

**Major assignment 2**

## **Research Report**

# **Moral & Ethical issues of Graphic Designers**

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## Are designers servants of a business ?

One could also ask, are you a slave to your job ? If one would answer yes then one should leave and seek freedom from ones own oppression. If one does not have respect for ones self then one cannot respect a business and visa versa. In most of the scenarios designers face on a daily basis, there is indeed a need to produce work without question. Designers are subjected to routines, rules, brand guides, rules of conduct, when to talk and when not to talk, following a certain protocol and so on. When we look at the situation from this angle we must question how a designer can take a proactive approach on ethics of their employing companies.

Lets face it, if a designer is working on material for a brand through a company, or an agency, then you are basically the hands of the operation. Before the designer gets a brief, there is a level of hierarchy which spans from the art director all the way through the brand manager and director, who may or may not be sitting on the board of directors table. Seldom will a piece that a designer has created land on executive committee table as they are concerned with business and analytical aspects of marketing. The underlings as I like to passionately label them are the group of people which see development of a brief and manage the development aspect. This gets sent to an art director who forms a team of people to deploy the brief to and get concepts developed and the media components working.

Even though a designer could approach their job in a proactive manner, due to the overhead hierarchy, seldom will this effect the work and environment attitude and approach. For instance most design jobs would be pre determined in a campaign, with clearly set guidelines and such, and since everyone wants to input their ideas a designer must be careful to not be influenced from their thought on the matter. After all the designer is brought into the project to lend their expertise and input to design the materials required.

For a viewpoint, we would have to say that there are no methods of directly influencing the system which employs the designer, however there are other avenues to take which would allow the designer to influence their point of view on issues. A designer cannot change the image and functions of a global and company single handily, they can merely influence or take a risk to set an example for other companies to follow.

## Ethics & Substantial Global Issues

Even though there may be both ethical and substantial global issues present in any given environment that a designer is exposed to. Due to the hierarchical nature of the corporate world, there is seldom time or energy to waste for a designer to get involved in or push for change. As previously stated, the environment which employes the designer is in fact judge, jury and executioner. If the brief calls to action input of this level from the designer, then this would be documented in the brief and would form part of the job obligations which the designer has been employed to fulfil.

Even though the designer may harbour resentment towards the employing establishment, it would be a harsh decision to make to re negotiate on a work contract if their lively hood were at stake. During these difficult economic times where work is scarce and competition is fierce it would often be to a disadvantage to a designer to not take on board work regardless of moral issues faced with it.

If the designer harbours resentment towards the establishment then they would not be fit to carry out the brief as they would not be mentally up to the challenge due to their beliefs and resentment for the work. In such a scenario it would be wise to defer the work to a known colleague to undertake on their behalf or simply decile the offer if the work were to be carried out on site and transferring the job to another entity were not a viable option.

Ethical issues are the manifestation of the designers own moral values and are really parallel in the instance of substantial, or ethical issues. For instance moral values could be a parallel descriptive to logic and common sense in a production sense.

As a designer, we have only power to influence, but due to the hierarchal nature of the system, the injected influence may or may not bare an outcome or reach a goal, it would all depend on the chain of command, the mood, and specifically the nature of the decision makers and their authorities.

## Ethics & Substantial Global Issues (Continued)

In Naomi Kleins book, No Logo, there is a bleak picture painted of corporate globalisation, it goes to the depths of political agenda and touches on the underlying issue of global democracy. There were a several global companies and brands bought forth which was used to justify the argument of exploitive means as utilised by global corporations and their brands, who participated in non ethical and substantial issues which reverberate throughout the global scene, its people, environment and economy. All aspects of this book concentrate on the bleak or negative aspects of the brands, a means to create controversy and an almost borderline propaganda tool to debunk the corporations and brands rather than to provide an exposé of the over all picture. It is in itself a piece of unethical literature and media as it is not a balanced argument but rather a one sided view or opinion of an individual.

In reality, brands, consumer goods and other objects are necessary for human nature. We believe that it is not a sin to provide goods based on an idea on a global scale. We tolerate the taxation system as this injects back into society the environment that we take for granted in the western world. The issue of what corporations do, eventually filters down to procreation and propagation of a better lifestyle for us all is even mentioned in the book and media. It is the books rejection and culturing of resentment to this, a fight the power stance which we believe is biased. From the examples provided above and throughout this writing we have an insight to the other end of the argument, on why it is necessary for a entity to control or influence some aspect of consumer goods. There is every good reason to question the system where certain issues are concerned in the matter of freedom, but there is the crux of this writing, freedom. The very simple explanation or lighting is that as humans who mainly live in a democratic environment, have freedom of choice to purchase and participate in consuming what products are made available. The literature is almost hypocritical in nature for some instances, it does not delve into the human psych or nature, it does not delve into political agendas of human propagation and the complexity of trying to create a equilibrium on a global scale. We should take the role of the United Nations committee and the task which they have to manage and draw a parallel to the subjects as presented by Naomi Kleins writings. We can then begin to see a much clearer picture illustrated of the entire scope of the problem.

## Sacrifices & Global Equilibrium

There are always sacrifices which have to be made in the face of progress, it is a common rule. The No Logo examples does not take this into account. Once a lady said, "you could be the sweetest plum on a tree, but there will be people that do not like plums. Its the way of the world. Deal with it". This is just a simple explanation of fickle human nature, it is impossible to please one hundred percent of the global population with a decision, the best one could hope for it achieve mean or greater then for the decision to gain acceptance.

