Many non-arts folks seem delighted to talk about business. While the books I've just mentioned prove that creative folks *can* talk that talk, most of us seem hesitant to. I imagine there are two reasons for that: we either think that good people don't care about money, or we think it's a good move to pretend money doesn't matter. Neither of these things take into account that everyone needs money to live.

I, myself, was a very broke musician before I became involved in visual things, and I came from the "slacker" '90s where music icons like Courtney Love and Mudhoney's Mark Arm were impossibly anti-commercial. Cracks in that facade have started to appear, but in the 1990s most "alternative" artists, musicians, labels, and magazines were very anti-money. Any written contract was a deal with the Corporate Devil. "Real" creativity was exclusively non-commercial.

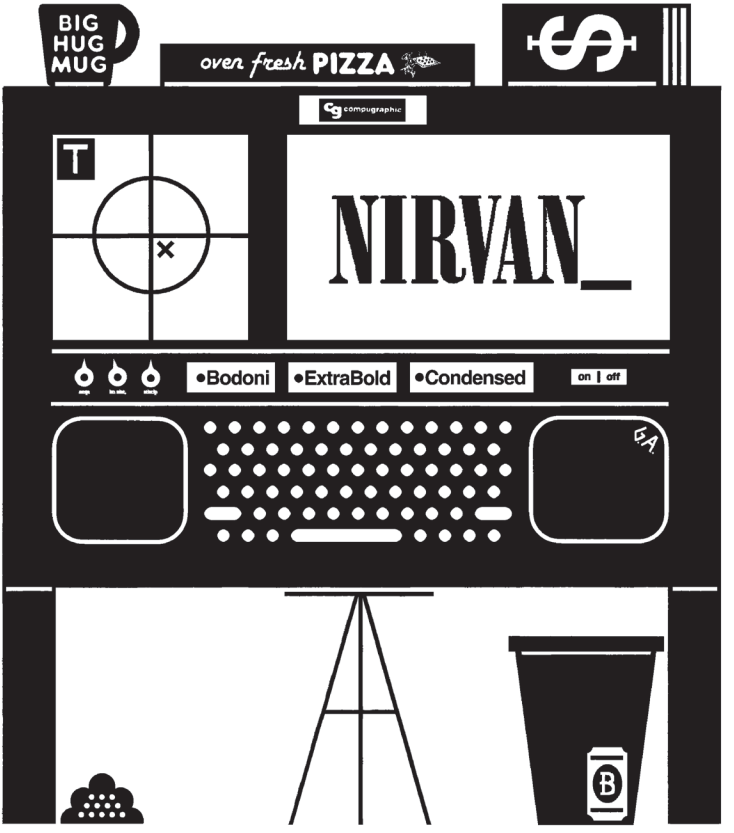
The centre of 1990s slacker culture was Seattle, specifically Sup Pop records. That record label's most popular band was a trio called Nirvana, and it was active from 1987 to 1994. The story of how the Nirvana logo was created tells us a lot about commerce in the era.

There are a few very similar versions of the process, but my favourite version is an account from former Sub Pop designer and godfather of American

DIY graphic design Art Chantry. To paraphrase a Facebook post he made a few years ago: in the late 1980s Sub Pop had a complex relationship with a group of music-minded designers in Seattle, and both the record label and designers were financially struggling. In the spirit of supporting the label and its musicians, the designers (sometimes begrudgingly) took turns working for the label for low payment or no payment.

In 1989 Sub Pop needed someone to put together the cover typography for the then-unknown band's first album, *Bleach*. Sub Pop Art Director Lisa Orth asked a local typesetter named Grant Alden to do it. To make it easier, they agreed that he could typeset it with the typeface his Compugraphic typesetter was already set to: Bodoni Extra Bold Condensed. He was paid $15 USD. In absence of a usage agreement, Sub Pop then used that type as-is on most of Nirvana's subsequent releases, and the modern Nirvana logo was later completed with the addition of a blissed-out, tongue-out, face. History is mum about who added that, but Orth herself is my prime suspect.

When Nirvana's second album, *Nevermind*, came out in September of 1991 with his type on the cover, Alden could've used that $15 to buy one of the 30 million copies that'd eventually be sold.


BIG
HUG
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over fresh PIZZA
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NIRVAN_
•Bodoni
•ExtraBold
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Thirty-some years later Sub Pop records still exists, Kurt Cobain's estate is worth around $450 million USD, and just yesterday I saw a kid at my daughter's school wearing the Nirvana logo on a shirt. It's not as famous as the Nike swoosh, but it's still one of the most recognizable logos in the music business and worth much, much, more than $15.

