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SOCIALLY ENGAGED GRAPHIC
DESIGN
- FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Good design and socially engaged design were studied in the broad context of the existing neoliberal political status quo. The definition and main features of good design were established based on: examples of good pieces of design, design history and core books on the subject. In this piece were discussed: ethical dimension of graphic design profession, sustainability in graphic design, political context of works as well as the graphic designer himself, the importance of choices he/she makes. The idea was raised here that socially engaged graphic design may be an extremely powerful medium for the communication of ideas and may help to shape society's awareness. The research conducted included meeting selected graphic design professionals from the United Kingdom and Poland who actively act in socially engaged graphic design and make an important mark in public discussion. The subject of socially engaged graphic design was researched practically in a form of Grafik Rebel Magazine. The magazine and its blog have become a great platform for communicating ideas to the wider public.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the theme of socially engaged graphic design and questions its future prospects. I have become interested in socially engaged graphics since I started professional work in graphic design field. I have been working in advertising agencies and publishing houses and I have experienced ethical dilemmas and the feeling that messages conveyed by adverts or magazines do not promote good values. It was really hard for me to concentrate only on graphics, and have my eyes closed for the rest of the time. It was nice to have the challenge of designing the new graphic look of a Fashion Magazine, but when I realized that this magazine panders to people's vanity, I did not feel happy about it. It was astonishing for me to find out that the purpose of the content of the magazine is to make the potential advert buyer happy. It was not important to write so that the readers could broaden their horizons or get to know more about the world. What the management cared for was whether the text goes along with the advert or not, whereas it should be the other way round. The decisions were made only based on the income from the advertiser and the criteria of who may pay more. Jan Sowa in a book '*Neo-liberalism and its critics*' explains how the media in Poland operate:

'Not contested frame of reference in which the mainstream media operate - especially in Poland - is something that can be called briefly the neo-liberal consensus. This is a series of dogmas and assumptions on which modern consumption society is built: that is the highest value is the economic growth, which solves all the problems, that free competition should be a fundamental organizing principle in every dimension of social life, that society is a collection of selfish individuals who always strive to special interests and the collision of these efforts form the common good, that our (western) culture and our way of organizing reality, socioeconomic and political is better than any other, which justifies the neo-liberal policy of the West.' (Sowa, 2007:148)

One can very easily lose the ideals once working in such environment, but I had always had Tibor Kalman's words 'Stay away from corporations that want you to lie for them' in mind. These words are the essence of what big corporations do in order to sell their product and generate more profits. When you are just one of the few art directors in advertising agency, which is also a big corporation, your point of view and opinion is not taken into consideration. You feel as a part of the system, which cannot change anything, because corporation is much more powerful than an individual. I totally agree with my interviewer, Polish social designer Twozywo's definition of corporation:

"Corporations behave like little children, who only want to survive. They are focused only on survival and its thrive. They have no mission. There will be all that we want them to be, in order to survive. If you want them to be green, they will be green. If you want them to be pink, they will be pink. They will be just what one expects them to be. Their main principle and the idea are to maximize profits." (Twozywo, 2011:31)

While designing commercial projects, in response to a client's brief, I was not sure if I really agreed with what I did. As a result, I had a strong desire to create designs, which would somehow rebalance things I was not necessarily content with.

I have started to look back at the history of design in my country. At the time when Poland was oppressed, when the Communism was in, so many beautiful social posters were created. Currently, it is not happening, or even when it is, those projects do not appear in the public space. Why is that? Is it due to the fact that we follow the West, consume a lot, and that we do not have an opinion? We have freedom and it seems that many more people have something to say and they can finally say it. I live in a country, which has historical connotations with social design. However, after the early 90s and the abolition of Communism capitalism has been introduced. I was in my early teenage years when I began to observe the first steps of capitalism and consumerism. Since the change big corporations appeared very quickly

to shape new desires, reactions and habits. This situation left almost no space for socially-involved design. This, on the other hand, is a consequence of a much deeper problem, which is Neo-liberalism. In Poland and in many other countries it has met very good ground for development. My society was tired of Communism, wanted the change. People wanted the freedom of choice, opinion, they wanted to travel, and simply be free. As David Harvey explains in his book *'A brief history of Neo-Liberalism'* this intellectual mode claimed freedom, used people's desires and aspirations to set up its structure within a certain society. Every aspect of our life is dictated by market economy, even culture, social care, education, natural resources so all fields of society which should be independent because they are common wealth, are unfortunately defined by the market economy. There should be some areas in society, which are free from profit-making, but there aren't any. That is why it is very difficult to operate in this system, where there are not certain beliefs and untouched aspects of life. It is hard to stick to ones values as people need to work for huge corporations in order to make a living. Those who can decide about what they do, how they shape the world are in the minority. In the Eastern bloc countries, as well as in Poland, "The desire of wealth has been designed as an escape from the clumsy, poor, totalitarian Soviet past," as Ewa Charkiewicz states in an essay from Communism to Neo-liberalism.

"Neo-liberalism - by linking it with freedom - appealed in Eastern Europe, longing for action, rest assured the hard life in the patriarchal structures of the socialist state, in order to implement a new ideal.

(...)Neo-liberal reorganization of countries based on the source model, the company has weakened the boundary between the market and the state which has marketed, and also strengthen it by law and by creating wealth above the law. The contract ensures the safety of neo-liberal corporations as generating wealth machines. With the reorganization of state companies, human bodies become a new category: the people are converted into positions in the budget, as an expense or revenue." (Charkiewicz, 2007:80,83)

So today, almost 20 years after this political change in Poland, this country is regarded as the most socially inactive country in the European Union. My work experience has made me think that what I do as a designer, aside from my everyday work, has its great potential, because it is true and connected with my core beliefs. Ideally it would be wonderful to make it as a main activity if I could make a living out of it. I believe that as a graphic designer who is not indifferent what is happening around her, I can do many projects which would make the outcome less harmful for society or even beneficial. I am happy to explore the subject of socially engaged graphics. I decided to bring to life a magazine Grafik Rebel, which is an integral part of my studies. Grafik Rebel aims to be an irregular publication dedicated to various areas of our life. It is brought to a reader as an antidote to corporate advertising. It pays particular attention to how graphic designer's shape the visual world. What I am looking for is a broad cooperation between artists, graphic designers, writers and pretty much everyone, who feels changes should be made and has the desire and idea to accomplish that. I have interviewed social graphic designers: Jonathan Barnbrook and members of Warsaw based artists Twozywo. There are very interesting texts on ethics in graphic design, sustainable design and range of recycled paper designers could use. I have designed a section for rebel activists to promote being pro-active. The magazine has become a great opportunity to get to know people who are engaged in social graphics, and get to know what do they think about its future, what do they think about graphic design profession, whether they feel they have the power to inspire changes, can they shape the visual world, can they communicate to the public what they really believe in? While working on the magazine, I was forced to rethink previous ideas and concepts.

Grafik Rebel has become very important part of my study. It has caused me to interview interesting artists and investigate the area in practical terms. I have created The Grafik Rebel blog, which is also interesting part of the research, as it has become a contemporary form of fanzine, where magazine content is extended.

The thesis is structured into chapters. The first chapter investigates social and commercial graphic design. It tries to define, find similarities and differences between them, questions what does good and bad graphic design mean in reference to ethics in graphic design, and asks who is the judge of what is considered to be good or bad? It also discusses what is the philosophical sense of good and bad in design, and presents graphic practitioners who make good designs as well as examining contemporary design trends. The second chapter emphasise social graphic design in Poland, exploring some very good examples of works by polish graphic designers. The third chapter tries to predict the future of social graphic design. I conclude this piece with my opinion about prospects of this graphic design practice.

WHAT IS GOOD DESIGN?

“Good” design can not be easily defined. Design piece may be “good” because of its aesthetic, its moral values, and because it brings positive effect on the society. If those three features are seen in the design piece it is “good” piece of design. When discussing “Good” design we should think over its content, so what kind of message the design piece tries to convey, the person who has done it, as well as what values does this piece bring to society, after all how the piece was produced. Graphic design is a powerful tool as it’s main principle is to communicate certain ideas by using words and images. Therefore, what appears on that image is equally important as the words themselves. . Looking back at the history of art one can observe that the majority of art pieces were commissioned by rich people to fit certain purposes. People were commissioning artists for example to make portraits of their families. The art was a fitness of purpose. Graphic design is quite a young profession and since its beginning it was a medium of expressing oneself and conveying messages.

