The Inclusion of Social Responsibility in the Visual Communications Curriculum

Case Study

Authorized by:

Lita Talarico

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School of Visual Arts

New York, New York

"Students are citizens. Designers are citizens.

Citizens must be engaged in the world they live in."

Steven Heller
*Co-chair of the MFA Designer
As Author Program
School of Visual Arts
New York, NY*

School of Visual Arts

Excerpt from official website
<http://www.schoolofvisualarts.edu/ug/index.jsp?sid0=1&sid1=34>

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(www.adobe.com/go/gn_home_logo)

Designer as Author

In addition to providing its students an extensive education in the art and science of visual communication, the School of Visual Arts MFA in Design program equips its graduates to be content creators and communicators. The program is called "The Designer as Author," and it is the first designed exclusively to encourage authorship and entrepreuneurship in a broad range of media. The SVA concept of authorship includes not only publications such as books or magazines, but products such as toys, television programs, websites, and far more.

Design boot camp

In the first year of the program, all students take the same courses to develop or strengthen their skills in using different forms and media. They learn about the creation of books, television spots, websites, presentations, and 3-D products. They expand their sense of branding and use of typography. They hear from industry legends like Milton Glaser or Stefan Sagmeister on how to use the power of design. Along the way, they fit in a course in thesis research and development and spend the summer break thinking about the thesis — the product — they will propose and fabricate.

A professional studio with professional tools

The department provides a workspace much like the students would find in a professional studio, with a library, conference room, editing rooms, and, instead of a lab, well-equipped individual workstations assigned to each student. The computers are equipped with Adobe InDesign, Acrobat, AfterEffects, Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash, and Macromedia Dreamweaver. Program co-chair Lita Talarico explains: "We provide all the tools students need to accomplish their course work. Adobe applications work seamlessly together to create these products from print and package to environmental design, from website development to motion graphics, and students use them on a daily basis."

From idea to finished product

The second year curriculum includes just two semester-length courses, such as intellectual property and exhibition techniques, and a number of four-week seminars on research, writing, design, entrepreneurism, and exhibition. Students prepare their thesis proposals in book format for review during the first semester. They must win approval of their proposal from the department head and a committee of thesis advisors before advancing to the execution stage in their last semester. In addition to the SVA thesis advisors, students are encouraged to find an external industry advisor to provide input and review on their thesis project. During the second semester students create their actual product or prototypes for it and, at the end of the semester, defend their thesis before a committee of advisors and industry guests.

Projects to products

Not all thesis projects become actual products, but many have. For his thesis project Bobby Martin Jr., class of 2003, rebranded the Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem and built a campaign advertising positive images in the African-American community. His poster campaign covered 35 billboards throughout central Harlem for five months.

Inspire: poster designed by Bobby Martin

Lead: poster designed by Bobby Martin

Jennifer Panepinto, class of 2003, entered the program planning to start her own business. She was dieting for her wedding at the time, and one night when she was too tired to measure her food, was inspired to design a line of porcelain nesting bowls with pastel graphics that give dieters visual guides to proper portion sizes. Today, her line of bowls is sold in the Museum Of Modern Art store as well as on her website. Sierra Krause, class of 2005, entered the MFA program with a passion for both interior design and lighting. She created Vega, a line of sculptural lamps composed of acrylic rectangles that can be used as frames for images. Today she can barely keep up with orders for her product.

Jennifer Panepinto's ceramic nesting bowls at the Museum of Modern Art.
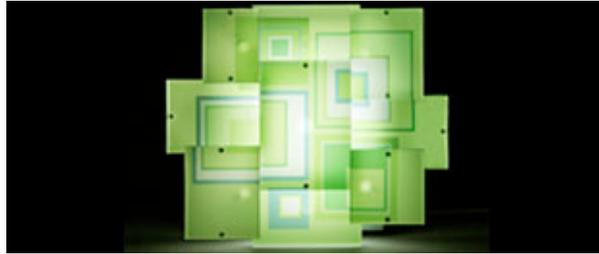
Vega sculptural lamps designed by Sierra Krause (Patent Pending)

Safe RX

Deborah Adler, class of 2002, redesigned prescription bottles for her thesis project, Safe RX. During the summer between her first and second years of study Adler considered ideas about Holocaust education projects or projects about the cultural influences behind curly hair. Then, during the fall semester, her grandmother took her grandfather's medication by mistake, and Adler realized that hard-to-read prescription labels had caused the problem. As she researched the problem, she found that 60% of Americans don't take the proper medications because of confusion over prescription labels. As a designer from a family of physicians, Adler felt this might be her way to contribute to the field of medicine. Her thesis project included a complete packaging system with a redesigned bottle in a D-shape, rather than a cylinder, a label with the drug name prominently positioned at the top printed in separate colors for each member of the family, and an information card with the intake schedule. The labels and packaging were designed with Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop as well as Adobe fonts.

