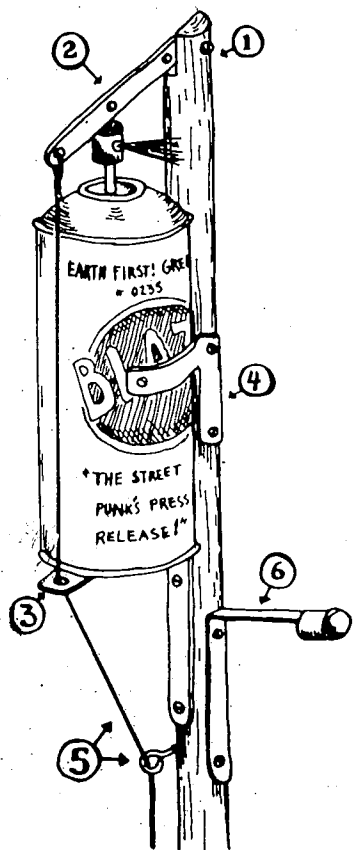


\$3.00



For those hard-to-reach spots!



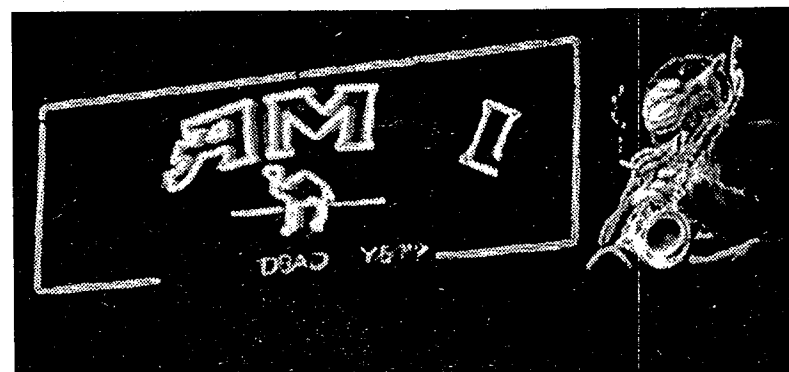
Back cover graphics by Earth First!

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—Los Cabrones Press

The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement

(Second Edition, Revised & Expanded)



by

Billboard Liberation Front
and Friends



Aim High

Once upon a time there were five tree planters from a cooperative who, having worked very hard, took a vacation in Seattle. They saw a billboard which had a very phallic jet aircraft torqueing across the sign with the caption, "Aim High." So they did.

They went onto the board, measured it, and got color samples. They pasted red-painted letters onto white butcher paper, got squeegees and other gear, and one evening rush hour they posted a person at one end of the freeway bridge next to the board, and another near an on-ramp in the other direction, all armed with walkie-talkies. The others wheat-pasted the paper onto the sign.

Most observers were amused. Others were hostile. One father-son team got out of their car and demanded that the crew "Come down here right now!!!" The young vandals explained that they had a job to do and ignored these "Love it or Leave it" types. The traffic flow soon compelled the all-American duo to leave. Indeed, it was so heavy that even with immediate warning—cellular phones hadn't yet arrived—the cops would have taken minutes to arrive.

Within 15 minutes the sign was corrected and our heroes had departed, leaving their spattered overalls and equipment in a friend's boat, which was anchored in one of the city's canals. To celebrate they went to a local bar, whose tinted windows turned out to have a commanding view of the scene of the crime. As they entered it was clear that virtually everyone had watched them; they were fingered—and the room broke into cheers.

They had relaxed for perhaps 20 minutes when the police arrived like gangbusters, looking for people to assist them in their inquiries. As no one had seen a thing, the cops left.

By noon the next day the board had been re-covered. It looked great . . . until the next winter rain, when the added letters showed through the wet paper. Next to "Aim High" were the words, "Blow Up the

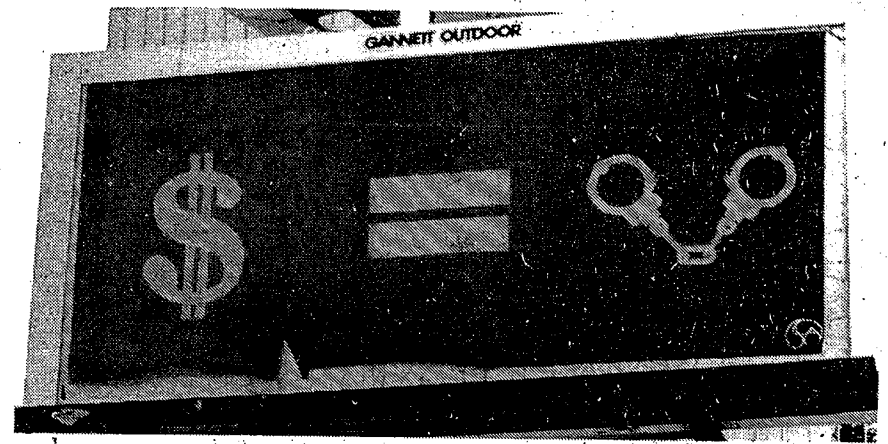
The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement

(Second Edition, Revised & Expanded)



Billboard Liberation Front and Friends





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The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement was originally published in *Processed World* magazine. We wish to thank the PW staff for their help in making this document possible, and we wish to note that the PW staff wrote two sections of this pamphlet: "We Also Do Boards" and "Aim High." Thanks also to Jack L. Lopes and Paizley Hayes of the FUCK YOU IT'S ART Foundation, the staff of *Twisted Times* magazine, the Institute of Media Deconstruction, the Institute for Rational Analysis of National Trends, and, of course, the sign industry.