Lucienne Roberts in the book “An introduction to ethics in graphic design” mentions:

“Visual art has long been the agent of moral and ethical thought. It can persuade, educate or control. The individual freedom has increased so has individual responsibility. Artists and

now designers, are therefore called upon to question the ethical dimension of their work.”
(Roberts, 2006:32)

Currently in graphic design issues like sustainability, ethics in graphic design and green graphic design start a wide debate among graphic designers. This trend however has its inspirations in early 60s. The book “Silent Spring” by Rachel Carlson published in 1962 is regarded as a catalyst of modern day environmental movement. The book paid attention to human impact on the environment and designers responsibility for projects they design. Two other very important visionaries who paid tribute to today’s sustainable thinking are: Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek. As Aris Sherin (2008:16) states in the book “Sustainable a handbook of materials and applications for graphic designers and their clients”, Buckminster Fuller’s work can be seen as a forerunner to the contemporary sustainability movement. Fuller had many professions and areas of interests, he was an inventor, scientist, writer and environmental activist. His main principle was to do more with less efforts. In his opinion the humanity wastes its natural resources. What is more, Fuller was the first human to state that the Earth belongs to everyone and to future generations:

“Our planet is home to all humans, but scientifically speaking it belongs only to the universe. It belongs equally to all humans. This is the natural, geometrical law. Any laws of men, which contradict nature are unenforceable and specious.” (Sherin, 2008:17)

At the time Fuller was regarded as an utopian thinker, but what he thought has become an inspiration for many graphic designers and environmentalists. The second thinker of the 60s was Victor Papanek. He worked in industrial design and challenged designers to be responsible for their actions both socially and environmentally.

In his major work ‘*Design for the Real World*’, as Sherin writes (2008:17), Papanek suggested a renewed focus on the end user and believed that designers and graphic designers had an obligation to work for the greater good, not just the financial well-being of their clients.

Papaneck stated: "In all pollution, designers are implicated at least partially." (Sherin, 2008:16)

The 60s was the time when advertising agencies grew in power quickly to shape new desire and habits. It was golden time of consumerism in States and Western Europe. Soon the graphic designers of that time became aware that they do not have enough control over what they do. This situation has become a trigger for announcing the "First things first manifesto". It was supported by key practitioners in graphic design and photography in the 60s. The manifesto discussed designers' responsibility for the future and stressed out to use their skill for the positive outcome. Closer today in 2000 a revised Manifesto was presented. The practioners stated in their manifesto that they renew the one from the 60s to give it an attention. "First things first" manifesto by Rick Poyner, well known critique and practitoner:

"We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators who have been raised in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable use of our talents. Many design teachers and mentors promote this belief; the market rewards it; a tide of books and publications reinforces it.

Encouraged in this direction, designers then apply their skill and imagination to sell dog biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes, credit cards, sneakers, butt toners, light beer and heavy-duty recreational vehicles. Commercial work has always paid the bills, but many graphic designers have now let it become, in large measure, what graphic designers do. This, in turn, is how the world perceives design. The profession's time and energy is used up manufacturing demand for things that are inessential at best.

Many of us have grown increasingly uncomfortable with this view of design. Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse.

There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention. Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programs, films, charitable causes and other information design projects urgently require our expertise and help. We propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication - a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design.”(Poynor, 2011:47)

The decision what project does the designer take, define who he/she is. It is not easy to concentrate only on ambitious projects and reject the ones which we do not agree with. The problem however, goes much deeper as we live in Capitalist era. In order to survive graphic designers need to get money, therefore there is only handful of designers who finally decide to set up their own creative studio, so that they have more control over their work. Jonathan Barnbrook is a great example of such designer. In his interview for Grafik Rebel magazine he admits:

“Well I don’t want to sound like a politician talking bullshit and evading a direct question. But it is a lot more complex than a black and white ‘will I work, wont I work’ situation. If you are within the industry and highlighting to those people the discomfort you feel with some of the things that are happening this can have more impact than washing your hands completely of the area.

Secondly I actually, in financial terms need the money from advertising to fund things like Virus or just spending time playing with some ideas. There is also the question of morals, often working for a bank could be as bad as working for an arms manufacturer because they lend money to such questionable industries to continue. I often get bogged down in this treacle of morality particularly in advertising, where I think ‘If I do a car advert is this

immoral because car exhausts are destroying the planet?’ So it has sort of been really uneasy where some jobs I have turned down because I wasn’t sure and some jobs I have accepted because I wasn’t sure.

There is a point here though, I think about the sort of clients we aspire to work for and for me, even though the advertising funds other work no matter what job I do, the first question I ask is is it an interesting thing to do? And usually if it is boring, no matter how much money, I will not do it. It depresses me when I see the kind of clients that young people aspire to work for, usually its sports manufacturers to do some ‘cool trendy type’, is this really the pinnacle of the creative effort of your life? It reminds me of a phrase said by some musician which was when you are a young band you want to change the world with your music. Wanting to fit in, just be successful or noticed is the opposite this means that you are just a sad cabaret singer. I think you can apply this to graphics also.”
(Barnbrook, 2011:16)

Barnbrook does not take any job which does not give him satisfaction. What is important, he does not want, as he says (Barnbrook, 2011:17), wash his hands completely from commercial area, as those project gives him funds to support important personal projects. For Jonathan it is a matter of finding projects even commercial ones which he feels content with.

My second interviewer, Polish artistic group Twozywo has slightly differentiate approach for choosing projects:

“Graphic design is primarily attributable to the service, so designing for someone else. For example a poster, for someone’s idea, for someone’s concert, to design someone a logo. However, I differ it from personal projects, when you do not have any customer. We do and try to do and talk over issues, which are in the second criteria of personal communication. This is the majority of what we do. Those other projects, like covers or something like that are necessity for us to survive.

(...) We have very bright and clear code of conduct. We do not touch any commercial

projects. We do only commissions connected with culture: book jackets, logos, hear you are. But only when they serve the culture.”(Twozywo, 2011:30)

Above designers make projects, which they believe in, which satisfy them, what then make them happy. Happiness is all important in “Good” design. “Work should make us happy. Our own happiness we can bring to others.”, suggests Roberts, 2006:64 . When we look at the theory of happiness what make us happy is a feeling of flow, when we don’t have time to think about things, which cause us pain. We are so committed to certain activities, that we forget about the world. In the graphic design field this results in designing beautiful projects, which we then can share with other people. This is similar in many other professions. Lucienne Roberts gives an example of Woody Allen, who once said that his work absorbs him so much that he has no time to ask himself the harmful questions. (Roberts, 2006:112) Not only the project itself can make us happy, but also the client’s or audience’s positive reaction.

What is more, it can make us get to know inspiring things, so we can get intellectual pleasure.

It can change the peoples’ life according to Barnbrook:

(...) “graphic design is not defined by marketing people or business it is done by humans for other humans, therefore it has the potential to change lives in may different and inspiring ways. Also, that it is possible to affect and change the world with your work. You shouldn’t worry too much about money unless it is a really serious problem, I think you should just aim to be able to survive and then do the work you want to do, not just go for big bucks.”(...)(Barnbrook, 2011:12)

“Good” graphic design gives a hint what sort of person the creator of certain design is. What choice did he/she made? “Good” is about these choices, as well as about thinking of those who will be the audience of the message. Choices for the other hand have its ethical dimension. Designers, as Anthony Grayling (Grayling, 2008:64) said, “find themselves in a spider’s web of duties”, they need to be responsible in front of their client, audience, society and themselves. They have great freedom and tools to choose from. The question

needs to arise, how not to behave badly in this competitive business of graphic design? The answer may be in setting oneself a code of conduct, as Twozywo has done. They stated clearly that the only projects they take on are those, which serve the culture. It seems that this is perhaps the best way to stay true to one's core beliefs. The belief in many times is an enormously strong imperative for action. Barnbrook believes in a political ideal in reference to graphic design:

(...) "design does not just serve the market economy - this is an imposed political ideal based on an abstract idea called profit, not human need. If people want to show their own human responses in their work they should do so if they feel that their work should connect with others in different areas over and above the client's message they should do so. To treat design as a marketing tool is a political decision amongst many and not the only one. I find that the people who often complain most about 'indulgent' design are jealous that they don't get to do that kind of work or are completely blind to the value of it, these complainers today are the ones who are taking a little bit of that extreme design and tweaking their packaging designs to give them a 'fresh' look tomorrow.

When I teach at colleges the first thing I usually say is forget about the idea of producing a portfolio to get a 'job'. It is far more important to do the work that you are excited by, not work that you feel you should do."(...)(Barnbrook, 2011:16)

Roberts, talks about design as a political tool as well as a choice of life the designer decides to have.

"'The personal is the political' was the mantra of the 1970s and is just as relevant today. Design decisions reflect your ethos - the way you choose to live. Recognizing that there is a relationship between personal and professional ethics is empowering - change is not necessarily a top-down thing."(Roberts, 2006 :192)

"Graphic design is a political activity. It gives form to messages. Designers have to consider the value of the message, and the form it takes. They also have to ask whether they have a role in including desires that can never be sated, that may result in profound discontent and

contribute to waste and environmental destruction on an unprecedented scale. For graphic designers, the tactile pleasures of ink on paper are crucial to making a design a success, so it is hard to accept that electronic publications may be less wasteful. These environmental concerns will form the next problem that designers must help to solve.” (Roberts, 2006 :112)

Graphic designer needs to see his/her work in wider context and ask question if the work design destruct the environment? Brian Dougherty (2008:13) claims that designers need to change the way they make things. They are the ones who inspire new ideas. Dougherty (2008:19) mentions in his book '*Green graphic design*', sustainability will define our era. To understand sustainability, Dougherty (2008:48,49) encourages graphic designers to take a mental journey with designing a project backwards. To see it at the far end of its existence when it is not needed and left abandoned in the landfill. Looking from the end to the beginning of the design process and asking questions how the certain stages could be improved so they don't generate that much harm to the environment is, according to Daugherty (2008:48,49), equally important as a creative process itself. Sustainable thinking has its roots in the mid 1980s when:

(...) “the collective resource consumption of humans has exceeded the annual productivity of the all Earth. We are in a stage that scientists call “ecological overshoot”. This means that we are using more resources than our planet can generate.” (...) (Daugherty, 2008:39)

Ineffective design is a waste. According to Daugherty (2008:39) nearly 97 percent of direct mail lands in a bin straight away. It is an enormous waste of paper, energy, ink and harmful to the environment. Traditional mail is read by hardly anyone. Having that in mind, designers need to challenge new ways of getting the messages across, which are more ecofriendly and attract people more. For Dougherty (2008:14) good design is green design. The design, which is created in respect of environment and people. Many corporations behave badly and try to make a profit out of being green therefore to make it happen they coined CSR Corporate Social Responsibility term. They do not necessarily change the way they produce things, but what they do is they pay money for a fair trade or eco certificates in order to make higher profits. Such overusing of green, is called “greenwashing”. At every stage we need to

be constantly aware what is happening not to be manipulated by those who are pretending. Also Corporate Social Responsibility has become one of corporations domenes under the sign "we do good things for people". Unfortunately, many times it is just one among many other ways corporations want to change the negative image of themselves.