I'm not saying Sub Pop, Nirvana, or Orth were villains, or saying that Alden was gullibly swindled or daft for not being able to predict the coming Nirvana boom—he's a smart and capable person, currently writing, editing, and designing in Kentucky after a decade or so of publishing a music mag called *No Depression*. Orth, too, is the kind of multi-medium, multi-skilled artist and activist that I especially admire, and was probably paid much less than what she was worth as Sub Pop's Art Director. What am I saying? That whether it's the 1990s or right now, it often benefits the client more than the creative when biz agreements are kept informal.

*

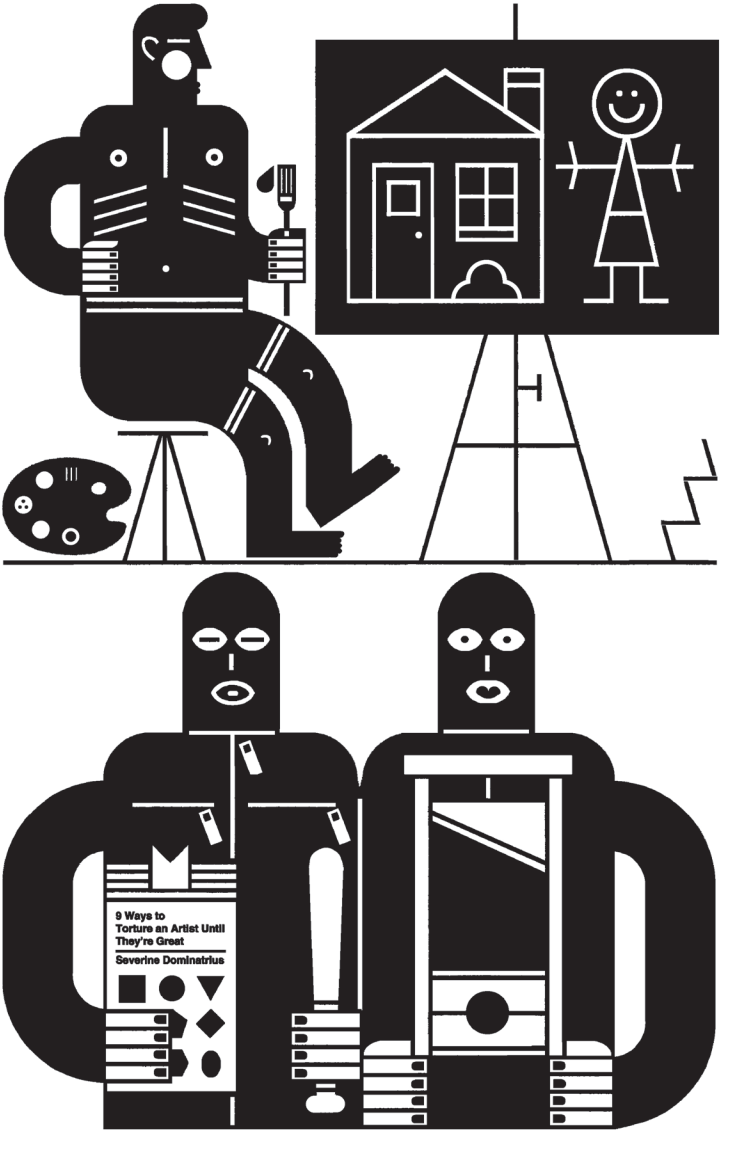
What else do us creatives have to contend with, besides cultural baggage left over from the 1990s? Off the top of my head:

- The very modern phenomena of the "hobby-to-career pipeline." On that path, creativity runs fast and business concerns follow slowly and reluctantly on a long, long, leash.

- That many independent creatives see themselves as an "idea guy," waiting for a "money guy" to show up and take care of them. They very rarely show up, except in fiction or in cases that a creative is already doing quite well.

- That discussions about conflict and theft can be awkward, emotional, or embarrassing. It can feel intensely personal, because we pour so much of our selves and identities into our work.

- That very few of us are eloquent or confident when it comes to dealing with ripoffs—they happen rarely enough that almost any creative is damned to be an amateur at dealing with them.



“He still hasn’t suffered enough.”

- That some people don't consider what we do as "labour," which makes them think it's okay to pay us with intangible things like "exposure" instead of tangible things like paycheques.

- That the internet age has turned notions of copyright and trademark and "originality" upside-down. As a result, our notions of "right" and "wrong" are uncertain, varied, and changing.