This edition published by Los Cabrones Press, with offices in San Francisco, Tucson, and Anarres. Look for us in the telephone book (but don't expect to find us).

Please Note: The BLF is not responsible for improving all of the boards pictured or described in this pamphlet, though it is responsible for a large majority of them.

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—Los Cabrones Press

slogans to the labels of cans going to a local "national security" company. His boss called him in and told him that he had just finished reassuring the place's head of security that the person who had done it was fired. (The FBI proved that the pain was applied before the labels were put on the cans). Fortunately for him, his boss had lied.

So, what's the point? Get out there and have fun! Spread the good word! Sometimes it's disheartening—you'll find that lots of people never look at billboards, and some people who do don't see what they really say. But billboard improvements are an alternative which subverts commercial and social space.

We hope to see your writing on the wall—real soon and everywhere! And remember—be careful; be funny; and be audacious!

—Primitivo Morales

We never went onto a board in advance. We felt that it wasn't necessary and involved undue exposure. In fact, some LAGards (Livermore Action Group—an anti-nuke group) were caught measuring a board and were charged with trespassing. Needless to say, they became some of the "usual suspects" when any billboard in the area was corrected. We worked with photos and visual inspections on foot, as we were mostly hitting small boards in urban areas. Freeways were a different matter.

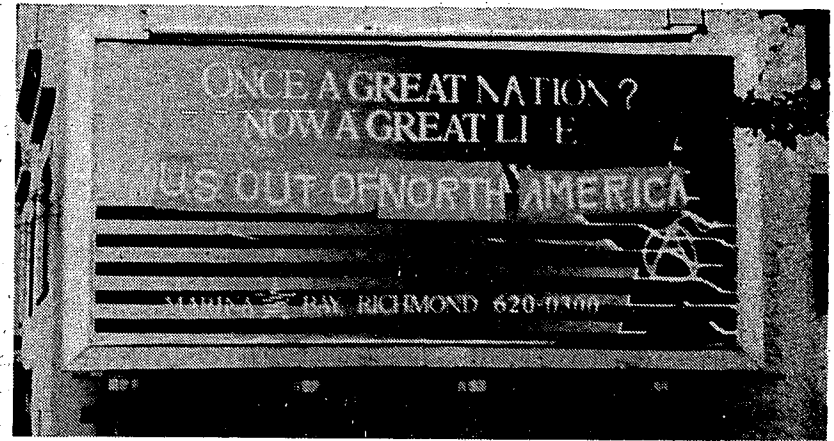
Most of our work was "corrections" and small alterations. We learned the hard way that what the BLF says about small pieces of paper is not just a good idea; it's a law of nature. We only tried to take over a whole board once. A dozen of us worked on it. It involved a tremendous racket, lots of work, and was a big failure. If we had scouted first we would have known that the beast was enameled metal. Our staple guns were useless. But at least we got the letter size right. They closed off the access after our attempt. Oh well. Wish we'd had the BLF's manual then.

Unwilling to limit ourselves to existing "authorized" locations, we also hung banners—two large ones. Both were produced by others; we merely provided technical assistance. One, strung across the last overpass before the toll plaza on the SF-Oakland Bay Bridge, was in honor of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Imitating a movie marquee, it read: "LEBANON—Featuring a Casket of Thousands/A US-Israel Production." It went up at 6:30 a.m.; CalTrans crews took the cotton sheet and rope creation down in less than an hour, but not before countless people saw it. The other was done in support of a LAG blockade, and was a light paper/balsa sign that read simply, "US Navy Supports the Livermore Blockade." Intrepid climbers were dropped off on Yerba Buena Island (a US Navy and Coast Guard property, which serves as part of the Bay Bridge) at about 6:15 a.m. They climbed up and hung the banner above the tunnel for west-bound traffic. We had several cars, each making a quick automotive stop—with excuses ready—on the lower deck (east bound) periodically until the party was retrieved (or captured). The sign was quickly removed, but at least one AM radio DJ report it, wondering idly if the Navy knew about it. A cautionary note here—we were very careful about these—if a sign comes crashing down on traffic it would be very counterproductive. Make sure the sign can be removed safely.

You want to be careful with stencils. One of us applied anti-nuke

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Notion/Now a Great Life," now reads, "Once a Great Nation/Now a Great Li e." A banner with 20-inch letters reading "US Out of North America" covers the real advertiser's name. (Let us not get into a debate about whether it has ever been all that great; we went for the cuteness.)