Artist like Twozywo are aware of that and they see that as the problem in a system.

"The fight with McDonalds is very beautiful and romantic but one need to be aware that the problem is not McDonald's, but the mechanism for eating mush immediately. I'd rather talk about principle than about the fact that this particular brand is bad, and the second one, which bought fair trade certificate, is good because he has a pretty label. It is greenwashing. For this some pay tribute. Nestle pays so some of their products have certificates but they change nothing in their production, but they only pay for it. So I do not see the point in such movements, because of the morality of the corporation. Corporations behave morally like little children, who only want to survive. They are focused only on survival and its thrive. They have no mission. There will be all that we want them to be, in order to survive. If you want them to be green, they will be green. If you want them to be pink, the will be pink. They will be just what one expect them to be. Their main principle and the idea is to maximize the profits."(Twozywo, 2011:31)

Good design has its philosophical ground. We can say about design that is good, looking on its aesthetics, ideal form, which is very platonic way of thinking. On the other hand, good design can serve people as utilitarian thinkers believed. "Utilitarianism evaluates actions according to their consequences, and measures these consequences according to some welfare or 'utility' measurement. As a general rule, the right action to take is the action that maximizes welfare." (Roberts, 2006:69)

Anthony Bertram, well known as a writer on design stated:

"Good design is not a matter of wealth, much less of the chic, the latest thing. It is not a matter of novelty, but of the production of cities and houses and goods which will best satisfy the needs of the people; the need of practical, honest, cheap lasting and beautiful

things to use and see in their everyday lives.” (Inkahoots, www.inkahoots.com)

The last and very important is social aspect of good design. This issue was touched slightly while presenting graphic design as a political activity. Political is social as it concerns many people. However, it is hard to make designs which have different messages than the ones accepted by majority. In the capitalist system societies belief in illusionary worlds were the hegemony of happiness is the only existing status quo. If an artist wants to present different approach to certain problems he/she has many difficulties. Twozywo admits that government officials want to see work with only positive messages:

“Who is an ally of the art? That real art. Corporations? Probably not. The society is not art’s ally as well, because it does not see any opportunities for art to meet any of their needs. Perhaps this is because public art if it is, it is dull and flowery, because it wants to be “for everyone”, so for “anybody”. What is worse only such form of aesthetics is tolerated by the authorities. Any other communication arts, is under strain, pressures, censorship. If it tries to convey not politically correct messages. And I do not mean insults for examples: to minorities or other seeds of social conflict, but raising topics that are uncomfortable. For example, presenting on murals more pessimistic ideas than the generally accepted hegemony of joy is not welcomed. Art on walls need to be cool, funny, colourful. I have heard this words from many officials, and art conservators, and they know very well contemporary art. Some officials have spent their lives at the desk, signing papers, therefore they had plenty of time to think and know better how the art should look.”(Twozywo, 2011:31)

What is seen: images, drawings are extremely important while putting the message across in design project. However, it is worth to concentrate on words as well. For Voloshinov words, which build a language, are the medium of ideology. For him, language is a system of socially generated signs, which certain society uses. They have different meanings for different social classes in different historical time, what Voloshinov admits in the essay *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

“This social multi-accentuality of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development. A sign that has been withdrawn from the pressures of the social struggle – which, so to speak, crosses beyond the pale of the class struggle – inevitably loses force, degenerating into allegory and becoming the object not of live social intelligibility but of philological comprehension. The historical memory of mankind is full of such worn out ideological signs incapable of serving as arenas for the clash of live social accents. However, inasmuch as they are remembered by the philologist and the historian, they may be said to retain the last glimmers of life.

The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium. The ruling class strives to impart a supra-class, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uni-accentual.

In actual fact, each ideological sign has two faces, like Janus. Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to other people as the greatest lie. This inner dialectical quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes. In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established, dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilise the preceding factor in the dialectical flux of the social generative process, so accentuating yesterday's truth to make it appear today's. And that is what is responsible for the refracting and distorting peculiarity of the ideological sign within the dominant ideology.”(Voloshinov, 1929)

The words can manipulate the meaning and convey ideology. This thought has its repercussions in today's neoliberal world. Language of media in Poland is rich with certain

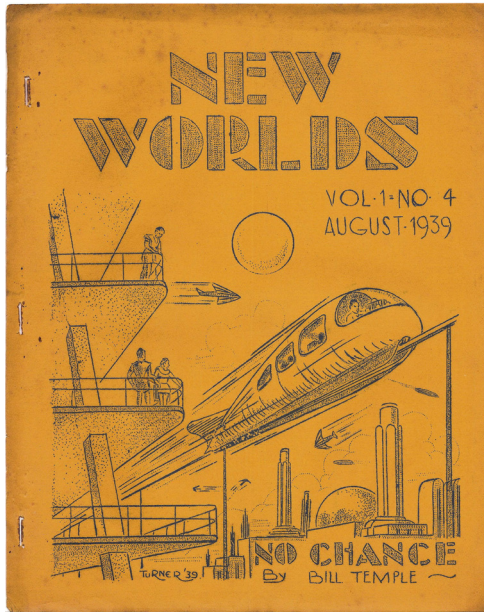


fig.1 New Worlds fanzine



fig2. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament LOGO



fig3. Works by Banksy

words which recur and they have become a tool for manipulation. Today media are not the middleman between the world and the audience, but they are the creators of the reality and the form they take has a great power. What is more, media are the example of using certain language to provoke needs, desires and problems. These days the trend is to dumb down language so that many people would understand it, is typical of television and print media such as papers and magazine. This is how the French writer and philosopher Alexandre Lacroix illustrates how television functions:

“Adverts are the real programmes in the television. They are squeezed between a set of quazi-programmmes, which intend to keep as many potential consumers in front of the screens as possible. The programmes broadcasted in prime-time intend to gather a huge audience, those programmes are accompanied by daily products ads like: washing powders, shampoos, food, cars, etc. Some of quasi ads intend to gather a specific target group in front of tv, for example children, intellectuals, or representatives of higher profession category, who are possible consumers of luxury products advertised. ” (Sowa, 2007:55)

Features of good design

Having discussed good design, we can specify features of a good piece of design. Good is design which inspires changes, in which the creator believes in, and which gives him/her satisfaction and happiness. Good design is about choices and what life the designer decides to have. Furthermore, good design stays true to ones principles. Good thinks about the audience, the way the design is produced and what impact it may have on the enviorment. Good design very commonly becomes a reaction and way of expression for problems, concerns or ideals and interests. Having looked back at design history there are many examples of wonderful good graphic design pieces done by people who were not always trained designers. Great examples are gathered by Teal Triggs in her book on fanzines. Fanzines are huge phenomenon. The first science fiction fanzines were created by



fig.4 BP logo rebranding project



fig.5 Works by Poster Boy



its fans in early 30s, as New Worlds famous science fiction fanzine. Fanzines are created by passionate people, who draw, cut out, staple, photocopy and use sometimes very simple methods to make their fanzine look good. The fanzine subjects are as varied as different passions of their creators, ranging across music, typography, social, political, environmental issues, animal rights, fine arts and many more.

Triggs admits that fanzines convey political concerns:

“Fanzines are positioned within the contradiction of the production of culture that constitutes an essential component of their politics, but also within the very conditions of the production of culture in which they are produced. The way in which fanzines are amateur productions suggests they are already situated in opposition to mainstream publishing and its conventions. At the same time fanzines are designed to be ephemeral, they are produced quickly and cheaply using copy-paper and lo-fi production and printing processes, with irregular dates and limited print-runs and distribution”(Triggs, 2010:14).

Punk years were the time when a lot of fanzines were produced. They had become an act of opposition of hard times. For example in Britain a severe economic crisis was on during 70s. It was very visual movement, and its repercussions were seen in fashion, culture, art, music and photography. The most important was the attitude. If one wanted to do something he/she just did that. Those times were very active and left very nice pieces of graphic design. Today fanzines both printed and digital ones are very popular. It may be because fanzine medium is independent and it does not count on profits, so its content is not manipulated, so may stay true.