New warning card designed in Adobe Illustrator

D-shaped bottles designed by Deborah Adler

Becoming ClearRX

While researching ways to take her idea to market she found that her best prospects for adoption were through a national pharmacy. She protected her

idea with a patent, and began patiently to contact various national firms. She always felt that her concept was a good fit for Target, a company with a focus on community involvement and a commitment to design as a way of differentiating itself. In August 2004, Target decided to adopt the idea and quickly assembled a team, including Adler, to bring it to market, in total a nine-month process. Adler worked with Klaus Rosburg, a Brooklyn-based industrial designer hired by Target, to refine her concept for its pharmacies. The two created a new bottle shape that stands on its round childproof cap designed to facilitate reading. As in her proposal, the labels list the drug name at the top, followed by intake instructions and then doctor name and refill options, with the Target pharmacy name at the bottom. A card on the common uses and side effects of the drug is tucked behind the label. The pharmacies provide six colored rubber rings that attach to the neck of the standard bottle so that each member of the family has a unique color for their personal medications. Adler also redesigned the graphical warning symbols to be more intuitive. The result of the test is Target's new ClearRX prescription system.

Creating content that communicates

Whether creating ideas like Safe RX, consumer products, publications, or services, SVA graduates in design learn how to focus a concept, research their materials and markets, and define their customers. They develop a business plan and a prototype as a part of their thesis. They exhibit their concepts both physically and online. Some of them take their thesis projects directly to market, and some apply their learning to better serving their future clients. All of them learn what it takes to become the creators, as well as the communicators, of content.

New Target RX bottle design

Colored rubber rings for new RX bottles

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Design Issues

Design=Heart? Stefan Sagmeister asks design students: Can design touch someone's heart?

Carolyn McCarron Sienicki

Originally published in Communication Arts November Design Annual 2006

I've always considered Stefan Sagmeister a professional provocateur. I still remember, as a young designer fresh out of school over ten years ago, receiving posters in the mail that he designed for the AIGA: the headless chickens, the wagging cow tongues, and the X-Actoed typography (into his own flesh, no less). I thought, *who is this guy?*

Now I know: He's Stefan Sagmeister, a superhero to many in the design world (even though he prefers not to be seen this way). He can convince clients to take creative risks that leave the rest of us awestruck. He employs guts in his work and gets endless publicity for his most shocking and provocative designs. Young designers everywhere revere him.

But with great power comes great responsibility, and he is attempting to bring a sense of humanity back to design and remind us of our individual power as designers—all by asking us one simple question: Can design touch someone's heart? To get things rolling, he has turned the question into a course he is teaching at design schools in New York City and Berlin, including the School of Visual Arts (SVA), the Cooper Union and the Universität der Küenste.

Stefan's question has inspired me to take a closer look not only at Stefan as a thoughtful designer and teacher, but at what my own design work is accomplishing (or not accomplishing).

Understanding the question
Stefan first raised this question in his book *Made You Look*, published six years ago. Today, an Internet search brings up countless postings as designers everywhere attempt to answer it—including students. American designers (as opposed to European designers) take the "heart" aspect of the question quite literally. The word "heart" in English implies love, caring or affection. Therefore, it makes sense to many designers to answer the question by taking on pro-bono projects for various causes, as side projects to everyday client work. While these designers' efforts are commendable, Stefan is asking us to delve much deeper than some may understand. What he is really asking us is: Can design do more than sell products for our clients? Can design move someone enough to change the course of events? Can design play a bigger role in solving societal problems? "You could also say, do something that matters," he explains. "It's a pity that the majority of what we do is promote or sell products for clients. I have nothing against selling. I do it, too. But I also think design can do so much more. It can inform, delight, provoke, support and simplify someone's life." The answer must come from your own heart. This takes an innate understanding of where your particular passions and design skills can make a difference to someone else. It takes soul-searching.