We corrected about a dozen boards in about a year. We were inspired by another group in Berkeley which was altering Selective Service registration boards ("It's Quick/It's Easy/It's the Law/Men turning 18 must register at the Post Office"): They had substituted—perfectly—the word "Deadly" for "the Law." Our first attempt was not as polished: we replaced the third line with "It's a Trap for Assholes." We specialized in these signs, our alterations including "It's the Pig's Law" and "Men turning 18 must register at the morgue." We also hit other targets of opportunity.

(We regarded this as training for more adventurous endeavors. We had read *Without a Trace*—a now long-out-of-print, anonymously produced manual useful to those who perform actions which they do not want to be caught doing—which emphasized the use of untraceable, ordinary items, and lots of caution about traces of the perpetrator remaining at the crime scene, and vice versa.)

We were indifferent to the ease of removal of our alterations—we figured that the workers who did so would be paid. One afternoon I saw a worker replacing an SS board that we had hit; we worked furiously, made calls, assembled the team, and had a new—and better—version up by 4:00 the next morning. Fast service!

We Also Do Boards

Our story begins long, long ago. . . . Even the statute of limitations has run out. . . .

I've never been at my best at 3:30 in the morning; being acutely nervous doesn't help the experience. In the predawn darkness our voices are muffled as we wake and drink some coffee, some alcohol: Slivovitz. We leave silently, carrying anonymous black knapsacks, dressed in dark colors, wearing felony shoes (sneakers), get into our vehicles and depart.

At the prearranged area we park out of sight of each other, retrieve our sacks and bundles (rolls of paper, painting rollers with long handles, and mops) and walk calmly to the board. It's one we've hit before so we know access and visibility. Hopefully the watch teams are in place in each direction. We won't know until we all get home—or we are warned of an approaching cop by a blinking flashlight.

The board is low, so one person will work on the ground. The nimblest climbs up first, then the heaviest. Mops are passed up, a bucket appears, and plastic bottles of starch are emptied. On the ground the rolls are unfurled and wetted lightly with a mop, while above another wets the paper on the billboard the same way. The awkward sheet is handed up, maneuvered into position, pressed down, then rolled firmly. The process is repeated for another large piece, then for two small ones.

We are interrupted by happy cries from the street—skateboarders! One of them calls his friend over,—unable to believe his eyes. His friend misses us at first, then focuses. They ask what we're doing, and I tersely explain: "We're correcting this billboard." They watch for a minute before heading down University Avenue. We rapidly finish our work and collect our tools. The ground person has already vanished around the corner when we dismount and walk away calmly, pausing for a moment to admire our handiwork. A sign which used to advertise a condominium village in Richmond with the slogan, "Once a Great

Introduction

Look up! Billboards are as ubiquitous as human greed and as difficult to ignore as a beggar's outstretched fist. Every time you leave your couch or cubicle, momentarily severing the electronic umbilicus, you enter the realm of their analog impressions. Larger than life, subtle as war, they assault your senses with a complex coda of commercial instructions, the messenger RNA of capitalism. Every time you get in a car, or ride a bus, or witness a sporting event, you receive their instructions. You can't run and you can't hide, because your getaway route is lined to the horizon with signs, and your hidey-hole has a panoramic view of an 8-sheet poster panel.

There are a million stories in the Big City, and as many reasons to want to hack a billboard. We have our reasons, and we don't presume to judge yours. In this manual, we have made a conscious effort to steer clear of ideology and stick to methodology. The procedures outlined in this pamphlet are based on our over 20 years' experience executing billboard improvements professionally, safely, and (knock on wood) without injury or arrest. In most cases, it should not be necessary to follow the elaborate, even obsessive precautions we outline here. A can of spray paint, a blithe spirit, and a balmy night are all you really need.

BLF Manifesto

In the beginning was the Ad. The Ad was brought to the consumer by the Advertiser. Desire, self worth, self image, ambition, hope; all find their genesis in the Ad. Through the Ad and the intent of the Advertiser we form our ideas and learn the myths that make us into what we are as a people. That this method of self definition displaced the earlier methods is beyond debate. It is now clear that the Ad holds the most esteemed position in our cosmology.

Advertising suffuses all corners of our waking lives; it so permeates our consciousness that even our dreams are often indistinguishable from a rapid succession of TV commercials.

Different forms of media serve the Ad as primary conduits to the people. Entirely new media have been invented solely to streamline the process of bringing the Ad to the people.

Old fashioned notions about art, science and spirituality being the peak achievements and the noblest goals of the spirit of man have been dashed on the crystalline shores of Acquisition, the holy pursuit of consumer goods. All old forms and philosophies have been cleverly co-opted and re"spun" as marketing strategies and consumer campaigns by the new shamans, the Ad men.

Spiritualism, literature and the physical arts, painting, sculpture, music and dance are by and large produced, packaged and consumed in the same fashion as a new car. Product contents, dictated by trends in hipness, have a half-life matching the producer's calender for being supplanted by newer models.

