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Nina Berry
Portland State University

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Anticommercial Purposes: New Methods in Graphic Design and Radical Environmental Change

by

Nina Berry

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Meredith James

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which graphic design has approached and interacted with sustainability throughout the last quarter of the 20th century and into today. Following two collaborative manifestos of graphic designers discussing design's potential outside of the commercial realm, this paper examines the way that graphic design has assisted with environmentalism thus far and makes a proposal for the way that graphic design should be used in an environmentally sustainable context into the future. Using the tenets of the new scholarly realm of Transition Design, this paper dissects how graphic design can assist a transition away from a centralized, fossil-fuel based economy toward a radically localized sustainable system using information design, persuasive design, and future-oriented visualizations.

“I am ready to revitalize the argumentative and confrontational traditions of design. I am ready to move from the margins to centre stage in the ethical, ecological and political debates of our time.”

Kalle Lasn, Adbusters

First Things First

In 1964, a group of fed up and frustrated graphic designers published an essay titled “First Things First Manifesto.” Denouncing design’s seemingly tangled relationship with advertising, they called for visual communications to be used for more worthwhile purposes, such as promoting science, culture, and education. The authors of the original manifesto would rather design be used to create publications, street signage, educational materials, and media by which to achieve more prosperity as a country (Wright, et. al, 1964). Although “First Things First” struck a nerve with the design community, it did not necessarily change the commercial trajectory of the last half of the 20th century (Poynor, 1999). By the late nineties, designers were still mostly making advertisements to sell trivial consumer products and services and design had, in many ways, become synonymous with commercial work (Poynor, 1999).

Persuasive messaging, it seemed, was the medium of the turn-of-the-century graphic designer. In 1999, Emigre revised and republished “First Things First,” updated to reflect the current state of graphic design, titling it “First Things First 2000.” Like the 1964 manifesto, the authors critiqued the way the two were intertwined, especially with regard to repercussions around the way the rest of the world perceived graphic design as an advertising based medium (Barnbrook, et. al, 1999). In the 2000 manifesto, the authors spoke about their own discomforts endorsing and developing an environment “saturated with commercial messages,” that in turn alters and harms the very ways in which people exist and interact (Barnbrook, et. al, 1999). The authors of the 2000 manifesto not only proposed a stricter separation of design from advertising, but they called for a shift of priorities in the world of graphic design, away from consumerism and toward more meaningful efforts in the social and environmental realm (Barnbrook et. all 1999). Many of the issues presented in this second manifesto, especially those regarding environmental crises, are still in dire need of the attention of skillful visual communicators nearly twenty

years later. As we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century, the problems and needs of graphic design have shifted and intensified. It is time to explore the proposal of more meaningful design pursuits as it applies to the present.

Design and Consumption

One of the most pertinent issues of the 21st century is the rapidly changing state of our natural environment. According to author Stephanie Kaza, environmental degradation is caused by an intersection of population growth, technological growth, and increased rate of consumption (Kaza, 2000). America in particular is on the forefront of overconsumption, and consumes 30% of the world's resources despite only making up 5% of the world's population (Leonard, 2007). Currently, American products promoting leisure have been around for long enough and are accessible to enough people that the U.S. has become a "consumer society", characterized by a populace who use their leisure time to spend money. Not only is this problematic from an environmental standpoint with regard to waste creation, but it creates social problems as well. Most of the goods and services Americans buy are produced unethically, in a third-world country with less-strict labor and environmental regulations (Kaza, 2000). However, in a consumer society, the incentive is to act economically over ethically (Kaza 2000). To fuel consumption, shopping has become the religion, advertising the bible, the mall the church, and the checkout line only one of many rituals worshipping the consumer God. Consumption infiltrates every ritual and seeks to fill every need, from food to sex to social engagement. Consumerism has become the norm, and anything deviating from it is out of the ordinary. Consumer agency has replaced ethical agency as more political choices are made within the confines of the marketplace (Willis & Shor, 2012), and a dull emptiness festers as corporations control the rituals that fill daily life, running directly counter to efforts toward environmental sustainability (Kaza, 2000).