Example of significant, ethical graphic design made with passion was is CDN logo. It was designed by Gerald Holtom in 1958 as a Campaign for Nuclear Disagreement logo for antinuclear campaign. This sign later became an universal peace symbol used in many different versions worldwide. It is based on the semaphore symbols for “N” and “D” (for Nuclear Disarmament) within a circle. Holtom later said that it also represented “an individual in despair, with hands palm outstretched outwards and downwards in the manner of Goya’s peasant before the firing squad.”(Roth,2008) Most recently Banksy, UK artist, made a murals



fig.6 Yes Men fake newspaper



fig.7 Work by Thomasmatthews



where the peace sign was a part of the project which has become a comment of a war in Iraq.

Most recent examples of "good" graphic design pieces the design made by passionate people, on social problems, with good aesthetics is the rebrand of BP logo announced by Greenpeace in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Public response to this project was enormous. There were professional graphic designers as well as non-professional ones participating in the project. The result was astonishing as so many creative, strong visually projects were submitted. This is one of many existing examples that everyone can react and communicate through words and images. In today's reality it is even more possible as most people have computers with at least basic graphic tools to use. The major question is whether he or she would have something to say.

Today there is a huge number of people who argue that public issues and social voices are left on the margins of the visual world appearing in public space. Those people use a variety of interesting communication strategies to play with pop icons and corporate images to make a consumers aware of surrounding problems. Their actions are usually seen as a form of subvertising, culture jamming which uses parody and irony in order to make the message clear for the audience to understand. Those not necessarily trained graphic artists who use elements of existing visual corporate world and change its meaning are called culture jammers. Poster Boy is an example. He is a New York based guerrilla artist who makes collages out of existing billboard adverts to create meanings, which stay in opposition to initial message. In an article on Poster Boy by Ben Walters in Guardian paper Poster Boy says about his work:

"As long as you're not hurting others, it can't be bad,". What Poster Boy does is culture jamming. Walters argues in the article:

"Culture jamming, meanwhile, developed as a more precisely targeted assault on corporate communications, satirically inverting branding and advertising techniques." Being a guerrilla artist is dangerous. One can be easily caught by the police. Poster boy knows almost everything

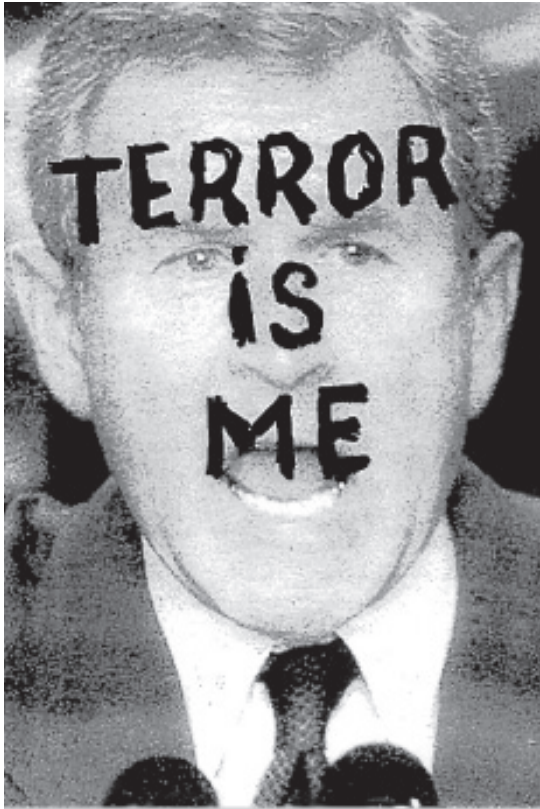


fig.8 Work by Grapius, French graphic design studio



fig.9 Work by Inkahoot



about the place he work in. Walters (2006) explain how Poster Boy work:

“High spirits notwithstanding, Poster Boy takes serious precautions. He operates only on empty platforms and works slouched against the wall, which shields his activity while giving him a good lookout along the platform. He knows which stations are accessible and quiet; how the CCTV cameras work; the rotation of subway and NYPD officers. He’s had several close calls: once, while pacing up the exit stairs after being rumbled by station employees, he passed two plain-clothes cops. “And they looked mean. They weren’t going to tick me off and let me go. They meant business.” (Walters, 2006) “

Poster Boy massed around with adverts to get occupied while waiting on the subway. (Walters, 2006). When he realised they were printed on self-adhesive vinyl, making them giant, re-stickable stickers, he saw there was fun to be had “maybe mixing up some words or cutting out a head and finding someone else’s body that it might look funny on” (Walters, 2006). He began combining images from clusters of posters, yielding elaborate and sophisticated results.

“Culture jammers argue that culture, politics, and social values have been bent by saturated commercial environments, from corporate logos on sports facilities, to television content designed solely to deliver targeted audiences to producers and sponsors. Many public issues and social voices are pushed to the margins of society by market values and commercial communication, making it difficult to get the attention of those living in the “walled gardens’ of consumerism. Culture jamming presents a variety of interesting communication strategies that play with the brand images and icons of consumer culture to make consumers aware of surrounding problems and diverse cultural experiences that warrant their attention.” (Douglas, 2010)

For Kalle Lasn (Douglas, 2010), one of the founder of Adbusters, the best culture jam is one that introduces a meta-meme, a two-level message that punctures a specific commercial image, but does so in a way that challenges some larger aspect of the political culture of corporate domination.”

Among the most radical of the public interventions are surely Andy Bichlbaum and Mike

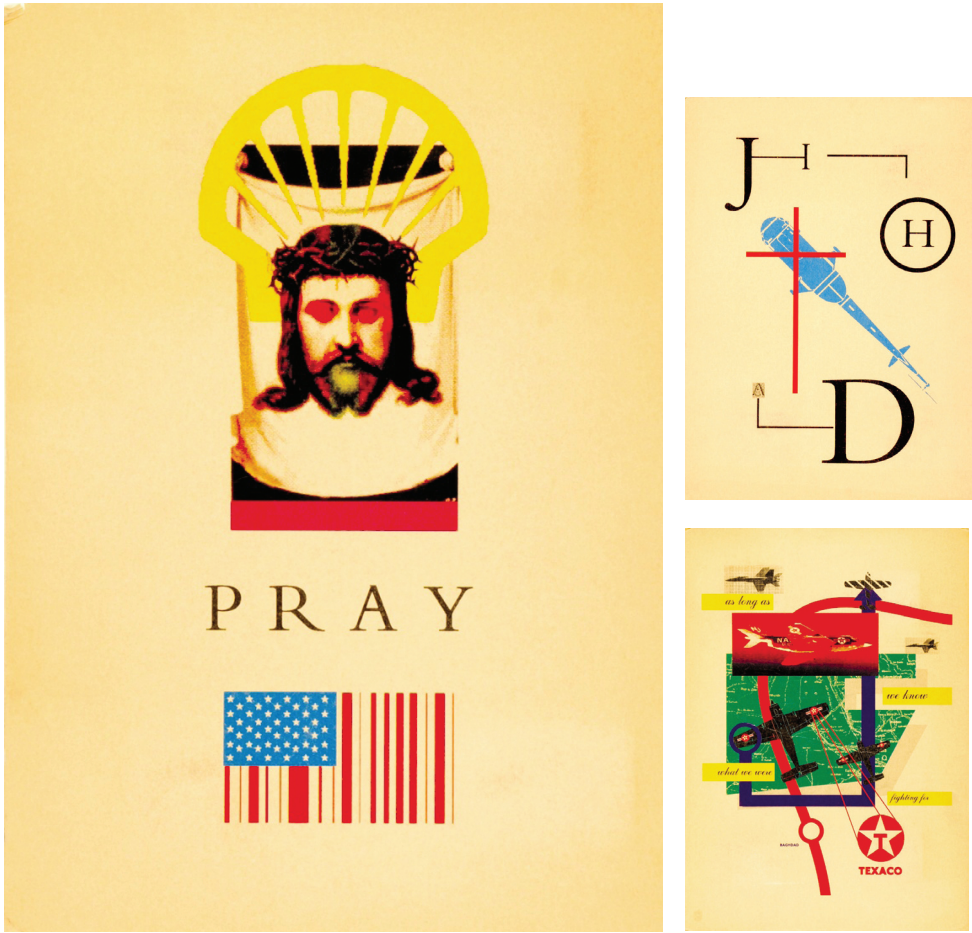


fig. 10 Works by Jonathan Barnbrook

Bonanno, The Yes Men.

“Striving to call mass media attention to the unethical practices of multinational corporations, the Yes Men create clever media spectacles by impersonating executives of such companies as Dow Chemicals, Exxon, and Halliburton to undermine their corporate goals and highlight their public abuses. Most recently The Yes Men joined forces with artists, writers, and activists to create and distribute one million fake issues of the New York Times blazing headlines such as “Iraq war ends”.” (Seno, 2010:308)

There are examples of design studios which do good design and make ends meet. I have chosen three studios, which works in my opinion best exemplify the ideas of good design. Thomasmattiew's is British design studio based in London. Straight away from the first screen of their website it is written that they do “good design”. For Thomasmattiew's “good” means appropriate, sustainable and beautiful what they state on their intro page about their philosophy:

“Reducing negative impact and enhancing the positive thomas.matthews is a leading practice in sustainable communications. We produce high quality, innovative design at a time when simplicity of solution and clarity of message matters. To put it another way, we believe in good* design. *appropriate, sustainable and beautiful.