Product placement in television and film have overtaken story line, character development and other dated strategies in importance in the film makers' agendas. The directors commanding the biggest budgets have more often than not cut their teeth on TV Ads & music videos.

Artists are judged and rewarded on the basis of their relative standing in the ongoing commodification of art objects. Bowing to fashion and the vagaries of gallery culture, these creators attempt to

A) Personnel: Have the smallest number of people possible on the board. Three is about optimum—two for the actual work and one lookout/communications person. Depending on your location, you may require additional spotting personnel on the ground (see below).

B) Communications: For work on larger boards where you're exposed for longer periods of time, we recommend compact CB units or FM-band walkie-talkies. Low cost CB walkie-talkies are available from Radio Shack and elsewhere, and can be fitted with headsets and microphones for ease of use.

Have one or two cars positioned at crucial intersections within sight of the board. The ground crew should monitor oncoming traffic and maintain radio contact with the lookout on the board. (Note: Do not use the popular CB or FM channels; there are many other frequencies to choose from. A verbal code is a good idea since the channels you will be using will not be secure.)

It's crucial that the ground crew don't lounge around their vehicle(s) or in any other way make it obvious that they're hanging around in a (likely) desolate area late at night for no apparent reason. A passing patrol car will notice them much sooner than they will notice operatives on the board. Keep a low profile. We've found that lookouts dressed as winos, or as homeless couples, are virtually invisible additions to the urban landscape. Park all vehicles out of sight of the operation.

C) Safety: The risk of apprehension on a board pales in comparison to the risk of falling, and safety concerns should always prevail over security. If you're not an experienced climber, you're better off helping out on the ground—as a security lookout, graphic designer or publicist. Even if you are an experienced climber, we don't recommend solo actions on any board larger than 8 panels (6x12 feet). Ideally, all field actions—but particularly those that require any sort of rigging—should incorporate the buddy system. If you're going to lean over the top of the board to affix any overlays, you should have a secured partner belaying you. It's a long way down, so be careful up there.



board surface. On cool nights in wet climates there may be condensation on the board, in which case the area to be covered needs to be wiped down first—use shop towels or a chamois for this.

To level overlay panels on the board, measure up from the bottom (or down from the top) of the board to the bottom line of where it needs to be in order to cover the existing copy. Make small marks at the outermost left and right-hand points. Using a chalk snap line with two people, snap a horizontal line between these two points. This line is your marker for placing your overlay(s).

If you have a canvas or paper overlay as described in (G) above, you can either tie the four corners and middle (top and bottom) very securely, or, if you can reach the face of the board by ladder or rope, attach the panel by screwing the 1"x4" boards to the billboard. A good battery powered drill is needed for this. We recommend hex-head "Tek" sheet metal screws, #8 or #10 size. Use a hex head driver bit for your drill. These screws work well on either wood backboards or sheet metal.

4. Executing the Hit

Once you've completed your preparations and are ready for the actual hit, there are many things which can be done to minimize the risk of apprehension and/or injury:

manufacture collectible baubles and contemporary or "period" objects that will successfully penetrate the collectors market. The most successful artists are those who can most successfully sell their art. With increasing frequency they apprentice to the Advertisers, no longer needing to falsely maintain the distinction between "Fine" & "Commercial" art.

And so we see that the Ad defines our world, creating both the focus on "image" and the culture of consumption that ultimately attract and inspire all individuals desirous of communicating to their fellow man in a profound fashion. It is clear that He who controls the Ad speaks with the voice of our Age.

You can switch off/smash/shoot/hack or in other ways avoid Television, Computers, and Radio. You are not compelled to buy magazines or subscribe to newspapers. You can sic your Rottweiler on door-to-door salesman. Of all the types of media used to disseminate the Ad, there is only one which is entirely inescapable to all but the bedridden shut-in or the Thoreauian misanthrope. We speak, of course of the Billboard. Along with its lesser cousins, advertising posters and "bullet" outdoor graphics, the Billboard is ubiquitous and inescapable throughout our world. Everyone knows the Billboard; the Billboard is in everyone's mind.

For these reasons, the Billboard Liberation Front states emphatically and for all time herein that to Advertise is to Exist. To Exist is to Advertise. Our ultimate goal is nothing short of a personal and singular Billboard for each citizen. Until that glorious day in global communications when every man, woman and child can scream at or sing to the world in 100-point type from their very own rooftop, until that day we will continue to do all in our power to encourage the masses to use any means possible to commandeer the existing media and to alter it to their own design.

Each time you change the Advertising message in your own mind, whether you climb up onto the board and physically change the original copy and graphics or not, each time you improve the message, you enter into the High Priesthood of Advertisers.