What prompted Stefan to pose this question to our profession in the first place? When he arrived at the AIGA Design Conference in New Orleans ten years ago, he was handed a bag of promotional

goodies, all well designed, of course. (Yes, this is the conference for which Stefan designed the promotional poster featuring bloody, headless chickens.) But what did these designers accomplish? "So much of what designers do is technically very good," he says, "but it leaves people cold and has little meaning in their lives. The question came out of a frustration of drowning in professionally designed things that nobody gives a **** about, neither the maker nor the receiver. The main reason for all this stuff is that most designers don't believe in anything. When your conscience is so flexible, how can you do strong design?"

This is quite a provocative and challenging statement, but then, that is Stefan's style. While I don't agree that designers don't believe in anything, I do believe this is Stefan's way of throwing down the gauntlet to designers to get back in touch with their beliefs and act on them. In our day-to-day work, it's all too easy to set aside our personal beliefs and convictions for the sake of getting an assignment out the door and getting paid for it. I agree that we can create more opportunities to incorporate the ideas we feel most strongly about into our work, thus making our visual communications more meaningful and personally rewarding—not only for ourselves, but also for others.

Furthermore, what Stefan is advocating is not the first time these types of thoughts have been voiced in our profession. They have been floating around for decades, heating up again with the release of the *First Things First* manifesto and the international debates it sparked. I feel that Stefan, however, has been able to put it to us in a more thoughtful way (as opposed to the manifesto authors' approach that put many designers on the defensive). Considering most designers are artists at heart, the opportunity to explore a poetically phrased question is one they are open to, especially as Stefan does so with them. He is smart to scrutinize his own work with this question: Have any of his designs touched anyone's heart? (Because he has done this, people perceive him as sincere and not hypocritical.)

He confirms the project that came closest to touching someone's heart was not a professional one, but personal: "Of all the hundreds of pieces I designed in the last twenty years, there is only one project where I can say for sure that I touched somebody's heart with design. My friend Reini came to visit New York City. He was afraid that none of the sophisticated women would talk to him. So before his arrival, I ran a poster campaign on the Lower East Side that read 'Girls, Be Nice to Reini.' At a small party we gave for him, this campaign turned out to be the conversation piece that started him talking to a beautiful woman. They actually wound up together. Not only am I fairly positive that I touched their hearts, but it is also one of the very few pieces of successful advertising I have ever been associated with."

Turning the questions over to students
To help get designers thinking in this direction, Stefan has posed the question "Can design touch someone's heart?" to design students in America and Europe. This is not the first time Stefan has taught; his course used to be a CD design class titled "Design for Music." This is the type of design that brought Stefan his fame. He changed the course because designing CD graphics to sell music for rock bands didn't seem relevant to what is needed in today's world. "While I still enjoy designing CD covers and visualizing music for different bands, it just isn't a practical problem anymore because there is so little need for it. We needed a more interesting, relevant question."

The timing for this new question could not be better; the days of giving students design briefs and faux content, and asking them to produce a layout, are quickly fading. A number of design schools are now encouraging students to first identify their passions, then look outside the school to identify unmet problems—from small-scale to large, from day-to-day to long-term—and create solutions that combine their passions with their design skills. By getting to know their audience intimately, design students are being encouraged to observe problems, address them with design and present a

creative solution to companies that can help make it a reality. Both the designer and the company should be able to profit from it and better the world at the same time.

Why change the dynamics? It is a way for designers to work proactively, to contribute more of their creative thinking, and to get more satisfaction out of how they make their living. When students (and professionals) identify something they care about, they are more passionate about it. When one's personal interest, strength and passion come into play, the design solution is stronger because the designer has more conviction. Both the conviction and the design come from the heart.

A good example of this is design student Deborah Adler at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. After watching her grandmother struggle silently with her prescription bottles day after day, Deborah sketched up a better design for a prescription bottle that made more sense and met her grandmother's needs. With work and perseverance, she sold her idea to Target, who paired her up with an industrial designer to make it happen. Some of the most successful products in the market have been born this way, such as the OXO Good Grips potato peeler (designed by Sam Farber for his arthritic wife). OXO now sells over 100 different products in the Good Grips line that are more meaningful and useful not just to arthritis sufferers, but to *everyone*.