When we say appropriate we mean communicating the message through the most effective medium to the right audience. Sustainable we define as design that has embedded systemic sustainability. And beautiful, through the creation of an eye catching and well-crafted outcome.”

Thomasmattiew's studio thinks differently:

“Priorities are changing – design and communication need to reduce negative environmental impacts and enhance the positives within society. Not just because it's the right thing to do, but because this opens up a whole new creative world. Backwards thinking has never been so important – we go on a journey together to consider the outcomes of our design right from the start, reducing the negative impact in your emissions and resource use. This allows us to avoid the roadblocks to creating authentic

design that makes sense for you and the next generation.” (www.thomasmattiews.com)

The above philosophy can be seen in their projects clearly. This studio has many good designs in their portfolio. However, Get On Board campaign is great as it unites and goes in reaction between South Africa and Britain. The idea of that project was to have a bus which would travel from Johannesburg to the G8 Summit in Edinburgh collecting people’s messages on third world debt. These then were delivered to the world leaders as part of the Make Poverty History campaign. This social campaign was conveying messages to people, and was nicely designed.

Another great example of good designers is Inkahoots, Australian designers who define themselves very precisely:

“The tension between private and public is a fundamental creative energy: what we know and feel and believe; and on the other hand what the weather’s doing and who’s running the country. Our work reconciles this dialogue between the stuff inside us and the world around us by finally stepping blinking from the shade onto the bright glare of the page or the screen.”

(...) We’re passionate about our work, and the role of our work in a broader social context. It doesn’t make any sense to us to diligently recycle waste paper, then go and work for a client who in policy or practice is fucking up the environment. Not that they’d want to work with us anyway. But we graphic designers have noticed a phenomenon (not unique to design) whereby corporations are appropriating alternative visual languages for mainstream audiences. (..)(Inkahoots.com)

“We work mainly in the community and cultural sectors,” wrote Inkahoots’ directors, Robyn McDonald and Jason Grant. ‘Not just because that’s where the best work is, but because we figure our environment is already cluttered with sophisticated corporate imagery that often doesn’t represent the community’s best interests. Alternative visual messages struggle to be heard above the rowdy din of dominant media. They need to communicate incisively with compelling power and drama, or even quietly with careful subtlety, just to compete.”

Within cultural sector Inkahoots have done a project called “Farm the fridge”. This project was



fig.11 Work "I chuj" culture jammers artistic group

fig. 12 Work by Wodiczko, Swatika, London



a hybrid food/market/exhibition/performance event in Brisbane city to promote alternative food systems (alternatives to the conventional supermarket process). Local organic food products are sold to office workers in their lunch time with the farmers themselves giving talks, it is followed by interpretive signage explaining where the food comes from, how it gets there and why it matters.

There are even more examples of good work done by designers, to mention *nouvstraviation*, French design studio which has its roots in famous *Grapic* studio. They continue to make political and cultural projects. One of the most admired piece by other graphic designer is a political poster with an image of George Bush and word " Terror is me".

To conclude this chapter it is not easy to judge if a design piece is good, as discussed in this chapter good design has its specific features based on which we could say if the design piece is good or not. Good graphic design thinks about people, society, environment, offers new conclusions, is ethical so do not want to do any harm for other people, good is good as it has its social values. Good design is for people. According to Zygmunt Bauman, it is always easier to see what is bad than what is good, what in my opinion refers to graphics as well:

"I suppose (though I could not prove it) is easier to know what is wrong. Here we usually doubt, are angry, feel the terror, hate, disgust. "Good" while speaking with semiotic language is more like a member of the opposition. Good image appears later as contradiction and repairing of bad."(Tester, 2003:72)

One does not need to be Barnbrook, InkaHoot or Thamasmattews, to make good design. To do so one needs to have the passion, be interested in what is happening around him/her, make good choices and have strong beliefs, so the work is a result of his/her life. Jonathan

Barnbrook sums this up:

“I have said many times that I don’t believe your work is separate from your life, it’s part of it, so I regard what I do in design as an extension of my philosophy in the way I live my life rather than the other way around. So in short, although I am not perfect I do try to practice what I preach as a good citizen in everything that I do.”(Barnbrook, 2011:18)

POLISH SOCIAL DESIGN

We the citizens of Eastern Europe, need socially engaged graphic design. Yet what does socially engaged graphic design mean exactly? To present and understand the idea of socially engaged graphics, it is vital to compare it with commercial graphics. The main difference between socially engaged graphic and commercial graphics is that the first tries to find the answers to real problems, which society encounters. Social design simulates action, give people choices and frequently it is the only way to manifest thoughts and ideas. The audience of those ideas are certain groups of people, or individuals. As a result, social graphic design becomes a civil activity, which supports pluralism and democracy within the country. That is extremely important in young democracies, such as Poland. Social graphic design is everything that is not visible in commercial design. Often advertising agencies take on non-profit projects on social issues. Those are a grasp of fresh air for creative teams. Invariably they have more creative freedom in these projects and are not limited by commercial clients interests. Choosing social issues by corporate advertising agencies is as well their politics to be regarded as the ones who have great ideas and who care about the society. Those projects are always more creative, fun and outstanding as the client do es not have the courage to interfere in the project as he or she does not pay for it. In reality, this is



fig.13. Work by Susid, AMS outdoor gallery



fig.14 Work by Sobczyk, AMS outdoor gallery



fig.15. Work by Maciejowski, AMS outdoor gallery

just another way for corporations to obtain more publicity. Undoubtedly, among the works created, there are many which are great, however what I am questioning is the agency's principle for choosing social issues for exploration. What is more, commercial design along with consumption-driven thinking generates consumerist needs, whereas it is the opposite case with in social graphics where necessity is the trigger of a project. Designing socially is political activity which is a reaction to a specific problem within society. Both social and commercial designs operate on independent levels but they invariably have some similar features. That is why it is hard to evaluate and assign them to socialism and capitalism. Furthermore, social design is an important aspect of social dialogue. Its main principle is to change, educate, provoke reflection and awareness. Social design, as a rule, is a non-commercial activity, which deals with important issues, therefore, the quality of the project is highly important. It must be said here that using the wrong attitude and tools to convey certain social message may result in people's misunderstanding of the message. At best, such work may turn out to be useless. The scale and budget for commercial campaigns is usually much bigger a those for social campaigns. Social design is much closer to its audience and provokes interaction faster therefore the designers in majority feel more passionate about those project, as they believe they can change the situation by their own actions. The limitations such us medium, scale, audience group, budget may result in creating even more interesting and powerful pieces of design.

An interesting and popular among artists form of action is intervention. The example of intervention from the Social Realism decade in Poland is the repeated action of painting the statue of Dzierzynski. The statue was situated in the centre of Warsaw next to the Office of Internal Affairs. The act of painting Dzierzynski's hand in red was regarded as a manifestation of disrespect and criticism of the Communist system. Other Polish examples closer to today are provocations by a group of culture jammers called "I chuj". This artistic group criticises consumerism. Their members use billboards with corporate adverts and stick certain words or images onto it, thereby of changing the meaning. Intervention is one of the many ways a designer may choose to act. In the book "Up against the wall" Russell Bestley and Ian