What good is it to brand packaging as being recyclable when the end consumer is far too preoccupied with the contents then to do their "chore" of participating in helping the global plight of renewable resources ? Case in point, it is the consumer which has the power to make a difference for they are people who consume the products and brands. As designers, our role or job is to package the product and to entice the consumers to spend money. Money which is pushed through the system to maintain a sort of equilibrium in society. As designers it is our job to follow standards as set out by the people that employ our services. As designers it our moral right to read and understand the greater depth and scope of the entire structure of the global society, to appreciate the far sight view on the horizons which are being acted upon today, for we are playing a part in this by sculpturing and moulding it.

From this we can gain a true insight as to the overall scale in question and we cease to see that the problem does not solely reside on the shoulders of global corporations, but that it filters down to every consumer playing its part. Consumers have a choice over persuasion which is the art of a designer and the marketing team. Consumers by nature are well aware of necessity and commodity so ultimately it is a matter of individual choice rather then consumers being influenced.

A designer or group of designers cannot "change the world", I believe that would lay in the realm of the supernatural and the entity called god. One human entity cannot change the world. Significant power and funds are necessary to have a voice to speak on the global stage, humans by nature would never allow one entity to wield so much power, look at the example of America and champions of sport, people do not like to see the same team win again and again, there has to be variety or the system gets stale. Which is where designers come in to define and dress the next thing for success.

## The Source

If one were to pursue with a one hundred percent ethical means of a design business then that would be a practice of folly and false realisation. When you think of the global economic and consumer system almost all goods in one way or another overlap through, raw material acquisition, industrial refining, production, branding, packaging, logistics and finally available to consumers through channels of what we would classify as unethical means. It is something which cannot be escaped or denied, it is in fact a very much a part of society as the consumers who consume and the designers which create the means to.

Even though I acknowledge the scope of consumer society, I have seldom questioned my employees on their stance of global issues and how they are doing their part to combat or finding a solution. It's not a part of my business and nor is it something documented in the briefs which were presented to me. On the part of personal ethics, yes, I have declined clients, I have walked away and in some instances part way through a job. I have never actively pursued a client for being environmentally responsible as that is never part of my job description, I believe it is something for the public relations department. If this department sees fit to include a component which signifies the requirement then it would be of my interest to fulfil this as part of my brief.

After many years of searching for an answer to this problem, I came to the conclusion that as an artist, one is free from complexities of the issues discussed in this writing. However does an artist question the means of obtaining and manufacturing their materials? This is the scope of the subject as even to this degree one cannot escape global consumerism of brands and products and the ethical choice of being a consumer.

David Berman's, views in *Do Good Design* portrays once again an idealised situation for graphics designers to indulge in proactive activities to help out on the subject of ethics associated with design and its influence on the environment and mass consumerism. The extract really does not shed light onto the overall scenario once again. Although there is an attempt to push designers into the direction of doing good design by allocating some time to work which benefits the environment and some manner of participating in an established guild of official design qualifications. But this has really not provided a solution, but rather a point into a direction. It does not showcase the reality of the global environment nor does it speak of corporate and government structure.

## The Circle

From knowing the things which I have learned, I have gauged my own point of view of the subject. Products are produced and marketed en masse and globally to drive economy, quite simple. If that were not the case then there would not be need for a lot of designers. A company often grows exponentially with a hot product or trend and therefore does not have adequate time to plan any means of future solutions and systems while growing. It is a snowball effect, when the company reaches its peak and begins to decline to a steady plateau of operation, this is the point where cracks or inadequacies from past systems rear up. It is all a matter of planning and taking each step in a calculated manner with provisions for rapid acceleration, cooling, braking and idling the system engine in consideration. Playing a helpful part as a designer evolves a great deal of investing time in learning economics and how business operates. It involves the designer to understand production means and methods, sourcing, managing, on how to make calculated decisions on production, on society and culture. Then the designer is equipped to understand and act upon the subject in an ethical and moral manner.

The truth of the matter is, consumers drive economy, which provides designers with jobs. It is a circular system. By breaking away from the system does not yield a good result for designers, by trying to question and propagate a sense of moral enlightenment is trying to de-bunking the system which provides the means of livelihood or biting the hand which feeds. To operate at an atomic level as I like to put it, a designer must create a nucleus of core ethics and principals for themselves to revolve around. From this a designer can decipher what to do and what not to do, which jobs to take and which jobs to discard based on their principals and the conflicts which arise from certain jobs. As is the nature of man, it is every one's responsibility to participate in keeping the flow of the world an ongoing process. This concerns humanity, environment, society and culture on many different levels. Before an individual takes on the world, one must first take on their inner selves and discover their own rules and ethics. This is being responsible for one's actions as there is no one else to blame for an action one chooses.

## Conclusion

Yes, designers do have the power to influence global companies but it is a gradual process over a period of time. We are seeing many changes occurring in the world for the better, third world countries in the current economic climate have prospered some from the past years of input from the global economy, an equilibrium is eventually being reached if we look at the overall picture. When we look at this from this perspective we find that globalization and the ethics and such in discussion are paving way for years of sacrifice in the past for a more prosperous future.

We as designers should be proud to know that we have played our part in getting the ball rolling, by our input and that things should only get better as time progresses. Achievement can never be without significant sacrifice. We all have to play our part in the overall grand scheme of things. If we all understood this to be the process of evolution and procreation then the world and us designers would make the globe better one step at a time.

## References.

<http://www.naomiklein.org/>

<http://www.davidberman.com/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bydesign/stories/2009/2648149.htm>

Personal insight & experience

## **Notes.**