Know your audience
The course is broken down into three assignments:

1. Touch the heart of an individual.
2. Touch the heart of a community.
3. Touch the heart of humanity.

With an audience, the wider you reach, the harder it is to answer the question. That's why Stefan starts small and expands, illustrating how the language of communication changes and becomes less personal and therefore less genuine. "I talk to my girlfriend Anni differently than I talk to Rolling Stones fans," he says. "The wider the audience, the more difficult it is to design for them. If your audience is everybody—from 6-year-olds to 60-year-olds, from iron workers to university professors—it becomes very difficult."

To keep communications genuine, knowing your audience inside out and homing in on a specific group with whom you empathize is key. "Know your audience" may sound like Marketing 101, but most students (and even some professionals) are unaware of this concept or have lost sight of it. Furthermore, students can easily get too caught up in how their portfolios look. Stefan reminds us of one of his hard-earned life lessons in his recent typographic billboard, "Trying to look good limits my life."

To prevent students from focusing on appearances, they are not allowed to stop with the concept and a comp. They must find a way to produce and distribute their solution in the real world. Students are required to build a feedback mechanism into the project so they are able to see if people were touched by their designs. A project is successful when the audience is touched, and that determines a student's grade. Stefan once told me that the best ideas sketched in his notebook over the years are worth nothing in comparison with the ideas he has executed and that still exist today.

What's your intention?
Composing the right content is as important as choosing the right audience. Stefan quotes Katherine McCoy that design can never rise above its content. He adds, "If I have nothing to say, the best design won't help me." In choosing their audience and creating content to reach them, students' designs have varied from country to country. In Berlin, student projects have been more technologically advanced and broached controversial topics. In the United States, however, many

students at SVA and the Cooper Union have chosen a project that addresses social issues such as homelessness. Stefan confirms that most graduate students in New York City chose to do something "uplifting." Perhaps this is because they rarely get the opportunity to work with this type of content in their professional lives, where the focus is corporate: the client and their bottom line. "From my point of view, it's open," says Stefan. "You could absolutely do something aggressive or shocking or off-putting, which of course, still touches somebody. I don't encourage it, but I don't discourage it either. This isn't a do-good class. I want my students to pick their own projects, their own audience and be in control of their own content. I want them to become aware of what they are putting out in the world and how it affects people. I want them to think through their intention."

In our interviews, I saw that some students struggled to get the right balance of design and intention. In some projects, the design speaks louder than the intention and the meaning falls flat. In others, the intention speaks louder than the design, to the point where design is not even needed. But then, I asked Stefan, does it answer the question?

Without the intention, Stefan emphasizes that there is no worthwhile form to design. For students, the intention is just a place to start thinking in a different direction in their work. He says, "I always ask, 'Does it really matter which typeface this important message is set in?' And I think the answer differs from project to project. Good form and the appropriate use of style can enhance any message, just as the wrong form can unbelievably hurt your message, as we have seen with the ballots in Florida, where bad form basically ruined a proper document."

So strongly does Stefan believe that style and good form can help communicate a key message, the STYLE=FART sign in his studio (that he has become notorious for) came down oV the wall long ago. "I've completely changed my mind about that, thinking that style was all hot air that means nothing. If we have something to say, we shouldn't neglect how we say it. Style can work as a lubricant for your message."

Is this the future of design?
Stefan's question made me stop and think about what has touched my own heart. In the days following 9/11 in New York City, it was literally Milton Glaser's scorched heart in the "I [heart] New York More Than Ever" logo. This mark had good timing and strategic placement. The design demonstrated a sincere kind of empathy that made me feel that I was not alone, that I was in sync with the creator; his scorched heart touched mine.

But it's all subjective. What touches my heart may not touch yours. Think about what has touched your own heart and why. What will it take to capture those emotions in our day-to-day work? How can we guide clients to approach visual communications with the same kind of sincerity and regard for their audience?