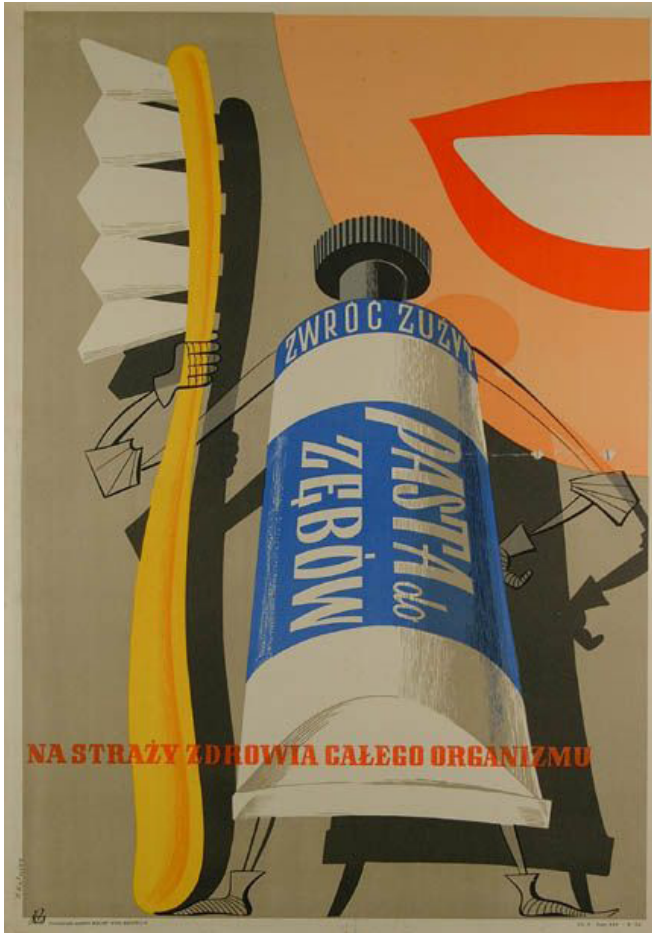


fig.16 Health and safety Polish Poster by Kaluzny

fig.17 Health and safety Polish Poster by Krusiewicz



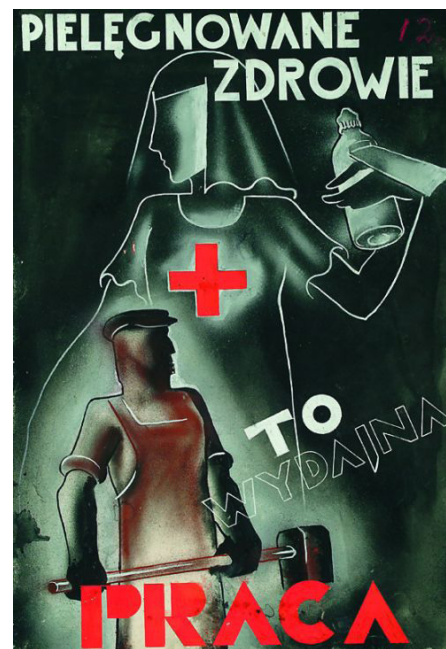


fig.18 Health and safety Polish Poster by Nowakowski



fig.19 Health and safety Polish Poster by Osiecki

fig.20 Health and safety Polish Poster by Urbaniec



Noble explain the idea of changing the meaning of an advertisement: "We are surrounded by photographic images in our daily lives and it is this familiarity that enables the designer to produce surprising effects in the eye of the viewer. By changing the context of an image the designer is able to let it communicate other meanings, which in turn shift an audience's perception of that image and enable understanding beyond the surface of the picture to emerge." (Noble, Bestley, 2002:50)

One of the best known actions was by Polish designer Krzysztof Wodiczko in 1985, in London. Wodiczko projected a swastika sign onto the building of the embassy of South Africa in London. The artist explains what successful public art piece means to him:

" This is public art. Reaction is needed to change circumstances. The attack must be unexpected, frontal, and must come at the night when the building, undisturbed by its daily function, is asleep and when its body dreams of itself."

The time Wodiczko acted, Margaret Thatcher made a shameful loan to South Africa. Mark Vallen in his essay explains the fundamental features of Wodiczko's act:

"Krzysztof Wodiczko creates art by projecting images upon the monumental architecture found in large cities. His ephemeral projection pieces last only a night or two, but they reclaim the city streets as places for discussion and heated debate. Wodiczko projected a photograph upon the domed Centro Cultural Theatre of Tijuana. The domed theater is where a documentary tracing the history of Mexican civilization is screened daily. The projection's theme was the undocumented Mexican workers who risk their lives to cross into the United States in search of jobs. The image used in the projection shows a Mexican worker with his hands clasped behind his head, as if being arrested by La Migra (the INS)."(Vallen, 2007)

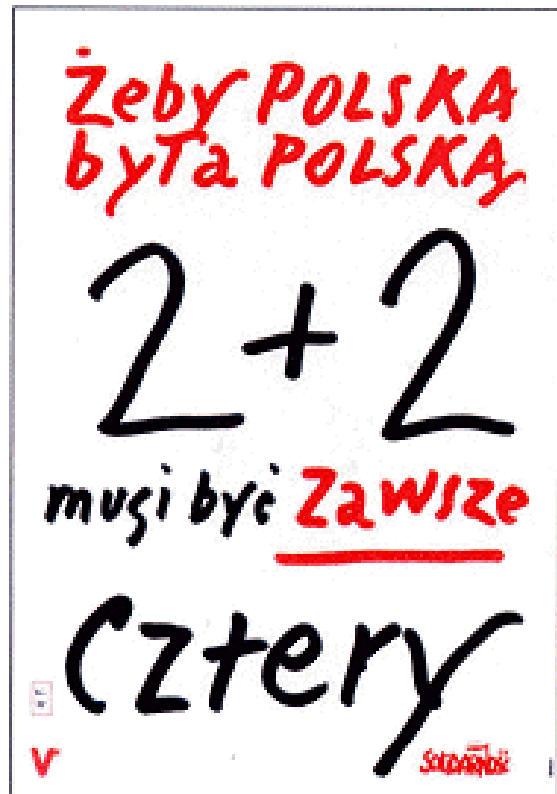
Wodiczko's art similarly to social graphic design is political and raise awareness on social issues. The artist uses public space as a surface for communicating ideas and changes the meaning of certain situations by manipulating with the context. Wodiczko best explains his works: "My work reveals the contradiction of the environment and the events actually taking place there. It is to do with politics of space and the ideology of architecture. City centres

SOLIDARNOŚĆ

fig.21 Solidarity logo by Janiszewski in posters



W SAMO POŁUDNIE
4 CZERWCA 1989



are political art galleries." Currently, Wodiczko is still an active artist and has projects with war veterans. War Veteran Projection is an audiovisual project carried out in various places around Warsaw using a demilitarised Honker Skorpion 3 army vehicle. The weapons platform at the back of the vehicle has been replaced with a specially designed 'projection platform' fitted with audiovisual equipment that fires voice sounds and textural images. Projected on the walls of Warsaw buildings, the text speak out the issues forced by Polish war veterans and their families. The projection was preceded by a workshop during which interviews with the veterans were recorded. Selected fragments, approved by the participants, have been turned into an audiovisual projection using special, dedicated computer software. The Warsaw projection is a part of a series of Krzysztof Wodiczko's projects on veterans, the first one having been carried out during the Democratic National Convention in Denver in 2008. In the Polish version, the artist gives a public voice to Polish veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, who cry out for understanding their way and post-war traumas, the difficulties they face in trying to return to civilian life. In the recent interview with Polish "Przekroj" magazine he confesses: "I do not care about the art, what I care for is having an influence on life. My main goal is to change public space into clinic. Democracy needs to be cured."(Wodiczko)

Social graphic design as opposed to commercial can be and generally is an incredible medium for the manifestation of thoughts and ideas. As designers we need to be aware of that. Those to whom we communicate, so the audience is equally important as the message. Therefore, when starting off with the project, the designer needs to think of the project's potential audience, their cultural and historical background. Defining that background may be very helpful for using adequate, understandable visual language and symbols which would best be read by that group. Many times the usage of the language from commercial adverts may be successful in social design. This is what the outdoor AMS gallery did in 1998-2002 in many cities across Poland. The gallery had 19 editions and it redefined the public space of Polish cities. The gallery used typical commercial medium billboard to activate society's imagination and to provoke reflection. On the billboards the gallery presented works on social concerns by well known Polish artists. According to the book, *Sztuka w miescie*

zewnetrzna galeria AMS 1998-2002, the most known and spectacular works were the ones created by Pawel Susid. One of Susid's works was an illustration of words "Wrong lives end up in death". The work by Pawel Jarodzki from 1999 was also successful. The work has been an interpretation of words "The one who buys is the one who does not eat". The billboard with Jarodzki work was usually presented close to supermarkets and shops, which increased its impact. The piece provoked the idea that people's work is changed into consumption and that consumption is the main activity which organises social life. An other work at AMS gallery stimulating society's awareness is a piece by Marek Sobczyk entitled "Solidarnosc". It was a nostalgic presentation of known sign which vanished from Polish streets at the end of 90s. The piece contained two Solidarity symbols. One among them was upside down. The manipulation of a well known sign provoked a question whether the solidarity logo with its attributed values is still alive in Polish society. It suggested the idea that those values are also upside down. The new logo indicated values which were in opposition to the original one such as: materialism, lack of trust, lack of loyalty and solidarity between people. The work by Maciej Maciejowski from 2002, entitled "How do we need to live now?" was a comment on the contemporary quality of life, characterized by the high rate of unemployment, ecological threats, globalisation and lack of solidarity between people which resulted in the difficulty in answering the question who will we be in the future, and what would be the most important thing for us. Outside the AMS gallery was the first repeated social action which presented socially engaged graphics across Poland. What may be interesting is the fact that AMS is a private company. Such an important and needed initiative should be expected from the public sector. AMS is the owner of the majority of billboards in Poland. By presenting the outdoor gallery with top Polish artists, AMS has gained more publicity and in marketing terminology it has gained positive PR by that action.

