

Chance Jordan Dufty

1803696

Research in Context ADAD5003

Graphic Design

Timi O'neill

Q3. How can semiotic analysis be used to critically evaluate the work of two creative practitioners from your discipline area? Begin by deconstructing the social and political aspects of their work and compare and contrast the intended purpose and constructed messages in your analysis. Conclude by discussing whether this mode of analysis is useful to practitioners.

Word Count: 2,404

It is more important than ever for designers to consider their political and social influence when creating designs and for them keep in mind the influence that current affairs may have, with the daily debates about what is politically correct in recent years it is easy for a design to miss the mark. So how is a piece of design made effective? In order for a piece of design to be seen as effective it must first encode the correct message within it be that with colour choice, font choice, the imagery that is used, the mode in which this information will be shared and viewed, and the time in which the design is produced, if it is lacking in any of those areas then it might lead to audiences having difficulty decoding the correct message from what they are seeing which in can often lead to brands and designers facing failures with their designs or campaigns.



Fig.1 Lucia Types

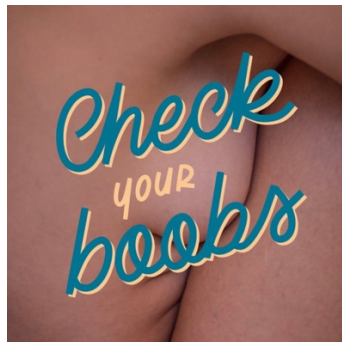


Fig 2: Alexiane Davenport.

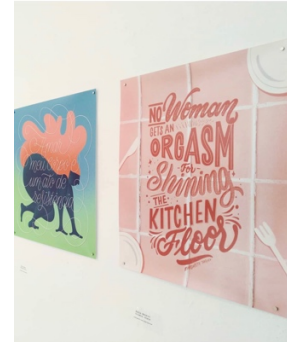


Fig 3. Typing Feminism Exhibition

In the fig 1, the typography work of *Lucia Types*, an illustrator and lettering artist from Spain and founder of the online project '*Typing Feminism*' which aims to showcase female lettering artists work from all around the world, highlights a desire to encourage women to speak up for what they believe in. The choice of colours used, reds, pinks and purples help to encode the idea of femininity and the bold typography choices are a good match to such a bold quote and are an interesting visual choice, drawing your eye around the piece smoothly. The centre illustration of an open flaming mouth is helping to encode the message in the piece, which is to not be silent, especially as a woman. I feel like these messages are then successfully decoded by the viewer and we understand that this is a piece with feminist tones as that is what the creator has intended. It is the combination of all elements that allows the piece to be recognised by the viewer as feminist. The underlying message of the image and all others in the '*Typing Feminism*' project link back to the definition of feminism, which is simply the desire for true equality between men and women.

If you look up the definition of "Feminism" in the dictionary, you'll see these statements:

Feminism is:

- 1. The advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes*

2. The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes
3. The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities
4. The doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/03/08/what-is-feminism-and-why-do-so-many-women-and-men-hate-it/#251e21917e8e>)

The power of encoding and decoding was explored by Stuart Hall who believed that *“Before this message can have an “effect” (however defined), satisfy a “need” or be put to a “use”, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which “have an effect”, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences.”* (1980, p.165)

An example of where encoded messages have not had the desired outcome would be a campaign by Bud Light (2015) that used the hashtag #upforwhatever accompanied with an advert that showed a man doing a series of events and printed messages on their beers that read “the perfect beer for removing no from your vocabulary for the night” this was met with criticism from audiences that believed it “encouraged and promoted rape” considering that alcohol can often be a factor in rape cases and the recent conversation surrounding consent and that led to the company apologising and the campaign being pulled. It also led to members of the public creating their own artwork responses, one featured here in Fig 5 is a good example of the general response this campaign received as well as how others saw an opportunity to use this failed marketing attempt for their own personal or political agendas, in this case to help raise awareness surrounding consent and rape. However, this interpretation was probably not intended to be encoded in the design by the designers who worked the job and it just shows how social and political influences can have a big effect on how audiences receive and perceive information. We could argue that if Bud Light had tried that campaign years prior when consent and rape were not such current topics it may have been met with a different response.