In ten years' time, Stefan believes that design from the heart is the only kind of design that is going to be created by professional designers. Non-designers in corporations are going to feel comfortable enough with iMacs and software to lay out their own annual reports and Web sites, and put together their own advertising campaigns independent of design and advertising agencies. He feels we are already starting to see this happen, and he advocates the pursuit of our own projects in which we can create the content.

But I believe that we can still explore the dynamic in our client relationships that holds us back from touching others. While it's true that many companies today have the technology to make anything they desire, they are still missing innovative and creative thinking; they are not in touch with the empathy and insight to understand what people really need and want these days. Focus testing provides limited feedback on what we already know, and not what can be. Designers can fill this

gap. There are some clients out there that wish to make a difference in the world too. We can find the right clients. We can explore our own passions and, as a result, make a difference to someone else.

Even though it has taken a superhero of design to make the question heard, it doesn't take one to answer it. Whether it's a personal or a client project, it's understandably easy to feel that we don't have the same resources as famous designers like Stefan to pursue this kind of work. But we each have unique powers to answer the question in our own way, with our own voice. Stefan's voice is a provocative one, a nudge-on-the-shoulder. What is yours?

It doesn't have to take a lot of time and money either. The simplest, best thought-out projects are sometimes the most powerful and far-reaching. Your answer just has to be true and sincere; it has to come from your own heart. If you have resourcefulness, guts and passion, your message will get through. Who knows? Maybe you will touch somebody's heart with your design.

Editor's note: Many of the most popular Design Issues essays are available in the book of the same name, compiled and edited by DK Holland and co-published by Communication Arts *and Allworth Press (www.allworth.com). — DK Holland*

These are projects Stefan considers successful because the feedback these students received "proved without a doubt that they touched their intended audience."

Amy Wang: School of Visual Arts
I.D., please?

"Stefan began every class," Amy Wang said, "by asking what interesting things students had seen in the past week." This prompted discussions that reminded Amy (and others) that she could not design in a vacuum, whether it was the vacuum of the design world or the vacuum of student life.

Flashing her I.D. to security guards night after night at the studio prompted her to turn the question of identity around. She interviewed 40 security guards to get a feel for their life stories and their passions, and composed vignettes of each.

She said the design of the vignettes presented many challenges. "I was looking for a way to turn the question around and provide an instant visual answer about who the guards are." In the end, she let the stories speak for themselves. Using a newspaper format, she placed the stories within a grid and pulled out quotes. Ornate details, however, kept the design from looking like an ordinary newspaper. The final printed piece is a poster printed on newsprint that folds into a brochure, which was distributed all over campus. "Now everyone on campus," she says, "can get to know these people we see every day but don't really know." Amy bridged an invisible gap between the students and the guards through her design.

One guard was so touched that he sent a copy home to his mother. The president of the school had one framed to present to the security office as a thank-you for their diligent work. The editor of the school magazine ran a story on the piece. And the head of the humanities and science department wrote how unusual and unexpected it was.

The head of security shaking her hand five times and thanking her profusely touched Amy the most. "The sense I got," Amy says, "is that they're all proud, and pleasantly surprised, to be recognized and even designed for."

What Amy learned through this simple, low-budget, black-and-white project (that the school

decided to pay for) is that "your intention matters—a lot! One person can make a difference."

Richard The and Willy Sengewald: Universität der Küenste, Berlin
Looking at Things Differently

Richard The and Willy Sengewald, digital media students in Berlin, explain that their program's focus is technical, as are the projects. Stefan's class, on the other hand, put the emphasis on people and reaching them regardless of the medium. "It opened my eyes to what it means to concentrate on the target group," Richard says, "independent of commercial interests."

Richard and Willy's final class exhibition was held in a building called the light tower, a ten-story renovated factory with a five-story glass cube on top, situated in the Friedrichshain section of East Berlin. They both created the OmniVisu, a small kiosk strategically placed one-quarter mile from the light tower, next to one of the busiest subway stations. Lights shining from two openings invited passersby to look in. Macro cameras inside the kiosk projected an image of their eyes (in real time) onto the light tower, transforming the entire building into a face with familiar eyes. When they blinked, their eyes on the tower blinked.

Stefan explains his own interaction with this project: "I was touched by how much Berliners loved it. People stopped all night to look inside, watching their friend's eyes transform the light tower into a face. For the people who were in the exhibition space inside the tower, the experience was totally different but touching nevertheless. Whenever somebody looked into the kiosk, these gigantic eyes appeared in the space, like King Kong looking in."