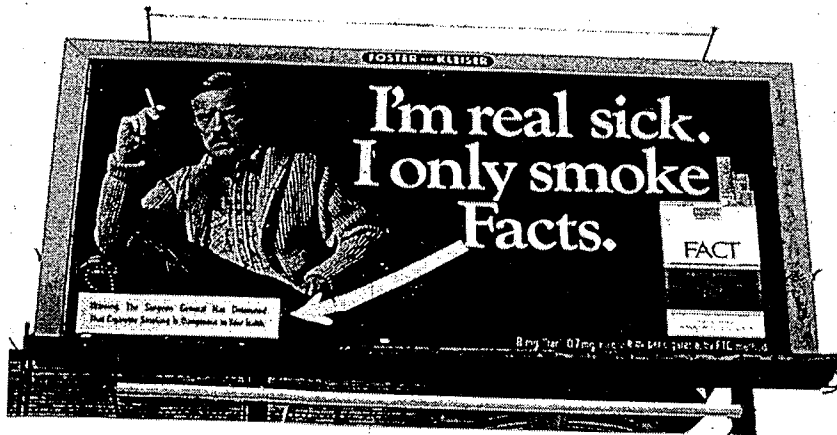
—Jack Napier

—John Thomas

A Brief History of the Billboard Liberation Front

September 1977

19-year-old Jack Napier and 43-year-old Irving Glikk attend an event sponsored by the mysterious San Francisco Suicide Club entitled: "Enter the Unknown." The two friends along with 24 other nascent urban adventurers are blindfolded, driven to an inner city freeway exchange and cajoled into climbing onto a factory roof where they improve two existing billboard messages. This gaggle of earnest though inexperienced drive-by copywriters are apprehended by the authorities (natch) and become known as the Max Factor 26.



December 1977

Glikk and Napier form the BLF and christen it by altering and improving nine Fact Cigarette boards around San Francisco on Christmas Day. With the help of Simon Wagstaff (BLF's first press

F) Tiling With a Photocopier: If you don't have access to a computer with desktop publishing software, but do have access to a good copy machine, you can duplicate the procedure described above using the copier's "enlarge" function. First, create a scale original of your overlay on a single sheet of paper, using stencils or rub-off lettering. Next, pencil a grid over your drawing, with each square being equivalent to the largest size of paper the copier can accommodate (letter, legal, tabloid, etc.). Cut the original into pieces along the penciled lines, then enlarge each piece on the copier, going through as many generations as necessary until each piece fills its own sheet of paper. Assemble the pieces as described above, adding color with lacquer paints or permanent markers. Weatherproof if desired.

G) Producing Overlays by Hand: We recommend using heavy pattern paper and high-gloss, oil-based lacquer paints. The lacquer paint suffuses the paper, making it super-tough, water resistant, and difficult to tear. For making overlays, roller coat the background and spray paint the lettering through cardboard cut-out templates of the letters. For extremely large images or panels, use large pieces of painted canvas. The canvas should be fairly heavy to avoid being ripped to shreds by the winds that buffet most billboards. Glue and staple 1"x4" pine boards the entire horizontal lengths of the top and bottom of the canvas. The canvas will then roll up like a carpet for transportation and can be unrolled over the top of the board and lowered into place by ropes.

H) Methods of Application: Although there are many types of adhesive that can be used, we recommend rubber cement. Rubber cement is easily removable (but if properly applied will stay up indefinitely) and does not damage or permanently mark the board's surface. This may become important if you're apprehended and the authorities and owners attempt to assess property damage. Application of rubber cement on large overlays is tricky. You need to evenly coat both the back-side of the overlay and the surface of the board that is to be covered. Allow one to two minutes drying time before applying the paper to the board. To apply the cement, use full sized (10") house paint rollers and a five-gallon plastic bucket. Have one person coat the back of the overlays while another coats the board's surface. Both people will be needed to affix the coated overlay to the finished

2) Most large paint stores carry small paint sampler books. It is possible to get a pretty close match from these samplers. We suggest sticking to solid colors and relatively simple designs for maximum visual impact.

D) Letter Style: If you wish to match a letter style exactly, pick up a book of fonts from a graphic arts store or borrow one from a self-serve print shop. Use this in conjunction with tracings of existing letters to create the complete range of lettering needed for your alteration. You can convincingly fake letters that aren't on the board by finding a closely matching letter style in the book and using tracings of letters from your photo of the board as a guide for drawing the new letters.

E) Producing Overlays From Computer Output: Computers with desktop publishing software offer many advantages to the modern billboard liberator. Fonts and colors can be matched precisely, professional-looking graphical elements can be added to your text message, and scale and spacing become much easier to calculate.

There are many software packages suitable for producing overlays, including PageMaker, QuarkXpress, Illustrator, Freehand, CorelDraw, and various CAD programs. Adobe Photoshop gives you the additional flexibility of being able to preview your hit—just scan in a photograph of the original board and apply your modification over it as an independent layer.