This way of life is deeply ingrained. Contributing to the proliferation of products that exist to satisfy fairly simple needs is advertising—a realm with which design is currently deeply interconnected. Commercial advertising exists to create more desire, which in turn encourages people to buy more

products to satisfy their basic needs (Riley, 2007). It deliberately exists to feed humans' sense of self-involvement, poking at people's basic needs and fostering greed, envy, anxiety and fear (Kaza 2000). Artist and designer Shawn Wolfe critiques the role of branding and advertising in role perpetuating consumer culture, and encourages graphic designers to at least acknowledge the role that they play in this process. Designers, according to Wolfe, must know the facts and outcomes about consumption "for the offshore sweatshop worker filling quotas at gunpoint, for Johnny Have-Not, who will live with that gnawing sense of festering inadequacy that advertising exists to breed, and for the landfill that will choke on those sneakers and handbags and portable minidisc players by the time we all buy enough of them to keep the economy on the upswing, forever and ever" (Wolfe & Heller 2003). As graphic designers, it is our responsibility to be aware of this cycle and how we participate in it through advertising.

The link between advertising, consumer culture, and environmental degradation is clear. But where does graphic design fit in to all of this? Do we have to make advertisements for a living that contribute to the choking of landfills? In his article about design and sustainability, Matthew Newcomb asserts that one of the goals of design as a principle is to shift the way that people think about the world (Newcomb, 2012). Design is an "innovative response to a perceived situation and need." It "makes more than an object or an arrangement—it makes new contexts and associations" (Newcomb, 2012). Design, and graphic design in particular, is not inherently tied to commerce and advertising. It exists to clarify and communicate ideas, a concept that is often employed by businesses in a consumer society. Design has the power to create new ideas, or portray relationships between two concepts, but it is not confined to use in an advertising context. While graphic design is always working in a situation with "restraints, competing possibilities, and purposes (often to influencing behavior)," it does not have to influence behavior to convince people to consume more (Newcomb, 2012).

That said, much of the work that graphic designers are hired to do in a consumer society thrives on the gnawing desires that Wolfe critiques (Wolfe & Heller, 2003). Branding to differentiate two similar products, laying out advertisements, creating new imagery and visuals for new products are all ways that graphic designers make work that contributes to America's overconsumption problem. It is important for visual designers to acknowledge the repercussions of this work and the role that it plays in the process

(Wolfe & Heller, 2003). Global consumption and distribution are the main environmental issues of the 21st century and those who facilitate its continuation will need to make “fundamental choices” about “lifestyles, patterns of production and consumer priorities” (Adams, et. al, 1990). This means that over the course of the coming decades, graphic designers must begin to question the role that their work plays.

Green, Eco, & Sustainable Design

Nearly twenty years have passed since the “First Things First Manifesto 2000” was written¹. Since then, designers have not turned a blind eye to problems of overconsumption and environmental degradation entirely. Through the last quarter of the 20th century, the “green” and “eco” movements in many design realms exploded, and designers of all disciplines have worked to explore ways to reduce the environmental impact of new products and services (Madge, 1997). During the 1980s, the graphic designer’s approach to designing something “green” was to literally make it *green* (Madge, 1997). Practices have evolved substantially since then, incorporating ideas of energy use, durability, and recyclability into products and designs (Madge, 1997). New approaches to sustainable design have emerged all across the spectrum, some more radical than others. In 1988, the *Green Consumer Guide* by John Elkington and Julia Hailes was published, detailing how to best shop and consume in an environmentally friendly manner (Madge, 1997). In many ways, however, environmentally friendly consumption sounds like an oxymoron after knowing the ways in which the ideology of consumption strains the environment. One particular type of environmental design, which caters to continuing consumer culture, seems to have taken off most strongly, and has become the face of environmentally friendly design practices. It is known as a “technocentric” approach to design, and is based on an ideology of progress and efficiency, favoring the invention of new products and technologies to solve current problems (Madge, 1997). The “ecocentric” approach to environmentalism, on the other hand, tends to favor more radical measures that reject the current paradigm and status quo (Madge, 1997). Technocentric

¹ In 2014, a third First Things First Manifesto was published online, but it failed to at all address issues of environmental justice, and is therefore left out of this paper.

design, unfortunately, does not really question consumer culture or interrupt the linear flow of consumption. Technocentric examples of environmental design include new products that address the same old needs in ways perceived to be more sustainable without questioning the root problems.

