

Obed Ledezma

Response: Steven Heller - The Underground Mainstream

"The Underground Mainstream" by Steven Heller centers on how the mass marketer steal these forward-thinking ideas from visionaries and package them for the mass market in order to make profitable. According to Heller the concept of mainstream vs underground relevant in contemporary design because from the beginning of the twentieth-century the underground has given up their original ideas to the mainstream. For example in Europe, "the Wiener Werkstätte, Deutscher Werkbund, Bauhaus, and scores of other reformist schools and movements that sought to better the marketplace with convention-altering arts and crafts fell victim to their own successes. Their collective goal was to raise the level of both manufacture and design while changing timeworn habits and antiquated expectations, yet their ideas became established. The avant-garde is usurped when its eccentricity is deemed acceptable (Heller)." In *Going Underground* by George Hurchalla states "Despite the misguided mainstream press declarations that "punk died with Sid Vicious (Hurchalla)." How the mainstream has the capabilities to kill an underground idea just because of the platform that they have and how influential it could be even with destroying an underground idea.

When it comes to my designer, their designs and how they will fit into this dichotomy is I was looking for a designer whose designs can get people to think outside of the mainstream and get their heads wrapped toward a more underground idea. Nike's recent ad campaign received many opinions, some positive and negative. The article "Brand Activism" by Jill Avery, points out "The campaign catapulted the brand into the media spotlight and made it a political flashpoint for consumers across America (Jill)." I see this as being successful in terms of fitting the dichotomy because you're getting people to think and you're promoting an underground idea through advertisement while bringing it out into the mainstream where it may or may not be accepted.

In terms of today, the underground designs influenced the work of many people that are relevant today. A lot of the time these designers go unreferenced because the person exploiting and profiting off this idea wants all the glory to themselves. These people bite off other's aesthetics and try claiming it as their own. In *Maps and Design—Influence of Depiction, Space and Aesthetics on Geocommunication* by Karel Kriz states "In order to communicate spatial results efficiently, from a cartographic perspective, both the conception and construction of maps must be well-considered beforehand. The proficiency to communicate lies therefore in how maps are designed and in the way they are realized and reproduced (Kriz)." This shows that sometimes in order to make the shift from old to new you need to have reference points in order to get through the next phase and shape the next design.

References:

Heller, S. "The Underground Mainstream." Armstrong, Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the field (2008)

Avery, Jill, and Koen Pauwels. "Brand Activism: Nike and Colin Kaepernick" December 2018. (Revised September 2019.)

George Hurchalla, "Going Underground American Punk 1979–1989", Second Edition. April 2016

Karel Kriz, "Maps and Design–Influence of Depiction, Space and Aesthetics on Geocommunication" (October 2012)