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Grapus

The design poster I chose for this assignment is an exhibition poster from 1982, designed by a French design studio called 'Grapus'. Grapus was a collective of graphic artists; intensive dialogue that was designated for problem solving, analyzing and discussing about content and messages. Grapus was formed in 1970, starting with the three young French designers; Pierre Bernard, Francois Miehe and Gerard Paris-Clavel. Before then, their journey started in Paris, where the streets were filled with posters and placards, hand-crafted mostly by amateurs. Bernard, Miehe and Paris-Clavel were involved in politics related topics. Bernard and Paris-Clavel were the two designers who spent each year studying under a Polish designer/ professor, Henryk Tomaszewski. Both were lectured about the tension between being a citizen and artist, it advocated an intellectual rigor and a clear belief about the world. These three designers believed that merging publicity and design was a way to create an artificial demand for profit, so they can join forces to turn their graphic design towards political, social and cultural matters. Therefore, these motives are the reasons that Grapus was formed to collaborate with other graphic artists, becoming an essential present for society at the time.

Grapus believes that their message can be expressed with design, a way to reflect politics, society and cultural issues. Universal symbol that translates a language that everyone can understand, regardless of their language, is one of Grapus' favorable elements because it’s a unique concept that can be translated and expressed for everyone who may or may not be familiar with the dedicated language and yet it’s symbols can still be understood. Let’s say that I’m in an airport in a foreign country, I need to find the restroom and conveniently I find the label with the symbol of two figures (male/ female) that represents the restroom. Another example is the symbols or color of flags, every flag has its unique form and meaning. Taking a look at the Soviet Union (USSR) flag, it’s one whole singular color (red) with an iconic symbol on the top left that resembles the nation itself. This symbol represents a hammer and sickle that represents proletarian solidarity, a union between the peasants and working-class. In this case, Grapus uses this element in their design to define their message that can be understood in society and involved in politics and/ or cultures.

Looking at the Grapus exhibition poster in 1982, their motives and goals are to achieve social and political changes while determined to realize creative artistic desires. In this poster, Grapus features a central figure holding a dimensional arrow with a cutout letter saying, “EXPO”. It appears a yellow face with a jack-in-the-box spring attached at the bottom of it, Mickey Mouse ears that are scribbled, features of Adolf Hitler hair and mustache, the left eye replaced as the Soviet Union symbol and the French Tricolor on the right eye. A way to clearly describe the graphics is according to the book called, ‘MEGGS’ History of Graphic Design Sixth Edition’, on page 486 at the left side of the paragraph states, “Grapus spawn many imitators. The shocking verve of its statements, especially the dynamic informality of its spatial organization of its spatial organization and casual, graffiti-like lettering, was copied by fashionable advertising.” An unsettling view and dystopia shape that sets emotional charges of graphic symbols that dispute from one another such as the Soviet Union symbol and the noticeable Hitler’s feature both contradict each other according to history.

Their message behind the madness is not only to remind about the past and the dystopian world, but as Grapus’s goal is for their design to speak directly towards society and that involves mainly in political issues, cultural appearance and more. Society is their main audience that they believe that their design can function and communicate towards them who also believe or distress about the two mentioned topics. According to an google scholar website, the publisher cites, “This thesis attempts to fill this gap through a dialogical analysis of their political and cultural posters. It will establish how their posters function and communicate in a political discourse”. It’s clear that the members of Grapus have good reasons for how their posters would function and communicate towards their target audience. Their dedication, their studies back in Poland and applying their conviction about the world creates a deep connection, motivating them to design posters that issues politics and cultures. It’s a change that Grapus always looks forward to merging the outside world with graphic design.

Some honorable mentions that I would like to compare with my chosen design is the ‘Futurist Manifesto’ and Gyorgy Kepes ‘Language of Vision’. The similarities between Grapus and the ‘Futurist Manifesto’ is they both mention how corrupted the world can be such as war, dictatorship, industry, violence, etc. The difference is the deliverance of their message, ‘Futurist Manifesto’ confesses the evil minds of a dystopia world, more of a philosophical direction and Grapus would use this context to reveal their own perspective to the world and it’s deeply involved in political and cultural issues. Grapus is known to use some universal symbol that can be sensitive to the audience and they use that source to communicate to society after the grief of war. Gyorgy Kepes’s article and Grapus approach have some similarities and differences as well. Their similarities are the selection of reference that can be sensitive toward the audience because Grapus uses symbols to apply their message in the posters that refers to distinct feelings or morals. Their difference is their objections, Grapus is mainly focused on politics and culture issues and Gyorgy Kepes takes a psychological way to interpret his artwork with values, language, visions and more.

Works Cited

. ‘MEGGS’ History of Graphic Design Sixth Edition’ (physical book)

. <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.551119> (google scholar website)