The cleaning product company Splosh markets itself as an environmentally friendly way to clean one's home (<http://www.splosh.com>). Customers order a box of plastic cleaning bottles and soap concentrates by mail, and then reorder concentrates to refill their bottles when cleaning supplies run out. Aside from the additional packaging that mail-order products require, Splosh perpetuates consumer ideas that the frequent use of purchased, chemical cleaning products is required in order to have a tidy and livable home, and that clothes and surfaces must smell like "Cotton Flower" or "Spearmint & Melon." Although their website is clean, simple, and green with minimalist vector icons and an animation of a man riding a bicycle, Splosh is not doing very much to help the environment. Their business model fits within the framework of a consumer society, marketing itself to those who exert their perceived political power through shopping. It continues to promote the production and consumption of new products to fulfill the same basic needs.

Another example of poor eco-design is the brand Boxed Water. "Inspire a better tomorrow by rethinking packaged water today," reads the website (<http://www.boxedwaterisbetter.com/our-mission>). Instead of packaging water in plastic bottles to be sold in a store, Boxed Water uses recyclable paper and plastic fused tetrapaks, the same packaging as many coconut water products, to sell water online. Inventing a less environmentally destructive way to sell packaged water in a country with drinkable tap water is an excellent example of failed technocentric design. Boxed Water claims to be "constantly exploring new technology to lessen the impact of the portable water market," while ignoring that the problem *is* the portable water market. Instead of looking at the root of the problem, this business model attempts to exist within a massively problematic framework. However, unlike Splosh, Boxed Water does make some attempts to question consumer culture. Under the "Projects" tab of their website is a page of gifs titled "One Small Thing" (<http://www.boxedwaterisbetter.com/one-small-thing>). Each image shows one way that customers can reduce their plastic usage and help keep plastic out of the environment and the oceans. The gifs contain easy-to-read information about plastic pollution, and act as an

accompaniment to the product. So, even though Boxed Water falls within the scope of technocentric environmental design, it does bring elements of behavior change into its brand.

In “First Things First 2000”, the collaborating authors stress the importance of donating design expertise to issues that matter (Barnbrook, et. al, 1999). If real, permanent environmental conservation is dependent on drastically reduced levels of consumption, this does not mean technocentric design, which still exists within the framework of a consumer society. The authors of “First Things First 2000” write:

“We propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication—a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design.” (Barnbrook, et. al, 1999)

A shift in mindset and reversal of priorities to contest consumerism is a lot to ask of a consumer society, but efforts are already being made to figure out how the transition away from overconsumption might be possible. A group of researchers, scholars, and designers are working on developing a new field of design which seeks to understand how society might undergo a transition of mindset and action toward a more sustainable way of existence. They have named it Transition Design (Irwin, 2015).

Transitioning Toward a Sustainable Society

Transition Design looks to create a radical change that might seem idealistic, but which could have a massive impact on the future of human ways of life: to imagine, design, and implement long-term solutions to the world’s wicked problems² by transitioning away from a fossil-fuel dependent, globalized economy (Irwin, 2015). Transition Design aims to change the way we think about designing for the future by stressing the importance of changing mindset and ideology as an essential step in crafting a sustainable

² According to the Austin Center for Design, a wicked problem is a societal issue that is extremely difficult to solve because of fluctuating requirements, interconnectedness with other problems, and massive scale. These are generally the kinds of problems written off by policymakers as unsolvable, yet they affect the lives of every person on earth. Some examples of wicked problems are climate change, global health and poverty, and fossil fuel dependency (Kolko, 2012).

society. Heavily influenced by the Transition Town³ movement in Europe, Transition Design applies natural design principles of biomimicry and permaculture to our present day wicked problems. According to Terry Irwin, the developer of the phrase *transition design* and head of the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon, this new area of focus “challenges existing paradigms, envisions new ones, and leads to radical, positive social and environmental change” (Irwin, 2015). Transition Design is composed of four areas of action which work together to complete the goal of moving toward a radically changed sustainable society: visioning, questioning theories of change, adjusting mindsets and postures, and designing in radically new ways (Irwin, 2015)

1. *Vision for Transition*

Envisioning a desired future is the first step to creating it. Discussing the increasing number of environmental catastrophes on the horizon does not make people very excited about what is to come. It is the role of the transition designer to show people the kind of world that *could be* if the future were built with sustainability and the human experience in mind. Compelling visions of the future can make people excited to change their behaviors and lifestyles, and to recognize problems in the present. They can also open up the discussion about alternative ways of being. Transition Design in particular looks to create speculative visions about radically localized societies in which needs are met closer to home and everyday life is a more holistic experience (Irwin, 2015). Currently, everyday life is broken up into spheres of work, home, and shopping. Basic needs like food and shelter are controlled by centralized, multi-national corporations. Part of visioning for transition is reimagining the daily experience of being and localizing the needs of everyday life (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2015). This would manifest in ways such as a lessened need for vehicles, agriculture at the local level, more shared public spaces, and more leisure time spent away from the consumer market (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2015). Visually showing this future to people can inspire, provoke, and even instill new ideas that help make the change possible. Visioning is a necessary step in making change, even if it only informs small changes of mind and behavior in the present (Irwin, 2015).

