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The subway System Map by Massimo Vignelli

The way we communicate has been evolving since the beginning of times. Technology is one of the main reasons for these changes. Therefore, the way that we see the world changes often. This leads to great design that can be universally understood around the world and designers have a very important job to reflect these changes in society. This can be difficult at times to keep up with technology to create design that it is easy to understand for all levels of a society. Massimo Vignelli has done a great Job through his designs by creating work that is modern, easy to comprehend and using typography to bring about a new way of designing that can be universal. One of his most famous designs is “the subway System Map” for New York City. This was a new way to informed and communicate with the public and it is still use til this day. “A Living Language” by Bruno Munari and “Modern Hieroglyphs” by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller provide a fantastic description on the evolution of language to symbols and images that help us understand in a deeper level how the “Subway System Map” changed the way we communicate ubiquitously.

Massimo Vigenelli was a famous designer of the 20th century known for creating very innovated designs. He was born in Italy in 1931 and in 1966 he moved to New York, he died in 2014. His main focus in design was; packaging design, showroom design, furniture design and many more. Massimo Vignelli worked on very famous designs that we still see today and it will probably stay that way for a very long time. Some of his most famous work include; The American Airlines

logo, Knoll logo, The New York City Map, IBM, Bloomingdales and many more. Mr. Vignelli is also very famous for his use of typeface. He incorporated a minimal style of design accompanied by an easy readable and pleasing to the eye typeface. One of the typeface he was known for using frequently is “Helvetica.” As well as, Garamond, Bodoni, Century Expanded and others. The use of these typefaces escalated Mr. Vignelli designs and made it more sophisticated. He made a perfect used of typography as design.

In 1965, Massimo Vignelli and his business partner Bob Noorda were recommended by Mildred Constantine to develop a project looking to transform the subway system in New York City. It was a lot of work and difficult to create a system that millions of people can easily understand, in the same language for a city full of people from all over, in an environment being lead by technology. Mr. Vignelli and Mr. Noorda embarked on this project along with the help of Lella Vignelli (Mr. Vignelli’s wife) who was also a great designer on her own. Vignelli and Noorda said that the system was “a mess” when they began working on it and it was up to them to fix that and to create a system that worked. The main focus was to create a system that people could easily navigate and provide the information that they people needed fast and easy. Finally, in 1972 the “New York City Map” was completed. It consisted of 8 colors and it each color represented a train line and that train’s journey throughout the city. Each stop is represented by a dot, he also used a san serif typeface, the map is layout on a white background. This minimal, clean style was easier to understand. The map has been slightly tweak ever since but the format remains the same until this day, even with the advancement of technology. For example, we use an app now to check train status and check the map for directions but it is the same image of magnelli’s map

design that we carry in our phone. I think that the Subway System Map was a revolutionary design that changed the way we use transportation by informing us and communicating in a very simple way.

“Modern Hieroglyphs” by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller describes how symbols and images have been used to communicate with society and keep them informed on where very important places for humans exist in public settings. For example, the sign for woman and man for restrooms is represented simply by a symbol and an icon shape like a man and a for the female, the bottom part changed to a skirt design in order to differentiate the gender. These two symbols were created in 1974 by Cook & Shanosky around the same time that Vignelli created the subway System Map. This is a very interesting detail because these two icons have been universally used and understood until this day also. Many more symbols were created to communicate with the public that we still see and rely on today. The quote on page 33 from the essay “Modern Hieroglyphs” by Lupton and Miller writes “A utopian effort to transcend the limitations of letters by exploiting the visual characteristics of typography.” In other words, going beyond what we can do with letters and turning them into visual symbols that represent what can be said with words has transformed the way we use language as communication.

A Living Language by Bruno Munari conveys the idea of the use of images and symbols, colors to communicate and the evolution of language. In this essay Munari discussed further the ways in which language is changing and some form of communication is being left behind because the

people of today are evolving was well. Therefore, new ways to communicate are necessary. A quote on page 39 from “A living Language” Munari writes “Visual language changes according to the needs of the day.” I think that depending on the time and evolution of humans and of course the advancement of technology leads to new forms of communication for the new generation of humans and will continue to evolve as time goes by. Designers must design keeping in mind who the audience is and if that design will still be use in the future for the people of the future.

Massimo Vignelli created a system for the people of New York. He had in mind who this people were and what they needed in a fast moving environment. A simple design that one can look at quickly and understand it. He accomplish that with “the Subway System Map.” Both Bruno Munari in “A living language” and “Modern Hieroglyphs” by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller , write keeping in mind the evolution of communication and who the audience is at the time that these changes are necessity for. As the world continues to grow and change so does the way we communicate and now we have many forms of communication that we understand universally. Humans adapt easy to change and we pick up new trends fast. Humans of today are being rushed by all of the technological advancement and communication that is fast, easy, reliable and minimal continues to be in demand.

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