Fig 4. Budlight Campaign



Fig. 5 Response to BudLight

The most effective designs are usually those that are based on current events, this differs all over the world but globally we have seen a rise in feminism in the last few years and the desire for women to seek equality more and more, the rise in movements like #MeToo, which saw many women in Hollywood come forward with stories of sexual harassment and assault perpetrated on them by men in positions of power. It helped highlight just one of the many ways women are treated differently in the work place. This movement is just one example of how times are changing and along with that women's attitudes. 'Typing Feminism' is a project that is contributed to by many artists, but it has a clear united message and it is bringing women together by giving them a platform to voice their opinions through their typography-based work. Using art by women to bring more awareness to the current political issue's women face, is a great step towards continuing to raise awareness and empowering women.

With the introduction of new weekly themed challenges to the project there has been a new wealth of work by new female artists. The first week started in October 2019, Breast Cancer awareness month, and aimed to help raise awareness and encourage women (and men) to check their breasts as well as to offer some words of support and encouragement for those who may be going through the illness. The addition of these challenges allows the designers that contribute the opportunity to create relevant and relatable content that reflects what society is going through at any given time whilst staying within the original framework of the project.



Fig. 6 Steven Harrington Illustration



Fig.7 Illustration on shoes



Fig. 8 Exhibition for collection

Steven Harrington artist and designer based in California, is well known for his bright and playful style. He has collaborated with Nike on a number of projects, most recently was a collaboration for Earth Day, *Harrington* created a number of graphics that appeared on shoes, T-shirts and advertising. Most notably the image pictured above features the Earth in a pair of Nikes', which was used in video and billboard advertising. The design seeks to allure to the more sustainable and earth conscious consumer as well as the avid collector and on one hand it achieves this to some degree however I feel this kind of design often misses the point. The design is in support of Earth day, which aims to bring more awareness to the current climate issues, it is then placed on a product that is only made from partially recycled materials and is still a mass consumer product that would have contributed to many of the issues Earth Day wants to help combat as an advocate for environmentalism and sustainability. *Environmentalism has been described as a "social movement or as an ideology focused on the welfare of the environment" that seeks to "protect and conserve the elements of earth's ecosystem" (Learning to Give 2003)* *Environmentalism aims to help correct and protect the earth from issues like*

managing natural resources and global warming which are largely caused by big corporations and businesses rather than the average man so with that it mind it doesn't make as much sense to pair Earth Day with Nike.

Can a design be successful if it is contradictory in its nature? You could argue that this is a successful design as it does what it intended to do, it advertises an Earth Day themed collection of items, the illustrations are well done and have a distinct style so it becomes a cohesive collection, so in many ways it works and the encoded message is clear. However we are in a time when there has been in rise in climate awareness and that includes the effect that clothing has on the environment, it has been found that “on average 35% of all materials in the supply chain end up as waste” (Common Objective (1), 2018) and that's before its even reached the consumer and so whilst the opportunity to produce designs with a larger company like Nike can be seen as a positive for a designer it could be that the designs may have been more effectively used in support for a smaller brand who focused more on their economic impact because when we consider the context in which the design is then being used, on not 100% sustainable products, it loses some of its effectiveness.

“The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of “source” and “receiver” at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. What are called “distortions” or “mis-understandings” arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange”

(2) Stuart Hall (1980) Culture, Media, Language (London, Hutchinson) P.166

When we are living in a time when clothing waste is at its highest, “Research⁹ shows that a chief culprit of this pollution is clothing made from synthetics (polyester, polyethylene, acrylic, elastane)” (Common Objective (2), 2018) and when that waste is a huge contributing factor to our climate issues, it is clear why brands may try and appeal to a different target audience that might otherwise make a more conscious effort to avoid them and their products however those who are truly concerned about their effect on the Earth still aren't likely to contribute to a company that isn't doing the most they can to be sustainable by still being a part of the mass waste issue and by creating large carbon footprints when transporting their goods and products. And they are also unlikely to buy a product that isn't completely recyclable and ultimately is bad for the environment regardless of whether it features a fun design. It is also worth considering that those who care for the environment strongly enough will also question the ethics behind such a large company manufacturing process, for example are the workers treated fairly and earning a fair wage. When we consider all these factors, we could question how well this product would be received and if the desired encoded message would be decoded in the right way by the consumer.

“Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to natural resources, we also need social and economic resources. Sustainability is not just environmentalism. Embedded in

most definitions of sustainability we also find concerns for social equity and economic development.”

<https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/what-is-sustainability.pdf>

This kind of design is not anything new, designers have been using political and social issues to gain interest for many years however audiences are growing less passive and are now more likely to speak their minds against advertising and marketing campaigns that haven't worked or may even verge on being offensive or disrespectful. In 2018 fast fashion retailer H&M came under fire when they released a hooded jumper printed with the phrase “Coolest monkey in the jungle” which at first seems like an innocent and playful child's garment, we have called kids little monkeys for generations, however it was the way in which this item was advertised to the consumer that was the issue, the clothing item in question was modelled by a black child, which many people considered to be offensive and racist. This evidently was not the designers intention, nor the photographers nevertheless somewhere along the design process this message became decoded by the viewer, this is most likely due to the political climate in 2018, people have less tolerance for racism even the most minor of incidents than they did even 10 years ago, the world we live in is ever adapting and changing and with that comes a whole new wealth of problems. Designers these days must think extremely carefully about so many aspects of their work that they may not have even considered before, certain colour choices or word choices in combination together can be triggering for viewers so they must learn how to balance what is a typically good design with that is currently socially or politically important.



Fig 9 H&M Store Front

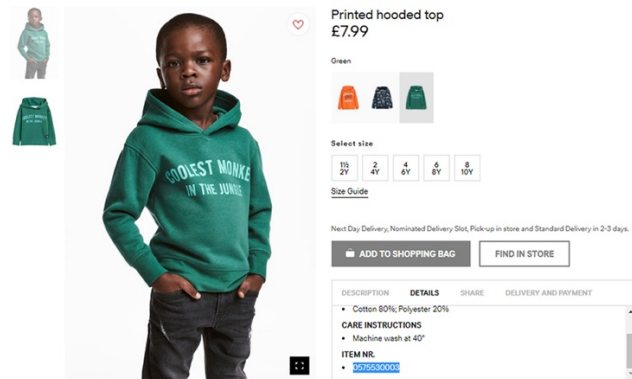


Fig.10 H&M Design mistake 2018

In this essay I have looked into and analysed how different designs and campaigns have worked or not worked and how with the right set of 'ingredients' or lack of one or more of them can affect how designs are received by their audiences. It has shown that often the design in itself can be impactful, but it is the context in which the designs are then used which can hinder their impact. I have discussed how we can use the idea of decoding and encoding to help us understand the meaning of a design, and how those meanings can differ and looked at how as the world continues to change, designers must too change along with it if they want their work to remain relevant and not be met with disapproval from target audiences. This is

best achieved by staying up to date with what social and political aspects of the world people are most affected by at any given time. This kind of information can help make or break a design, as we have discussed above it is easy for designers to get lost in the aesthetics of design and so neglect the underlying messages that may be decoded from that. It is also often the case that the design can have too much of a hidden deeper meaning that the audience is unable to perceive, and the viewer is left to take it at face value which again can lead to a negative overall outcome. It would be useful for designers, myself included to keep in mind how these things can affect us and how our work will be seen by others, being mindful of how political and social influences can change the impact of a piece as well as bearing in mind all other elements of what makes a successful design

Bibliography

Caprino, K (2017) www.forbes.com Available at:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/03/08/what-is-feminism-and-why-do-so-many-women-and-men-hate-it/#251e21917e8e> (Accessed on: 05/12/19)

Common Objective (1), 2018, www.commonobjective.co [Web Page] Available at:
<https://www.commonobjective.co/article/fashion-and-waste-an-uneasy-relationship> (accessed on 5/12/19)

Common Objective (2), 2018, www.commonobjective.co [Web Page] Available at:
<https://www.commonobjective.co/article/fashion-and-waste-an-uneasy-relationship> (accessed on 5/12/19)

Hall, S (1980) Culture, Media, Language (London, Hutchinson) p.165

(2) Hall, S (1980) Culture, Media, Language (London, Hutchinson) P.166

Learning to Give(2003) www.learningtogive.org Available at:
<https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/environmentalism> (Accessed on 05/12/19)

Mcgill(2013) www.mcgill.ca <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/what-is-sustainability.pdf> (Accessed on 05/12/19)