After you have designed the overlay and printed out your tiles, you'll need to assemble the individual printouts jigsaw-style and glue them onto some sort of backing material. Heavy pattern paper works best for this, but you can also use 1/8-inch foamcore for smaller overlays, i.e. those less than 30 inches on a side. Start in one corner, adhering the first tile with spray adhesive to the backing material. Carefully assemble the rest of the tiles, trimming off unprinted margin space as required and laying them down one at a time, making sure all the edges are well-secured. If you get a little off-kilter at some point in the process and the pieces don't line up with absolute precision, don't worry—large-scale work is more forgiving since people will be viewing it at a distance. When all the tiles are secured, reinforce the edges with clear packing tape. If it's going to be a wet night, or if there's a chance your work may stay up for a few days or more, consider weather-proofing your overlay with a coat of clear lacquer.

agent) they publicize their premier Billboard action for maximum exposure and impact.



October 1978

Camel Cigarettes image is improved by properly attiring their scantily clad spokesman, "The Turk."

1978-1980

Various billboard improvement campaigns of varying quality and impact.

April 1980

The BLF points out the boring message behind the Marlboro Man. (See page 22.)

May 1980

The Billboard Movement (BM), comprised of Arnold Fleck, Walid Rasheed, and Cruella DeVille splits with the BLF. (The Gordon's Gin/"It fucks you up" & "time for whip" improved boards appear.)

**1980-1984**

More actions around the Bay Area and California.

January 1985

Founder Irving Glikk retires. Spokesman Simon Wagstaff retires.

1985-1989

The BLF, overwhelmed by the heady joy of Reaganomics, falls into a complacent consumer trance and forgets to improve any billboards.

May 1989

Due to a slick threat to the paving industry, the BLF regroups to strike a blow for Exxon Corporation in the wake of the Exxon Valdez disaster. Jack Napier takes over as spokesman. Winslow Leach and Ethyl Ketone join and Walid Rasheed rejoins BLF. (See inside front cover.)

July 1989

A "philosophical organ," The Institute for the Rational Analysis of National Trends (I.R.A.N.T.), is debuted in the BLF's Portland, Oregon office. Under the direction of Igor Pflicht a unified, codified, quantified and ossified core BLF philosophy is becoming ever more clear.

by selecting the "Tiling" option from the Print menu. If you don't have access to a wide-track printer, try to locate a machine that can handle 11x17 tabloid-sized paper—the bigger your printer's output, the fewer pieces you'll have to tile back together to create a finished overlay. Most neighborhood copy shops and many corporate offices now have color printers/copiers with 11x17 output.

For low cost and maximum durability, consider canvas. When impregnated with oil-based lacquer paint, a canvas overlay has the potential to last longer than the sign surface it's affixed to. It's heavier to carrier and more difficult to secure to the sign, but it's a reliable, low-tech alternative that can be implemented inexpensively.

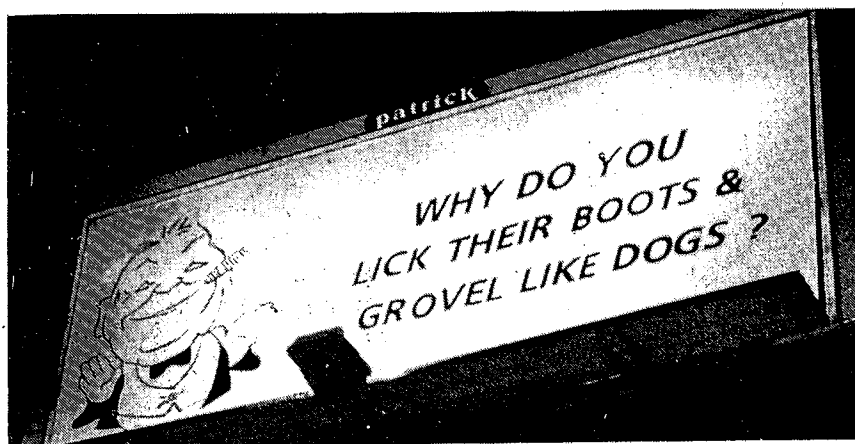
We don't recommend using overlays much larger than 4'x3'. If your message is larger, you should section it and butt the sections together for the finished image. It gets very windy on boards, and large paste-overs are difficult to apply.

B) Scale: If you are changing only a small area (one letter, a small symbol, etc.) you probably do not need to go to any elaborate lengths to match or design your "overlay" (we'll use this term to describe the finished image/lettering you'll be applying to the board). Just take actual measurements or tracings directly off the board. If, however, you intend to create overlays of great size and/or number of letters and you want the finished image to look as much as possible like the advertisers themselves had made it, you should plan on more elaborate preparation. Find a position roughly level with the board and looking at it square on (200 to 1000 or so feet away).

Photograph the board from this position and make a tracing from a large print of the photo. Using measurements you have taken on the board (height, width, letter height, etc.), you can create a scale drawing of your intended alteration. From this, it is possible to determine how large your overlays will need to be and what spacing will be required between letters.