Social and commercial design in Poland develop asymmetrically. When in 1989, Poland overthrew its socialist system to build a consumption-based civilization, everything became commercialized. The important element of those changes was settling down massive companies which have their professional commercial design tools advanced. Among those



fig.22 Works by Twozywo

companies were advertising agencies which shaped new habits, desires and needs. The process happened in other countries of the Eastern Bloc as well. Those unoccupied markets were excellent for the expansion of corporations. All the political and social aspirations were met leaving no place for socially engaged graphics. At first the society was not critical towards the new system which was offering more goods and choices. Democracy and its freedom was what Polish society believed would be the best for the country and the nation. Polish society had been thought for years that there was no conversation with the people who were in power and that the only accepted form was the monologue of those in power. The propaganda poster in the Polish People's Republic was a way to create a festive atmosphere during national days. The propaganda poster was an icon of the Communist system in Poland. Beyond mainstream political posters of that time, there were posters on health and safety, on social diseases such as alcoholism, and on tuberculosis, venereal diseases which were often great pieces of social graphic design. These posters, however, did not appear in public as they were communicating shameful ideas, but were rather hidden somewhere in a surgery or in an industrial workplace. In the book on Polish posters on social issues entitled "Safety First/ Muzeum plakatu w Wilanowie 2000" the author states that such posters were regarded as a phenomenon and had their roots in the time between the wars:

" Work safety has been presented in Polish posters since the period between World War I and World War II, it should be duly appreciated and treated as a phenomenon in its own rights inside the history of the 20th graphic design in Poland. The aim of the poster is, on the one hand, to communicate a specific danger and ways to avoid it in an easy and understandable way, and on the other hand, to correct wrong behaviour by a suggestive visual sign or equally clear warning or prohibition. Message is the factor deciding on the format of persuasion have been used. The next important feature of work safety posters is their display. Printed in sizes hardly ever bigger than B2, it is made for indoor areas. Together with their objectives they formed part of general prevention and education process. Their role was a quick action which was a component of a comprehensive programme created to point out and bring to light unwanted behaviour at the work

place. This idea was the starting point for the publishing activities of the institute for social issues which was established in 1931 specialised in publishing books brochures and posters on work health and safety.”

Regardless of official national propaganda during the Communist era, engaged graphic design was not existing to be actions of democratic opposition were rather modest and on a local scale. The most interesting example of a socially engaged piece of graphic design is the design of Solidarity logo by Jerzy Janiszewski. Since its beginnings the design functioned as a poster. The logo was usually situated in the middle of a white poster. There are many features of that Solidarity logo design, which decided of its originality and strength. This graphic sign communicated spontaneity, independence, social rebellion and hope. It was a great representation of the Polish social moods of that time. In 1980, the non-governmental trade union created the first independent labor union in a Soviet-bloc with Lech Walesa and others. It gave rise to a broad anti-Communist non-violent social movement which vastly contributed to the fall of Communism.

Janiszewski, the creator of the Solidarity logo and many Solidarity movement posters, explains the idea behind his design:

“ I saw how solidarity appeared among people, how a social movement was being born and how institutions joined in. This all had a great effect on my spirit and I decided I wanted to join the strike. I chose the word solidarity because it best described what was happening to the people. The concept came out of the similarity to people in dense crowds leaning on one another-that was characteristic of the crowds in front of the gate. They did not press and push each other. Finally I added the flag because I was aware that this is not a regional group question but it is a universal movement. The letters have a disordered look because this is their strike attribute.” (Aulich, 2000:168).

The potential of Janiszewski’s Solidarity sign has been used by many political parties and artists who wanted to outline similar ideals or as previously presented Sobczyk’s work under AMS gallery, to show the lack of ideals.

Another great example of Polish social design of the 80s are works by the Orange alternative.



fig. 23 Works by Third Wave



fig.24 Works by Third Wave



fig.25 Works by Third Wave



fig.26 Works by Third Wave



The Orange alternative was an underground protest movement which was started in Wrocław, by its leader Włademar Frydrych. Its main goal was to present an alternative to the Communist regime. The Orange alternative used absurd elements for its peaceful protest. The movement was regarded as part of Solidarity. They were best known for painting graffiti with dwarves with anti-governmental slogans on the walls across main Polish cities. This is an example of typical, ironic language of the Orange alternative by Frydrych:

"In Poland there are only three places when you can feel free: In churches, but only for meditation, in prisons, but not everyone can go to prison, and on the streets: they are the freest places.

The Western World will find out much more about the situation in Poland from hearing that I was put to jail for giving tampons to a woman, than from reading the books and articles written by other people from the opposition. Can you treat a police officer seriously, when he is asking you the question: "Why did you participate in an illegal meeting of dwarves?" (Frydrych, 2006:20)

The book on this historical anti-Communist movement presents the movement as a real treasure not only for Polish history:

"Today the Orange alternative movement connected with the history of the struggle against communism is part of the world's artistic heritage. In the 1980s no movement would fulfill the unity of life and art with similar consistency. Never before has an independent artistic movement played such an important role in the social and political changes occurring on national and international scales. In the early 1980s, Poland was drowning in waves of social unrest. The year 80 brought forth the creation of Solidarity, a trade union started in the shipyards of Gdansk. At the same time, independent organizations were being formed on university campuses around the country. In the fall of the same year, at the university of Wrocław, a student movement called the movement for one culture came to life. One of its founder Włademar Frydrych known as "major" publishes the socialist surrealism manifesto which becomes the ideological backbone behind the gazette known as "The Orange alternative"."

The revolution in Dwarves power made a lot of graffiti, stencils and posters. One of best known piece was entitled "Wanted dead or alive Jaruzelski", a work on general who introduced martial law in Poland in 1981.

Polish democracy is quite young and the level of social civil awareness and the power of the visual message is not as strong as in Western. In a time of globalisation Polish society has difficulty communicating basic ideals using socially engaged graphic design. It is due to the fact that Poland is regarded as the most socially inactive country in the whole European Union. It is a paradox that in rich, socially and politically stable countries, social design is much more visible and used as a way to educate, manifest and exert pressure on those who govern. It may be that the level of social awareness is based on the level of its education, development and social activity. The presence of socially engaged graphics reflects the quality of the country's democracy itself. The more socially engaged graphic design is, the better the development of countries and societies. The more civil societies the more examples of socially engaged graphic design. It is surprising that not many examples of socially engaged graphics are created in Poland these days as opposed to many well known ones across the world, great examples of Polish critical art pieces by artists like: Uklanski, Zmijewski, Kozyra, Jakubowicz, Sawicka or Rajkowska. There is a lack of pro social designs. The design starts when the need appears. Does it mean that we do not have any needs, problems, issues which should be discussed? There certainly are but they first need to be noticed before being addressed later. Gradually, Polish society recognises the negative aspects of global consumerism. The introduction to the catalogue of works done by young Polish designers for the exhibition Young Polish designers dealing with consumption states:

" We in Poland have democracy, freedom and shops filled with goods. The problem has become how we are using these goods. At first after years of making do without, it seems a fair reaction that people wanted to buy as much as they could, so as to start resembling the affluent societies of the West as soon as possible. Today, we are more and more frequently conscious of the fact that consumption is not just an attitude of individuals, but a global ideology operating on the awareness of the majority in society. This ideology

defines purchasing not only as the appeasing of private needs, but also as a citizen's duty to help the economy. Vance Packard one of the first critics of consumption-based society in the USA quotes president Eisenhower in his book/*the waste makers/1960/*. who when asked during a press conference what people should do to fight the recession responded 'buy'. When he asked further 'buy what' he added 'whatever' In that book, Packard recalled slogans directed at the public in the 1950s. One of them was 'Buy buy buy It is you patriotic duty! But is it really?" (Frejlich, 2004:20)

The situation with Polish social graphic design is changing. More artists have the wish to communicate social issues through their works. An artistic group, Twozywo is one of still only few examples of artists who make their mark in a variety of ways. Twozywo has been operating legally in public space for 6-7 years. They started off with stencils and stickers to currently design book jackets and paint murals. They publish illustrations in a form of small novel on global issues in major Polish daily papers. Twozywo admits that it is really hard to make projects when there is no eager for cooperation from local authorities. "The relations between us and the authorities are inherently nonlinear. We're down here, and they are up there. No way to say about any dialogue, we only receive the message. The messages are only from one side. We propose, and the power, either accepts it or not. And that's it. There is no debate about it. The authorities will always find their methods, if it does not want to censor openly it will increase the obstruction, or invent formal restrictions." (Twozywo, 2011:31)

Twozywo artists have an understanding of the problem on a larger scale. They describe the essence of their activities in these words:

" But what we do, is not a struggle against capitalism, because capitalism itself is like a fruit of a larger problem. This is just an extension of an internal problem that consumes our civilization and takes a long time. So we also try to deal with this specific kernel and its fruit, but who loose the essence."(Twozywo, 2011:31)

According to Twozywo, the majority of Polish social design pieces are a cliché of what has been already created elsewhere: "When you look at Polish street art artists, or social designers

everything is done in the net, through the wire, on the screen. Many of the works are cliches, failed, inept copies, better, worse, but it is an echo of what is happening somewhere in the West.”(Twozywo, 2011:31)

Twozywo works present Polish media, even though they criticise the system and politics. Another great Polish social designer is Dariusz Paszkowski. Unlike Twozywo, Paszkowski involves other people in his projects, therefore his works are even more powerful. Paszkowski has been involved in social design since 1987. He is the initiator of The Third Wave artistic group, a collaboration of artists. The Third Wave group defines themselves as ones who make things: “with a social draft, with no orthodoxy and putting out, no drugs and always underground. To inspire, help and create.” The Third Wave creative team was established in 1998 in Bielsko-Biala in the southern part of Poland. The artists began their adventure with graffiti much earlier. In the second half of 1980s stencils with political, ecological and anti military messages appeared on walls across the country. In that time some artists already were painting their pictures on walls.