- The idea that chaos, pain, and poverty fuel creativity, so trying to improve one's situation is counter to making "good art." See the previous page for a humorous example of this. And while I'd like to take credit for the gag, I've just redrawn an unsigned cartoon I found in a late '60s low-brow pulp joke book called *Zowie*!

There are other considerations, too. If you're independently wealthy, a hobbyist, a retiree-turned-painter, a hermit, an avant garde messiah, or a trust fund kid, getting ripped off doesn't matter

as much. Those folks can enjoy claiming that "art wants to be free" without consequences. It's an easy thing to say when your expenses are nonexistent or already taken care of.

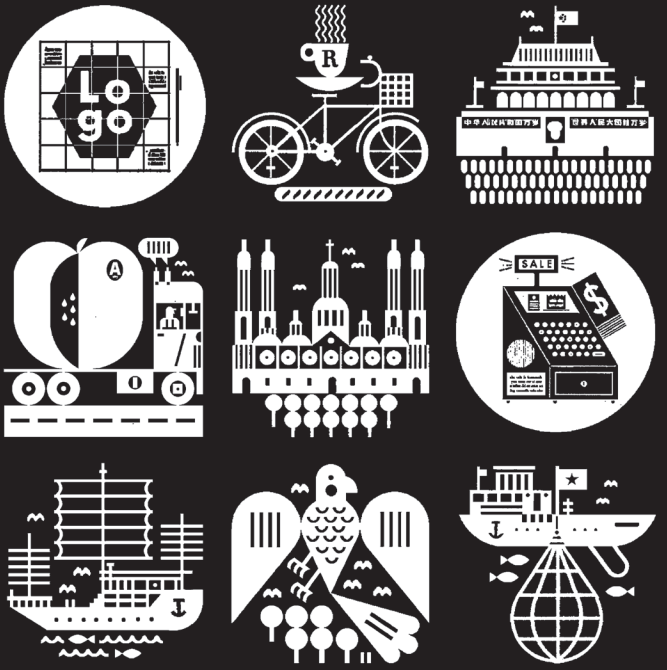
But actual creative individuals don't often fit these categories. We might want to support a family, have a stable home, maintain our health, eat reasonably good food, and vacation every once in a while. We probably don't want to make art while binge-drinking absinthe like Henri Toulouse-de-Lautrec, however fun that seems every once in a while. If you're intent on creating a stable career that will exist for years and years, one has to take these things somewhat seriously.

*

And that's exactly what this book hopes to do. I'm not going to pretend to be your parent, friend, mentor, instructor, teacher, or lawyer. I am, though, going to be candid enough about my experiences to make something relevant to modern photographers, designers, and illustrators. Ideally, these experiences will be relevant to others, too—whenever the law is out of reach, people improvise and find their own ways to find justice and settle grievances. Some of my tactics should be applicable

A Collection of Essays

by an Italian Design Legend



wherever and however artists are at work. And just in case you're into the "sport" of authenticity-debating, it's here, too. A third of the ripoffs in this book fit into that conversation, as does the cover of this book itself.

When I posted an early mockup of it online, an acquaintance said it looked like "a ripoff of a Penguin crime cover." He was half right. I was indeed staring at the cover of Italian design legend Bruno Munari's Penguin Classic edition of *Design as Art* before and after making it, and it's still an arm's-length away from me as I type this. I'm also aware that if I add the word "by" to the cover of this book—as authors usually do—it'd easily be misread as *9 Times My Work Has Been Ripped Off By Raymond Biesinger*. An earlier version of the cover said exactly that, a hilarious reminder to examine my own own relationship to copyright, trademark, and other peoples' works.

Researching for this book has involved poring through a lot of my old notes, and I've been amused by how flawed and inconsistent I have been towards the rights of older illustrators and designers. And I'm definitely not pretending the examples of my own abuses found in this book are the *only* ones I've ever committed. You'll find more if you look harder—some of my personal pieces are absolute

minefields of intellectual property. So, not only am I going to be talking to some of the people who've ripped me off, I'll also be talking to some of the people *I've* ripped off. They're all part of this, too, and their perspectives are worth noting.

With all that in mind, don't take my actions as an always-right example of what needs to be done about infringements of your work and thefts of your labour. Ripoffs are varied, as are the people involved with them. Through these illustrations and words, though, I hope you can develop a few more skills to use in the getting-rougher world of being an independent creative worker. The better we all are at defending ourselves, the less we'll have to do it.