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Proposal for Dissertation: Hope, Influence and Future

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The chosen keywords I will be exploring through my dissertation are; *hope*, *influence* and *future*. I consider all three of these words as being significant in my practice and they are important to me on a personal level. I will be examining how each of these words plays a pivotal role within design and what kind of impact they can have on the world around us. Design surrounds us every day through a range of products and services which can sometimes go unnoticed. I strongly believe in the idea that focusing on more positive meanings and outcomes within our design has the potential to improve life for us all and truly make a difference in our futures.

Hope

hope, ‘a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen.’ (Oxford dictionary, 2021).

We often think of the word *hope* in relation to as movies, TV shows or politics. The word itself is powerful and naturally brings with it a sense of possibility and change, it can be used as a tool to provide an insight into an alternative way of living in the future. This imagined future that is portrayed often taps into our emotions by showing us imagery of an exaggerated version of our current reality. This is often linked to current socio-political struggles and helps us to visualise a more equal and tolerant society or technological advances, giving us a view of what could be possible.

Hope is a feeling that we would have encountered from a young age and stays with us during our lifetime. Our own perceptions of the feeling could be determined by our upbringing, society and cultural differences. ‘The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe’ (Berger, 1972, p. 5). As an example, *Hope* would have a different meaning to someone in the UK who is financially stable compared to a person struggling with poverty in a poorer country. Here the definition of the word doesn’t change but it’s importance and outcomes can.

Providing *hope* could be used in relation to the fight against climate change, keeping our beaches clean or trying to save endangered animals from extinction. While discussing what designers can do to help tackle the climate change crisis, Freelance illustrator, Ben Tallon stated ‘visual communicators should “avoid the temptation to be visually angry and preachy”, and instead try to be “clever, subtle and original” in sharing facts that make for difficult reading.’ (Dawood, S. 2019) These ideas expressed by Tallon show how work where *hope* is the product of the design can assist in tackling

important climate issues we are faced with, and can be seen in with campaigns such as Extinction Rebellion. The purpose of their campaigns being a subtle call to action to show the positive impact we could have on the world from each making a few changes or behaving differently. It has the potential to allow us to overcome obstacles by providing an ideological *future* that we can picture and aim towards.

The word *hope* falls into the category of signified when you consider Saussure's Semiology theory and it supports the idea of everyone having a different view and outlook on it. 'inseparable from the signifier in any sign – and, indeed, engendered by the signifier - is what Saussure calls the signified. this is a mental concept.' (Cobley, 2012, p. 18). Therefore, we can understand that a word like *hope* would have a different meaning and level of importance to us individually on most occasions but can also serve a bigger purpose. 'Words work in the way they do because of the place they have in the structure of the language, because they are different from one another and fit into a particular pattern'. (Thody, 2006, p. 15).

There have been several examples of design that successfully created *hope* for its audience, whether it's a poster during WW2 created by Abram Games or more recent as Obama's campaign for US Presidency several years ago that focused on the word hope designed by Shepard Fairey. Both examples would have provided hope for very different reasons to their audiences but are equally effective in conveying their message. Looking at Games's poster for growing your own food, the emphasis on this image is to try and be more self-sustainable by growing your own food instead of relying on it being imported. The poster was designed during WW2 when there would have been conflicts that would have made transporting food very difficult with supply routes targeted and this poster offered a solution. The non-coded iconic message 'Barthes uses this term to refer to the "literal" denotation, the recognition of identifiable objects in the photograph, irrespective of the larger societal code (or langue). (Cobley, 2012, p. 70) in this poster clearly denotes the importance of using our spare land to grow food. This has been illustrated using both sides of a dinner table to represent an upside-down, alternate version of living. Even if we remove the text from the poster, The image alone still signifies the meaning and message in the design. The Obama poster makes use of colours similar of the American flag to indicate its underlying theme about it being for a new US president. The

single line of text being the word hope clearly hinted at a better future for Americans when employing a change in leadership and it resulted in being very successful. I believe being able to provide hope through design will continue play a big role in life and will be utilised more.

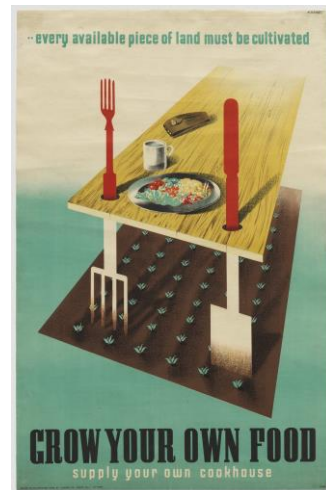


Figure 1: Games, A, (1942) *Grow your own Food*



Figure 2: Fairey, S, (2008) *Hope*

Influence

Influence has been defined as; 'the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.' (Oxford dictionary, 2021). It comes in many forms and is used in a broad range of disciplines. The designs we see day to day can *influence* us in

many ways depending on our personal views, the brand and its message they are aiming to communicate. We won't always pay a great amount of attention to all of the designs around us but they can still have an effect on us, however small. 'Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of all decisions are shaped by others. It's hard to find a decision or behaviour that isn't affected by other people.' (Berger, 2016, p. 10).

When thinking about day-to-day influence, fast food restaurants and coffee shops are some of the first to spring to mind. Establishments like this rely on successful design both inside and outside. Items like menus, display boards, banners and logos all play a vital role in how influential and successful a business can be. They will try to *influence* customers to buy certain products through advertising campaigns consisting of posters, billboards, web adverts and space in newspapers. Reaching out to a wider target audience across a range of services to make them more desirable.