Richard says the reaction of Berliners taught him to consider who is on the other side of a user interface. "It was amazing because it was a very simple interactive piece, yet it really worked, not for a small group of people accustomed to digital media projects but for normal, everyday people on the street. We never experienced this with previous projects, and it made us realize that this is a major flaw with technical projects. We learned how to reach people by discovering what makes an interactive project interesting for everybody. We now try to keep this focus on the individual interacting with the media in our future work."

Sue Walsh: SVA
Recognizing an Unsung Hero

Other than the occasional last-minute card for a friend or relative, Sue Walsh admits she had never spent much time thinking about reaching out to someone with design. So for her project, she decided to focus on a part of her community she tends to overlook. "I thought about how we are involved with so many communities," she says, "that we have no personal interaction with, and how little we know about them."

The people that keep her street clean in Brooklyn, the New York Department of Sanitation (NYDS), is one such community. Through her research and interviews, Sue learned that after firefighters and police, NYDS employees have the third most dangerous job in the city. She also learned that the city does not provide the NYDS with protection. How many of us really pay attention to what we put in our trash? Every day, NYDS employees deal with bags that contain bacteria, sharp metal, blades and broken glass.

So she designed a pair of gloves for each employee in north Brooklyn—120 total—complete with a logo that features a NYDS employee as a superhero, and each pair customized with the employee's name. She stressed the importance of the name; without them, everyone would have the same gloves. She wanted to emphasize the individual, not just the service. "It's the difference between a form

letter and a personal note," she explains. Sue tried to get all the materials donated with no success. With classmate Jamie Prokell's successful humanity project, however, funding became a reality. Throughout her project, NYDS employees were perplexed and asked her, "Why us?" This confirmed Sue's observation that this is an unnoticed and underappreciated group—until the trash bags do not get picked up off the sidewalks. Even then, it's the service that gets noticed, not the people providing the service.

It took her a year and a half to see the project to completion, but it was worth it. "When we unpacked the boxes and employees found their names on the cuff and pulled their pairs out, they were so excited! One man said he was going to put his on the mantel at home. Another man said I would have the cleanest street on the route. It was a heartwarming response."

By taking the time to see the project to completion, Sue learned about being resourceful and persistent: "It's possible to bring your own ideas into the world and to make a difference. Never give up on your ideas."

Jamie Prokell, SVA
If I Had a Hundred Dollars

Jamie Prokell established a fund to pay for future class projects. On the last project, Jamie recalls, "I was looking at all the other projects in the class and thought if we were able to execute everything, it would all add up to touching humanity." Time and time again, some students needed only a little extra money to see their ideas to completion and hopefully touch someone, but most students tend to be short on cash.

So Jamie put together a direct-mail campaign: 300 handcrafted booklets and handwritten notes for SVA alumni and faculty, asking for a $100 donation. The paper was donated by Mohawk Papers, and the booklets were run off the color printer at school. The fundraising materials emphasized, with humor, how quickly we all go through $100. Yet imagine it going to something better— to touching someone's heart with something near and dear to their own heart: Design.

Within a few months, Jamie had raised almost $7,000. "If someone sent me $100," he says, "it means they were moved enough by the mailer I designed and personalized for them." He prepared handwritten thank-you notes to all who contributed. He sees the fund as his legacy to his alma mater. "This class is going to happen semester after semester. Lots of great projects will be proposed, but they will all run into the same issue: funding. Some students will find the resources for their projects, but some will not. I don't want to see good ideas go to waste."

Jamie learned something significant by personalizing each mailer. "When you believe in what you're doing and you're sincere, it comes across. Your sincerity, passion and commitment can move others to take action. When they do, you feel like you've accomplished something."

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Sunday, December 18, 2005

Socks for the Holidays

This morning I passed out socks to the people waiting in the food van line in Tompkins Square Park. This was the tail end of my attempt to touch the homeless with design, part of Sagmeister's class 'Can You Touch Someone's Heart with Design?'. Our last project was to touch humanity. I wanted to do something relating to homelessness. My initial approach to the assignment was on a larger scale. But after researching homelessness in NY and the resources that are available, I changed the scope of the project and scaled it down to something I felt I could achieve on an individual level.