³ The Transition Town movement is a collection of initiatives from towns around the United Kingdom protesting dependency on oil and transitioning to self-sufficient communities run on sustainable energy sources (Hopkins, 2008). Founder Rob Hopkins details the history and progress of the movement in his book, *The Transition Handbook*.

2. Theories of Change

Transition Design is based on a different idea about change. Instead of thinking about cause-and-effect, top-down-based models of change, Transition Design is based on change as it develops within open, complex systems (Irwin, 2015). This kind of change can be guided and catalyzed, but never totally controlled and outcomes are hard to predict (Irwin, 2015). For example, instead of pushing people to drive less in order to slow climate change, change within a transitional framework would more likely create ways for people to drive less, see how that action affects climate change, and move forward from there.

3. Mindset and Posture

When trying to change the minds of people who form a society, it is necessary that a designer has the right mindset for the change they want to create (Irwin, 2015). The world is overpopulated and widely interconnected, and every transition-based design decision must reflect an understanding of this. In general, our ideals, mindset, and values currently subscribe to the ideology of consumption, and societal shift in values is required in order for environmental change to happen. Environmentally friendly behaviors tend to make for happier people; it is now just a matter of implementing measures of change on a large scale (Warren and Kasser, 2005). Transition design encompasses the need to change the minds of the general populous, and that cannot be done without a change in mindset of the designers (Irwin, 2015).

4. New Ways of Designing

When working in the realm of Transition Design, one is working toward a longer, more future-based vision (Irwin, 2015). Every piece of design that is created fits into this narrative, even though one part can not possibly solve all aspects of the wicked problems. For example, encouraging behavioral change that might not have an effect for generations to come would be a worthwhile endeavor under Transition Design, even if the effects were not visible right away. Designers must prioritize long-term thinking above all else, to counteract the effects of widespread practices that harm the environment, such as planned and perceived obsolescence⁴. By creating ongoing smaller changes, transition designers move in the direction

⁴ Planned obsolescence refers to the design decision to create products that fail after a period of time to ensure that the user will continue to purchase products. Perceived obsolescence refers to the design decision to convince consumers that a product is no longer usable in order to ensure continued consumption, i.e. perpetuating trends (Leonard, 2007).

of larger societal change while looking for emergent possibilities of ways to make a bigger difference (Irwin, 2015). This new way of designing will also incorporate expertise from many sources, relying on the collaboration of scientists, city planners, and experts in other fields to help figure out the most ideal way to transition society (Irwin 2015).

The Role of Visual Communicators

If designers were to write a third “First Things First” today, it unfortunately would need to address many of the same problems as the first two. Designers are still hired to do mostly commercial work, and we as a society still face enormous consumption-fueled problems, particularly with regard to the natural environment. Thus far, the role of graphic design and visual communication in efforts to create environmental change has been largely limited to the business and advertising sectors. Creating products, developing “green” branding, and working for allegedly sustainable businesses are some of the main ways that graphic designers have been thinking about environmental impact. However, this approach still exists to fuel a consumer society, and if designers truly want to assist global change, we will have to start working outside of overconsumption—or better off, working to end it. Using the four tenets of Transition Design, it is the responsibility of visual communicators to change fundamental beliefs and attitudes about consumption. A change in mindset and posture, as illustrated above, is absolutely necessary in order for more grand environmental movements to succeed. As far as actual practices to instigate changes in behavior, I have outlined a proposal of three methods of sustainable graphic design will assist the transition away from a consumer society: informative design to illustrate the current state of society, persuasive design to change mindset, and visionary design to create a more environmentally sustainable future.