C) Color Matching: There are two basic ways to match the background and/or colors of the lettering or image area:

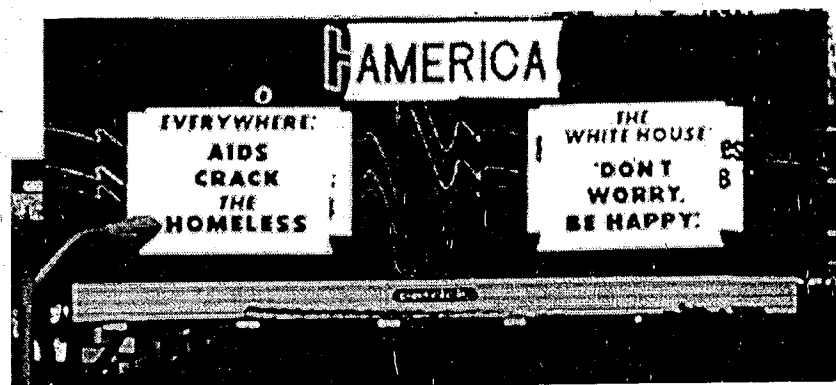
1) On painted or paper boards you can usually carve a small (1"x1") sample directly off the board. This does not always work on older painted boards which have many thick layers of paint.



prohibitively expensive for most groups, and in these days of computer-assisted photo enhancement, photos of your hit could arguably lead to the accusation that your hit was a binary illusion, crafted on a Macintosh rather than on the urban landscape. While technical competence is a worthy goal to pursue (and a major motivation for the BLF), the success or failure of your alteration will ultimately depend more on the quality of your thinking and the power of your altered message than on how well you can match a font.

A) Choosing a Production Method: Before you get too deep into the design process, you need to decide how the overlays will be produced. If you're lucky enough to have access to commercial sign-printing equipment, you can go the professional route and opt for industry-standard vinyl. Vinyl overlays are strong, light, easy to transport, and easy to apply, but unless you have an industry insider on your team, they will probably be too expensive to produce. If you or a collaborator have late-night access to the facilities of a commercial printer, neighborhood copy shop, or advertising bureau, you may be able to output your overlays on a large-format color printer or plotter. The venerable LaserMaster, with its sturdy coated paper and 36-inch track, is a BLF favorite, but there are many other models in the field.

Printing on paper nearly always requires a process known as "tiling"—cutting the image up into smaller pieces that are then reassembled into a whole. Popular computer programs like Quark Xpress and Adobe PageMaker can perform this function automatically,



December 1989

The BLF ends the decade with a political message for America.

January 1990

Kidnaped *Bay Guardian* political editor, Tim Redmond, foments BLF propaganda.

1990

Processed World magazine publishes "The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement." Los Cabrones Press publishes the piece in pamphlet form later in the year.

May 1991

Along with Artfux of NYC, BLF is voted into 10 best Media Heroes of 1991 by the *Utne Reader* Magazine.

1993

Blank DeCoverly signs on as new spokesman and John Thomas takes over the helm as security chief. L.L. Fauntleroy shows up with a great many sixes. The Mark of the Beast shows up on Billboards all around town.

April 1994

Plymouth Neon, Captain Morgan, and other Ad campaigns appropriate BLF tactics to sell their products. BLF counter appropriates.



1995

BLF drops LSD and is covered by LSD.

December 1995

First ever Neon glass billboard improvement graces every child's favorite Smokin' Joe. (See front cover.)

September 1996

Charlie Manson becomes new Levis spokesman (with the help of the BLF)

1997

Conrad Hoc signs on as BLF Web Designer.

1998

BLF helps out Apple computer with its grammatically challenged "Think Different" campaign.

Check your escape routes. Can you cross over rooftops and leave by a fire escape? etc., etc.

D) Illumination: Most boards are brightly lit by floodlights of some type. Smaller boards frequently are controlled by photo-electric cells or conventional time clocks, also somewhere on the board. If you find the photo-electric cell, you can turn the lights on the board off by taping a small flashlight directly into the cell's "eye." This fools the unit into thinking it's daytime and shutting the lights off.

Most large boards are shut off some time between 11:00 pm and 2:00 am by a time clock control somewhere on or near the board. Typically, a time clock can be found in the control panel at the base of the support structure and/or behind the board itself. These panels are often locked (particularly those at the structure's base). Unless you are familiar with energized electrical circuitry and devices of this type, we caution you to wait until the clock shuts itself off at midnight or so. Many of these boards run 220 volts and could fry you to a crisp.

E) Daytime Hits: We don't recommend this method for most high boards on or near freeways and major roads. It works well for doing smaller boards lower to the ground where the alterations are relatively quick and simple. If you do choose to work in the light, wear coveralls (company name on the back?) and painters' hats, and work quickly. Keep an eye out for parked or passing vehicles bearing the billboard company's or advertiser's name. Each board has the company emblem at its bottom center. If you're on a Sleaze Co. board and a Sleaze Co. truck pulls up, you're probably in trouble. It is unlikely that the workers will try to physically detain you (try bribery if necessary), but they will probably call the cops.

