-Linked*) to capture some of the emotions and dialogues of the riders and their friends or spectators.



Image A
Jeremy Jones; Burton Boards
Image source: www.burton.com

The words and textures on the boards I am making, given their idiosyncratic nature, create two visual conversations that exist simultaneously on the two sides of a snowboard. The first conversation reflects the internal, private conversation the rider has with their self while snowboarding (see img B, C, D). On the bottom of the first board titled *Mind Game*, the phrases “I hear sounds all around” and “having that voice inside your head, right beneath your skin like a tangled mess of thoughts both logical and insane” alludes to this private conversation going on in the rider’s head. The typography reflects these “thoughts in the form of words and sentences that bounce around inside a rider’s head” as he or she rationalizes over what they want to do and feel in contrast to what their psyche is advising them to do and feel (Cohn 33). The composition of the text

on all three boards is meant to seem jumbled and unresolved, given that “many athletes do not have the ability to completely control their inner thoughts” (Cohn 31).



Image B: Mind Game
Bottom Side - Rider's Emotions

Image B: Loosen Up
Bottom Side - Rider's Emotions

Image B: Mislinked
Bottom Side - Rider's Emotions

Imagine a rider shredding down the side of a mountain, and out of their peripheral vision they see a perfect backcountry jump made from snow over a fallen tree. Excited with their discovery, they slow down and signal their friends to follow them over to the jump. Setting their line, the rider decides they are going to go for a rodeo 750 (back flip

with two twist) and the internal dialogue begins. They say to themselves, “Not too fast, and not too slow,” when immediately they remember of all the things that could possibly go wrong. They have to hit the pillow line at around 30 kilometers an hour because any faster and they’re landing on the flats. Any slower and they won’t get a clean takeoff. So as they play devil’s advocate with their brain and gravity, they gain speed and hope for that marginal chance that they execute the trick with elegance and style (The Sick Art of Snowboarding 56).

The expressive nature of the second board titled *Loosen up* conveys emotions associated with confidence. The text making up the internal conversation such as “come alive and a give me five, just slap my hand and amplify” is intended to release a positive overall vibe when experiencing the ride. This text was influenced by the work of F.T Marinetti and other futurist artists who “used sound as the driving force in their work (White 22). According to White, Marinetti created “typographic voice” in his piece, *Parole in liberta*, “from words thrown about the page, composed with type, lines and occasional drawings” (White 23) (See img. E). Attempting to create a “typographic voice” like Marinetti, the *loosen up* board uses a mix of handmade san serif and serif typefaces to create a strong tone of voice that reflects the internal feelings of the rider. The way the structure of the words play off common letters within the words forms an alternating relaxed and dynamic composition similar to the how a rider’s path is determined by the topographic features of a particular mountain. Carving back and forth in a zigzag pattern, it is almost like the rider made a lot of sharp turns through the words “feelings get real”, and an open, loose turn on the second “O” in the word “loosen”. The elongated “u” in the word “up” reflects the shape of a common freestyle event known as

the half pipe. Furthermore, the green, white, and black colors used on this side of the board symbolizes the familiar landscape many of these riders ride in on a daily basis.



Image E:
Filippo Achille Emilio Marinetti.
Four pages from his futurist book, *Parole in Libertà*, printed on metal, 1932
Image source: Creative Type, 12

The second conversation, existing simultaneously with the first, is between the rider and the spectators watching. This dialogue characterizes how a spectator understands the motion they are seeing based on physical and cerebral qualities instead of sensual experiences. In the *Mind Game* board, I created the external text (words representing the point of view of the spectator) “came flying out of the air, playing with fate” to suggest what the spectator is seeing as they anxiously wait to see if the rider lands their trick. (See img. F,G,H). The words create a mental image for the viewer, and a

sensual feeling for the proficient riders that have actually experienced this uncertainty in midair. The words, composed “in an essential messiness and ambiguity of the human condition” (Heller, 44) on the board, relate to how a spectator watches while experiencing adrenaline and uncertainty.



Image F: Mind Game
Front Side - Spectator's View

Image G: Loosen Up
Front Side - Spectator's View

Image H: Mislunked
Front Side - Spectator's View

The fine line I am playing with between what is illegible and legible purely depends on one's specific orientation and relationship to the content of the words on the board. Influenced by the experimental spreads in the magazine *Ray Gun*, art directed by

David Carson, the structure of these boards allows the viewer the ability to choose points of interest, much like the way pull-quotes or blurbs do in magazines (See Img. I).



Image I:
Ray Gun Magazine spread (vol/year not specified)
Image source: Typeplay, 55

The typography on these three boards may seem completely illegible to a spectator that has little knowledge of snowboarding, but very legible to the actual rider who has felt and experienced the very thing I am describing. My intent is not to have the specific messages on the boards be communicated so directly that the viewer always get what I am saying the first time they look at them, but instead provoke interest to hopefully draw the viewer into the piece to further decipher its message. Unlike poster design that needs to have an absorption rate of ten seconds or less, I want the viewer to spend five, ten, even fifteen minutes with my boards (Heller 46).

Consisting of two sides, a snowboard's physical division between top and bottom serves as a secondary layer of conceptual complexity for these board's graphics. The external dialogue, composed on the topside of the board, is meant to be the external skin of the board, covering the internal, private conversation underneath. The internal dialogue, placed on the underside of the board (less visible than the topside), can only be seen when the rider is in midair or at an angle that allows the bottom of the board to be visible. The availability of these thoughts serves as a metaphor to how one's thoughts stay contained within their psyche until shared. However, realizing that the inside and outside of the rider are still both connected, the text, textures and colors spill onto each side of the board, creating continuity between the opposing sides. In the *Mis-Linked* board, the words "I'm missing the link between brain and instinct" are on the topside of the board because they relate to a visual experience witnessed by the spectator. Whereas the second part of the phrase "so I hide inside my music, and forget the day" are placed on the underside of the board because they relate to the emotions the rider is feeling while in motion. The compositional boundaries differentiating between how the rider deals internally versus how the viewer sees the athlete externally are blurred. This new link between both expressions visually validates that without the external context, the internal contexts could not exist.

This series of snowboards will be displayed on three pedestals in an art gallery. Placed in clear U-shaped stands on top of three small pedestals (one foot by one foot square cubes), each board will stand upright on the bottom edge, topside facing forward. Arranged in a triangle, the viewer can walk into the middle of the display to see the backside of the boards. Originally, I wanted the board's stands to spin 360 degrees on a

circular axis, so the viewer could see the graphics in motion as well as take the board out and examine it closely. However, rarely do the viewers touch a designed object in a gallery, so the hope of combining the graphics and movement will have to be realized only when someone takes the boards out to the snow.

By displaying the boards so that the graphics will not be obstructed by the stands, I hope the viewer will be able to experience the designs as a whole. This slight difference of presentation compared to mainstream methods demonstrates the very nature of snowboarding and of expressive typography. Both snowboarding and expressive typography involve risk and anticipation. If every athlete did the same thing over and over again, and never pushed the boundaries of what could be done- would you even be interested in the sport? I don't believe we would. As Vignelli said, "the grid is a lion, you are the tamer. If you stay too long in the grid, the lion will eat you" (De Jong 33).

Works Cited

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