1. Informative

Visual communications as a discipline is not inherently opinionated. According to design theorist Meredith Davis, good graphic design is useful, usable, and desirable. It prioritizes “clarity, accuracy,

completeness, efficiency, and objectivity,” (Davis, 2012). The main job of a designer is to depict a poignant visual representation of a message in order to exchange meaning within a culture (Davis, 2012). This can be any kind of message, for any kind of purpose, and oftentimes, design is used only for efficiency. For example, this paper is set in eleven point font as opposed to three point, for the purpose of allowing the potential reader to see the words. This choice had little to do with the content, and more with the function of the paper itself. This “efficiency-first” method of communication is essential to the goals of Transition Design, and is one of the ways that informative graphic design can help facilitate a transition. In his TED Talk on data visualization, David McCandless defines design as a practice devoted to solving problems in a visually elegant way (McCandless, 2010). McCandless focuses specifically on data visualization, and the way that graphic design can illustrate information better than plain text. In his well-known piece, the Billion-Dollar-o-Gram, McCandless creates simple boxes to show the relationships between billion dollar amounts spent all over the world. This visualization of groups of massive numbers gives them meaning, and in turn, communicates the message more effectively than a list of figures.



Bringing a visual element into communication can have a large impact, especially when it helps differentiate data. Numbers and figures in a list tend to lose their meaning without some kind of visual element, even if it just a simple pie chart. Transition Design faces many problems of information, especially with regard to knowing how to best approach a complicated problem. Transitioning to a more sustainable society is a massively complicated process, and visual communicators who can work with data and information will be of invaluable assistance, with simple everyday tasks of design efficiency.

Information design, however, is not limited to data visualization. Graphic design can assist in the clarity of many different types of information, from the design of a blog about boycotting corporate conglomerates to an infographic about the healthiest pet food. A greater societal transition requires

transparency and understanding if minds are to be changed, and elegant visual communications will be absolutely essential, especially in the forms of resources for making more sustainable choices. There exists a lot of information already about overconsumption that could be communicated in a more effective way. For example, one of the biggest problems facing people who want to learn how to change overconsumptive behaviors is the knowledge of where to even begin. Creating approachable resources for people to understand problems and begin changing behaviors is an essential role of the transition-based graphic designer. In the piece below, I explore the ethics of coffee drinking through different consumer choices and their effects on the planet. Corporate coffee is on the left side of the spectrum, showing its problematic nature with regard to treatment of workers, unsustainable agriculture, and thinning of place. On the far right is bird-friendly coffee in a reusable mug. Each category is based on the product's environmental impact, as well as treatment of workers and social impact. This piece encompasses a new posture of considering social justice alongside environmental justice, and approaches the problem in a more holistic way of giving both equal weight. Part of designing for transitions is taking into account these multiple sources of problem with any issue, and approaching a solution that tries to account for all of them.