3. Producing Graphic Overlays

Though powerful improvements are occasionally executed with nothing more than a spray can and a sharp wit, most actions require the production of some type of graphical overlay to alter the board's message. The more professional-looking these overlays, the greater impact your modified ad is likely to have on the public. This is not to say that every hit needs to look exactly like an original—this would be

B) Practicality: How big are the letters and/or images you would like to change? How close to the platform at the bottom of the board is your work area? On larger boards you can rig from above and hang over the face to reach points that are too high to reach from below. We don't recommend this method unless you have some climbing and rigging experience. When hanging in one position your work area is very limited laterally. Your ability to leave the scene quickly diminishes proportionately to how convoluted your position has become. Placing huge words or images is much more difficult.

C) Security: After choosing your board, be sure to inspect it, both during the day and at night. Take note of all activities in the area. Who is about at 2:00 a.m.? How visible will you be while scaling the support structure? Keep in mind you will make noise; are there any apartment or office windows nearby? Is anyone home? Walk lightly if you're on a rooftop—who knows who you're walking over.

What is the visibility to passing cars on surface streets and freeways? What can you see from your work position on the board? Even though it is very difficult to see a figure on a dark board at night, it is not impossible. Any point to which you have line-of-sight vision is a point from which you can be observed. How close is your board to the nearest police station or highway patrol headquarters? What is their patrol pattern in the area? Average response time to Joe Citizen's call? You can get an idea by staking out the area and observing. Is it quiet at night or is there a lot of foot traffic? When the bars let out, will this provide cover—i.e., drunks keeping the cops busy—or will it increase the likelihood of detection by passersby? Do they care? If you are definitely spotted, it may pay to have your ground crew approach them rather than just hoping they don't call the cops. Do not let them connect you with a vehicle. Have your ground crew pretend to be chance passersby and find out what the observer thinks. We've been spotted at work a number of times and most people were amused. You'll find that most people, including officials, don't look up unless given a reason to do so.

Go up on the board prior to your hit. Get a feeling for being there and moving around on the structure at night. Bring a camera—it's a good cover for doing anything you're not supposed to: "Gee, officer, I'm a night photographer, and there's a great shot of the bridge from up here . . ."



February 1999

BLF launches it's web site, <http://www.billboardliberation.com>, on Valentine's Day.

March-April 1999

BLF sponsors bi-coastal Billboard shows at SF's LAB and NYC's CB's 313 Gallery.

October 2000

Los Cabrones Press publishes the second (revised & expanded) edition of the BLF manual.

The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement (Second Edition)

1. Selecting a Billboard

In choosing a sign, keep in mind that the most effective alterations are often the simplest. If you can totally change the meaning of an advertisement by changing one or two letters, you'll save a lot of time and trouble. Some ads lend themselves to parody by the inclusion of a small image or symbol in the appropriate place (a skull, radiation symbol, happy face, swastika, vibrator, etc.). On other boards, the addition of a cartoon "thought bubble" or "speech balloon" for one of the characters might be all that is needed.

Once you have identified a billboard message you wish to improve, you may want to see if there are multiple locations displaying the same ad. You should determine which ones give your message optimum visibility. A board on a central freeway will obviously give you more exposure than one on an obscure side street. You must then weigh the location/visibility factor with other crucial variables such as physical accessibility, potential escape routes, volume of foot and vehicular traffic during optimum alteration hours, etc. Of course, if you can improve more than one board in the same campaign, so much the better.

There are several standard sign types in the outdoor advertising industry. Knowing which type of sign you are about to alter may prove useful in planning the operation:

Bulletins are large outdoor sign structures, typically situated alongside federal highways and major urban freeways. They measure 14 x 48 feet and are usually leased in multi-month contracts, meaning that an advertisement will stay in place for at least 60 days.

30-Sheet Poster Panels measure 12 x 25 feet, are situated along primary and secondary roadways, and are usually updated every 30 days.

8-Sheet Poster Panels measure 6 x 12 feet and are usually found in high-density urban neighborhoods and suburban shopping areas. They are designed to reach both pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and are leased in 30-day increments.

Out-of-Home Media is the industry term for advertising targeted at people on the go, including bus shelters, bus exteriors, taxis, subway stations, street furniture (newsstands, benches, kiosks), painted walls, and "indoor out of home" locations like airports and malls.

There are of course many nonstandard formats as well, and these frequently make the most intriguing targets. Oversized bulletins, animated signs, painted buildings, and boards with neon all offer unique challenges for advanced operations. Signs featuring large, illuminated text can often be improved simply by turning off a few letters, converting 'HILLSDALE' to "LSD," for instance, or "HOTEL ESSEX" to "HOT SEX." The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

2. Planning the Improvement

Though the sudden urge to just climb right up a sign and start hacking can occasionally be overwhelming, in our experience this type of "impulse improvement" tends to deliver unsatisfactory results at unnecessary personal risk. The guidelines that follow draw on the BLF's proud 20-year history of planning and executing such actions without injury or arrest.

A) Accessibility: How do you get up on the board? Will you need your own ladder to reach the bottom of the board's ladder? Can you climb the support structure? Is the board on a building rooftop, and if so, can it be reached from within the building, from a fire escape, or perhaps from an adjoining building? If you need ladders to work the board, they may occasionally be found on platforms on or behind the board, or on adjacent boards or rooftops.