The time passed and streets, districts, wagons and pieces of concrete have been flooded by the second wave of graffiti. Tags, silvers and murals - made it like real America. It was colourful but generally without referring to social issues. There were some exceptions, though, like, the artists who created the third wave in Polish graffiti (this is where the name of our group comes from). This is what Paszkowski says about the Third Wave artistic group ideals:

“We try to reach people with our message to let them notice important issues and to have good fun from this. From time to time we help financially some of humanitarian activities. What is more, we don't only use one kind of technique. We cut down stencils. We paint directly from a paint can. We make stickers and posters. We create our techniques like: gluing of ceramic masks, mirrors with scratched text and stones with hammered symbols. We also use the fastening of “Kramelka”, which is a wooden “peg” with a flag which is moved by wind and brings positive energy to city space. All the time we develop creatively and we invite other people to cooperate.”(Third Wave)

Similarly to Twozywo The third wave artists have their code of practice. They avoid newly

built walls, antique and sacred objects. They search for places in the streets in which their stencils may survive for long time. Artists from Third Wave admit that they do their job without orthodoxy and pretending to be nice. They only make designs once they feel like it and when they've got free time and if there is creative inspiration. "The season of a year, a time of a day or a night are not important," - they claim.

Paszkowski the initiator of Third Wave foundation, admits in an interview with NGO website: "Commercialization and limiting oneself in the narrow little world, make people stop noticing what is happening around them. That is why I have not chosen one topic on which I would like to focus on. There is too much to do, limitation is not good. We want to build networks of cooperation. The unity has its strength. We help here, you help there. We are looking for allies and see what we can do together so it generally moves forward." Paszkowski believes that street art is the perfect medium for communicating ideas to the public. He thinks that public art may be as powerful as corporate campaigns. Paszkowski states that for him art begins when he starts to work together with people. The result of this action is a mural, graffiti. The aesthetic of the piece is not as important as the moment of its creation and cooperation with people. What Paszkowski believes is that public space is the people's place to manifest their problems and ideals. The majority of graffiti actions done by Paszkowski are in cooperation with non-profit organisations. Most recent graffiti work by the artist was done with people from Drug addicts association. With Paszkowski as an instigator they created a wonderful graffiti piece addressing the problem of drug addicts in the Polish society. They claimed that drug addicts should be cured instead of punished. Paszkowski strongly believes that graffiti may make people happy as well as conveying important thoughts. For Paszkowski graffiti needs to react quickly on what is happening. The work "In the face of death" fig. illustrates it perfectly. It was done only two hours after the plane crash on 10th of April 2010, when the president and his wife and handful other state officials were killed. The mural was painted by a member of The Third Wave group in Bielsko-Biala. The image of Polish flag was followed with words "In the face of death so many things seem to be unimportant". Paszkowski is an example of a person, who not only

act in graphic design area but also write texts and publishes zines. The way Paszkowski lives has its repercussions on his work and becomes his work. He is a buddist and co-founder of "Save the Tibet" foundation. Due to the foundation initiative the roundabout in Warsaw is named "Roundabout of a free Tibet". Paszkowski and his crew painted Save The Tibet murals on the buildings next to the roundabout in an act of protest to Chinese politics on Tibet. The majority of current Polish socially engaged graphics is presented in a form of graffiti, stencils, stickers, badges as those mediums provoke immediate reaction and can be the best form to express social concerns. Graffiti and murals have great potential to be seen by many people, because of their size and dominance in the public space.

"If we are to believe in the power of ideas, as we must understand that it is not in the thoughts we keep to ourselves but only in sharing them that ideas attain their potential. This is the primary reason that public space offers such fertile tableau for unsolicited artistic expression." (Seno, 2010:220)

It can be seen that in Poland the public critique of political and neoliberal world is breaking through. It is not equally seen as in eastern European countries such as England or France. Poland has different history and therefore needs different time to respond. There are more and more non-profit organizations which act for society and education. Unfortunately those do not get the support needed from the officials, what is more officials try to diminish their role. The example of such organization is JA Wisla - a non-profit foundation which are active in riverside areas in Warsaw. In an interview for Grafik Rebel Blog with the founder of the organization Przemek Pasek admits that civil society and non-governmental organisations are fictions in Poland. According to Pasek, there is not any law which would support such organization in a planned way. It is really a shame that people in state offices do not support these initiatives and underestimate those who use all of their creative energy to make good things for others, but sometimes they need just a bit of support to make progress. Those people often have much deeper knowledge of certain areas than official workers who don't even bother to visit those areas and do not have a clue what is happening there. Riverside is a great ecosystem for birds, beavers and other animals, what is more the river itself has

a great potential for educational walks for children, etc. The majority of these ideas has been brought to life by activists from JA Wisla, with almost no support from the state. This is a general rule with non-profit organizations, and shows the huge problem of underestimated social issues. This however has its roots in education. There are no educational programmes which would show young people that one can help for free and that it is satisfying. The capitalism has caused the disappearance of non-profit actions. Today people need to be always rewarded with money. This attitude is seen among many people who want to work at organisations, even in non profit ones, Pasek admits in the interview. This situation needs to change as money is not that important as the solidarity between people. The young generation of the 90s is already paying their tribute to working for corporations. Most of them are people who have been experiencing corporate domination for many years. Right now their anger is changing into action. It must be said here that socially engaged graphics are the consequence of ones thinking, therefore it is good to observe independent media institutions in Poland which shape people's point of view and address important issue. The key example is Krytyka Polityczna an institution, which was established in 2002 with the aim to reinvigorate the Polish tradition of engaged intellectualists. Its main areas of interest are knowledge, culture and politics. Their activists believe that knowledge, art and politics are only ways for expressing. What unites them is the fact that they have their influence on social life. Their main principle is to fight economic and cultural exclusion. They believe that there wont be any chance for social politics without creating a place for political dicurse. Therefore besides academic activity such as translations, discussions, book publishing, their members organize political debates and are active in fields such us literature, theatre, visual arts, and publish their ideas in national newspapers and magazines. "Krytyka polityczna" have the mission to present and publish the most important works in philosophy, social politics, culture theory and art. It organizes meetings and discussions open to the public. Currently "Krytyka polityczna" is present in many other cities across Poland. Most recently an office in London has been established. "Krytyka polityczna" is very important for educating socially engaged artists and cooperates with many artists who are not indifferent to what

is happening around them. The more places like "Krytyka polityczna" which connect visual arts and knowledge about the world, the more powerful socially engaged graphics will be in Polish public debate.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this piece I was aiming to answer the question: what good design is? My research has helped me to specify what features good design has. Good design talks about social concerns, is political, thinks about the audience, and the environment. The message it conveys is as important as the production process and the material used. Good design says what sort of person the creator of the design is, what interests him/her, what does he/she think about problems our society has encountered. More importantly good design is about the choices the designer makes and what he/she believes in. Good design can really change the way we live and can inspire others to think differently. Good design does not need to be presented in form of a poster, leaflet or logo. Currently we live in a high technologized era, which gives us great opportunities to use other mediums to communicate such as movies, sound, websites. Good design is not restricted to a certain medium. Everyone could be designer as for example in the case of BP redesign logo project set by Greenpeace. My research has shown that what is important in designing socially engaged designs is a strong imperative to make a difference, energy and most importantly, the message we would like to communicate. Artists and creative groups such as: Barnbrook, inkahoots, Twozywo, Third Wave show that it is possible to make great socially engaged pieces of graphic design. What is more platforms such as facebook and twitter help to reach more people and respond the design immediately. An important part of my research study has become Grafik Rebel magazine and magazine's fun page on facebook. Facebook fun page has become a platform where I have been publishing my works and I was able to observe peoples' reactions to certain projects. For a start I have designed political poster on Egyptian situation



fig.27 Work by Anna Skopinska

from January 2011. The poster contained two graphic symbols the original solidarity symbol and solidarity written in Arabic with Egyptian flag underneath. The image has provoked a massive discussion among many facebook members. The reaction was spontaneous and the majority of people who responded were Polish Jews living in Israel. They were afraid of the rebels and worried that so many countries may join in and follow Egypt what may result in threatening Israel. I admired people who stay in opposition to resist and decide to fight for their rights and freedom. What astonished me the most was the fact that those young Jews did not see that the people in the situation that they care for were themselves and the fact that the consequences of this Egyptian rebellion may have its consequences in Israel. At first it was very hard for me to read all those comments, one person even wrote that my design does not suggest any connotations with previous idea of solidarity sign. Having experienced that, I have realized that to be a socially engaged graphic designer one needs to be brave and strongly believe in what he or she is doing. At that time I was not prepared that this design may provoke that many negative reactions and only few positive ones. When making socially engaged projects the designer need to be prepared for a firm critique. Is it better than to make projects which do not provoke any comments, just to feel more secure? I am not an exhibitionist person therefore, I do not write much on facebook, but from time to time, I have this need to comment certain situations. The same was with Egypt. On my eyes, I have experienced how powerful socially engaged graphic design is together with facebook as a way of showing it to the public. Before publishing the solidarity piece of design on facebook, I had not realised that there are so many different attitudes towards this situation. It has definitely brought up discussion and provoked people for reflection and this is, I believe, what socially engaged graphic design is about.

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