So, i began by volunteering at the Bowery mission to assist with the food van stop at Tompkins Square Park. It was a rewarding experience and i felt a connection with the people i handed out food to, and sat down and shared a meal with.

Which is why the next weekend I returned, with a big bag of socks, individually wrapped with a designed strip of red paper that simply said 'warmth'. As i handed them out to people the response was a positive one. Because of the design element wrapped around the socks, it was suddenly transformed into a more personal gesture, a holiday gift.

Many of them said 'god bless' and 'may god look over you and your family'. I was struck by the religious faith of all of these people had. Despite any economic and health problems they may be faced with, they were full of hope and gratitude. More than most people I know.

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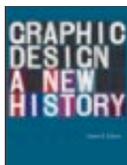
And there I was, with my bag of socks, thinking I was there to help them when really it was them who helped me. I was reminded to be grateful for everything i have today. I was pulled out of the end-of-term funk i'd been experiencing.

During the holidays and beyond, let's all remember to touch someone's heart with design. As designers we are so lucky to be able to do this.

Posted by lara mccormick on Sunday, December 18, 2005 at 11:58 AM | Permalink

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Comments

i really enjoyed reading your entry, lara. this season really is about giving, not getting, identifying and not comparing. a fresh new pair of socks is something everyone can identify with as well as appreciate. thanks.

Posted by: nancyw | Sunday, December 18, 2005 at 02:35 PM

This is a nice story, but I have to say that it was not your design that touched the hearts of the people who received socks. It was your act of service. You would have received the same response if the socks had been handed out in a plastic Wal-Mart bag.

I have always been interested in Sagmeister's idea of touching the heart with graphic design, and have thought about ways to do this. In this example your red band did add a nice touch, and the type is set well, but you have to look at what was inside the design. A nice pair of warm socks. Unless you designed the socks in some special way to last longer, to be warmer, to stay cleaner longer or something like that, your design was just something that kept the socks together. The thing that we need to do as designers to touch the heart with design is get other people to share socks, not just wrap them up ourselves.

N O V E M B E R   2 0 0 7

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

A R C H I V E S

November 2007

October 2007

September 2007

August 2007

July 2007

June 2007

May 2007

April 2007

March 2007

February 2007

L I N K S

journal.aiga.org
AIGA Online Journal of Design

Allworth Press

Design Observer
writings about design & culture

underconsideration.com/speakup
Speak Up > Design Dialog

www.typotheque.com
digital type foundry; high quality text and display fonts.

MSU Graphic Design

Core77
Design Magazine + Resource

What is Graphic
Design For?
(Essential Design
Handbooks)

Edward R. Tufte: Beautiful
Evidence

Cameron
Sinclair: Design
Like You Give a
Damn

I am not trying to discout your act of service, we should all do more things like this, I am just trying to point out that this goal of touching the heart is more that wrappers on socks, it needs to touch people in a way that moves them to action. And in your case it was not design that moved you to action, but your experience of serving meals and meeting the people. So, how do we move people to action with design? Can it be done? I don't know, but we should keep trying.

Posted by: Jonathon | Monday, December 19, 2005 at 12:55 AM

You're right Jonathon, it was more the action than the design that touched these people.
In the end, handing out the socks was not my final project for the class, rather something i wanted to do on my own after volunteering and realizing that the people I met could really use some new socks.

This topic of touching people's hearts with design is fascinating to me as well. Yes, let's all keep trying.

Posted by: lara mccormick | Monday, December 19, 2005 at 09:48 AM

Jonathon, you make some good points. Maybe the same response would have resulted if the objects were placed in a plastic bag. But I also agree with Lara's comment that the design element transformed the objects into a more "personal gesture, a holiday gift." The packaging conveyed a further sense of caring that, when combined with the act of giving and the object itself, was touching. It completed everything. But can design be powerful enough that it is the primary, and not a complementary, factor? I think we're all asking the same question here and, yeah, I'm still working on that one, too.

Posted by: Clement Wu | Monday, December 19, 2005 at 12:12 PM

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Posted by: Juno888 | Tuesday, May 15, 2007 at 09:39 PM

You waited quite some time to post a reply! what's it been, 5 months? ;)