Another method of day-to-day influence we see is through various items of clothing with slogans that help with spreading messages both positive and negative. Clothing is an easy way to create unity in times such as protests and the number of people wearing the same item of clothing can be a factor in influencing others. This can be seen in annual events such as LGBTQIA+ Pride and more recent protest movements such as Black Lives Matter. These events and protests in themselves could be considered as examples of *influence* because of their growth in popularity since they were first established, with more and more individuals now supporting the cause. Each of these examples demonstrate an attempt of making the world better with less hate, judgement and criticism. 'The rise of the T-shirt industry after the Second World War resulted from a range of cultural, commercial and political activities, including grassroots protest, political advertising, popular social commentary and fashion retailing.' (Lees-Maffei, 2019, p. 68).

Every one of these areas within design would have taken time to be researched, planned and produced. Some of these designs might be minimalistic in appearance and others might have multiple layers of detail. All of which demonstrate the key elements of graphic design were understood and considered, such as; typography, hierarchy, colours, use of space and layout. 'Constructivist design that is capable of analysis and reproduction can influence and enhance the taste of a society and the

way it conceives forms and colours' (Armstrong, 2009, P. 63). Getting the basics right and making your message clear and known can determine how influential a piece of design could be.

Influence plays a key role in how we perceive the world and shapes the expectations we have. 'What design brings into being not only influences the nature of the world we human beings inhabit but equally affects what we become as actors within that world as its makers and un-makers.' (Fry (2011) p. 30). Throughout history we have seen occasions where design has led to big changes such as successful political election campaigns transforming the UK leadership. One of the most notable in the UK, is a poster from 1979 on behalf of the Conservative Party to rival Labour that placed them in power for 18 years. On the surface this design shows a long queue of people and the text claiming the current political party is ineffective. Within its context it tells a story that Labour has resulted in a lot of unemployment with the queue of people waiting to go into a Job Centre to find work. The signs that make up this particular poster would have made it easy for the audience to understand what was being depicted and led to the changes in government.



Figure 3: Saatchi & Saatchi, (1978) *Labour isn't working*

Future

My final keyword is *future*, by definition it means; 'a period of time following the moment of speaking or writing; time regarded as still to come.' (Oxford dictionary, 2021). None of us know what is going to happen in the coming years, although we can make predictions. it's this uncertainty that

can be challenging and often prevents thorough preparation. There could be less demand for designers with more people doing their own graphics through DIY videos. ‘The more that our economy runs on people doing it themselves, the more people will demand opportunities to do so, and the more graphic designers will have to adapt their methods.’ (Armstrong, 2009, p. 119).

Thinking about the *future* from a design perspective, you can consider trends and styles that will be popular and used more often which changes frequently. There might be existing trends from previous years that are thrown back in the limelight again. This has been seen with styles like pop art and comic art that has had a revival over the last couple of years due to its popularity in movies and art. Reflecting on what happens in the world around us allows for us to design with more meaning and makes it possible to highlight certain topics that are relevant.

Another aspect to think about and something I often ponder over is the impact design can have on the *future* and it's a subject that has been discussed previously. ‘there is a simple and vital question that needs to be posed immediately: in the face of the unsustainable state of the world, what can political activists and designers (including myriad other professionals who, knowingly or unknowingly, make design decisions) do?’ (Fry, 2011, p. 5). We have seen examples of ways in which design can evolve during the current Covid pandemic, where businesses have relied on graphic designers to create safety notices and posters with very little notice. The importance of these designs being that they are essential to public health and allowing the world to return to a state of normality that we were familiar with. If we didn’t have the ability to design, relaying important notices and information would be extremely difficult. Highlighting the need for flexibility within design and ability to adapt to our ever-changing surroundings.

Some designs will use visual representations and statistics of what the *future* could have in store for us as content to help audiences imagine potential outcomes. More often than not these are distressing by nature and intended to cause feelings like panic, guilt and concern for its intended audience. Using negativity as a way to get us to act. This technique has been used for some time in photography, art and design throughout history and works well regardless of the topic although might not be as effective as it once was. ‘the fact that these images belong to the moment but speak of the future

produces a strange effect which has become so familiar that we scarcely notice it' (Berger, 1972, p. 149).

Focusing more on what design can do for our *future*, ethics needs to be reviewed and considered to comply with existing frameworks. Creating work that doesn't raise any questions about its morals and presented in a responsible way. 'The act of design is the extension of potentiality. When design occurs, it brings ethical space into being. In this sense, design is by nature a fundamentally ethical activity.' (Scherling, L & DeRosa, A, 2020, p. 89).

Throughout this essay I have considered how design can improve life for as many people as possible. Imagining a world surrounded by imagery and messaging that focus on positive ideas. Using design as a tool to improve society on a wider scale to benefit everyone equally. I have questioned what issues are we facing currently that through some carefully thought-out design can we change or understand better. In my proposal I have deconstructed existing examples and analysed what elements and rules they follow to stand out and be recognised.

This has also raised some sub questions that I would like to explore within my dissertation such as; What impact can design have on politics and influencing the outcome of political campaigns? Can design promote sustainability and a greener way of living for us all? How does design influence the following of protest movements? Thinking of the above has allowed me to decide that I would like my overall question for my dissertation to be: *Can creating hope and influencing people through design have a positive impact on our future?*

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