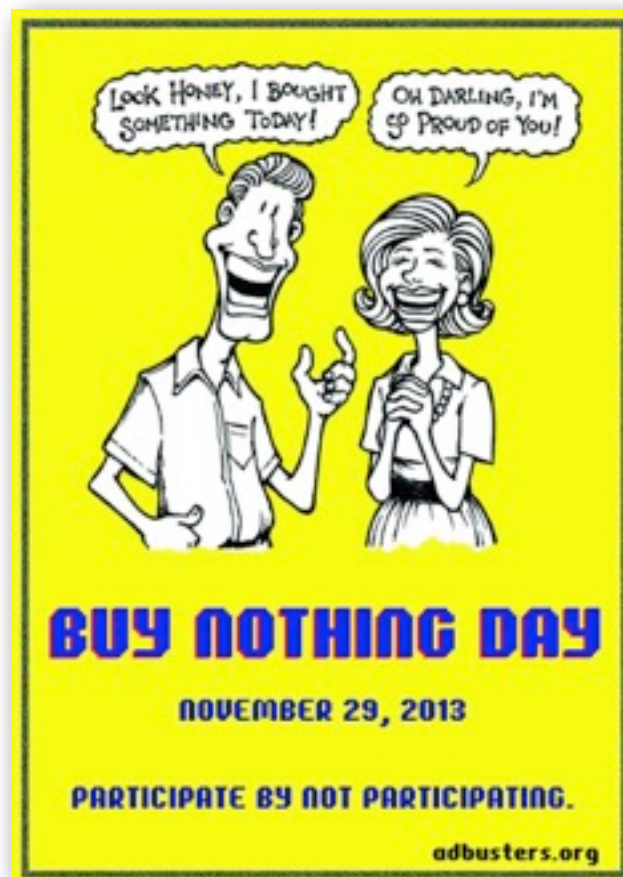


2. Persuasion

Advertising exists to create desire that fuels consumption. Designers who are hired to create advertisements take part in that process. Rick Poynor wrote an accompanying essay to “First Things First 2000”, in which he equates design as persuasion to getting people to buy things (Poynor, 1999). This is a fallacy, as design can be persuasive for all kinds of reasons. Commerce-based persuasive design just tends to be the most prevalent because we live in a consumer society. One of the most famous examples of successful non-commercial persuasive design is the collection of public service advertisements that took down the ritual of smoking in the last quarter of the 20th century. Imagery of cigarette tips, rotting lungs, and former celebrities dying of lung cancer forged a bond between tobacco and death, and changed public opinion about cigarettes from that point forward, establishing their identity as a habit that kills (Lasn, 2006). The vulnerability of the tobacco industry to a series of articulate pieces of persuasive design exemplifies the power that visual persuasion can have (Lasn, 2006). In his book about subversive and radical graphic design, Kalle Lasn proposes a framework for the evolution of marketing. It begins with *traditional marketing*, which sells infinite products to an ever-greedy consumer base, and moves on to *social marketing*, which sells society on a new set of ideas and lifestyles. After that comes *negamarketing*, an attempt to convince people to consume less and use less resources. Finally, it ends with *demarketing*, “unselling the consumer society; turning the incredible power of marketing against itself” (Lasn, 2006). Transition design urges movement toward demarketing, creating a society without the din of advertisements and consumerism dictating mental and physical spaces. However, it is important to see the other types of marketing as steps toward a demarketed society. Persuasive design can assist the realization of this goal.

To fully transition away from a consumer society, as is the goal of Transition Design, behavior will need to change in many realms of existence. According to Kursat Ozenc, altering actions and thought patterns is difficult, but by changing the rituals around them, the development of new behaviors can feel more natural (Ozenc, 2015). How can graphic designers alter or design new rituals? *Adbusters*, a magazine created by Kalle Lasn and dedicated to questioning the role of graphic design and advertising in

consumption and politics, created a holiday. “Buy Nothing Day,” as it was dubbed, uses the visual language of advertising to encourage people to buy nothing for an entire day (Lasn, 2006). It began to gain seriously popularity in 1997, when it was established to take place on the Friday after Thanksgiving, co-opting the day traditionally reserved for massive-scale consumption as part of rituals accompanying the “celebration” of Black Friday. By reritualizing Black Friday into an anti-consumption holiday, Adbusters brought into question the common dependency on daily consumption (Lasn, 2006). Lasn was driven by the knowledge that “overconsumption is the mother of all our environmental woes,” and believed that an exercise in self-restraint might be the perfect medicine for a society obsessed with consuming (Lasn 2006). The visual pieces created for Buy Nothing Day fall into the category of persuasive design, but they function in ways opposite to commercial advertisements. This particular strain of persuasive design could be considered negamarketing, as it is working to dismantle overconsumption.



Persuasive design is an essential part of helping society mentally and physically transition, especially with regard to rituals. Persuasive design can use already established visual languages, like advertising in the Buy Nothing Day campaign, or it can create a new visual language in order to persuade in a different way.

In the piece below, I use the language of collections and storytelling in order to persuade people to bring their own container to the café in order to create a new ritual around the coffee consumption experience. Instead of focusing on the detrimental impact of paper and plastic coffee cups on the environment, I focus on the collection of mugs that the viewer presumably already owns, and attempt to integrate them into the ritual of visiting a coffee shop. Using design to normalize the carrying of a cup instead of wasting a new plastic one each time would not totally facilitate societal transition on its own, but is a design decision informed by a new theory of change; in this case, working with what the viewer already owns (Irwin, 2015). It begins to make a small dent in a huge problem while focusing further ahead. Shifting mindsets from expecting a disposable container to ritualizing the carrying of one's own container would reduce the waste produced by coffee shops, as well as add an element of responsibility into the ritual of a café visit. Implicitly, this piece also establishes that the viewer not only has enough mugs to take one to the café, but also that they have *enough*. The target audience lives a consumptive existence, and this piece of persuasive design is asking them to question their consumer habits in more ways than one. By rethinking rituals and behaviors, designed persuasive messaging can help establish the mindset and posture a society needs to transition to a more sustainable model.



You have so many mugs at home.

Why are you still drinking coffee out of a disposable cup? Paper cups are lined with polyethylene, the same material used in water bottles. Yikes. Although it can be recycled, it takes over 100 years for it to

actually decompose. Bring a mug next time you leave the house. Change starts with people, and it's time to shift the way we think about consumption and reevaluate carrying your mug cup.

#transitiontoday

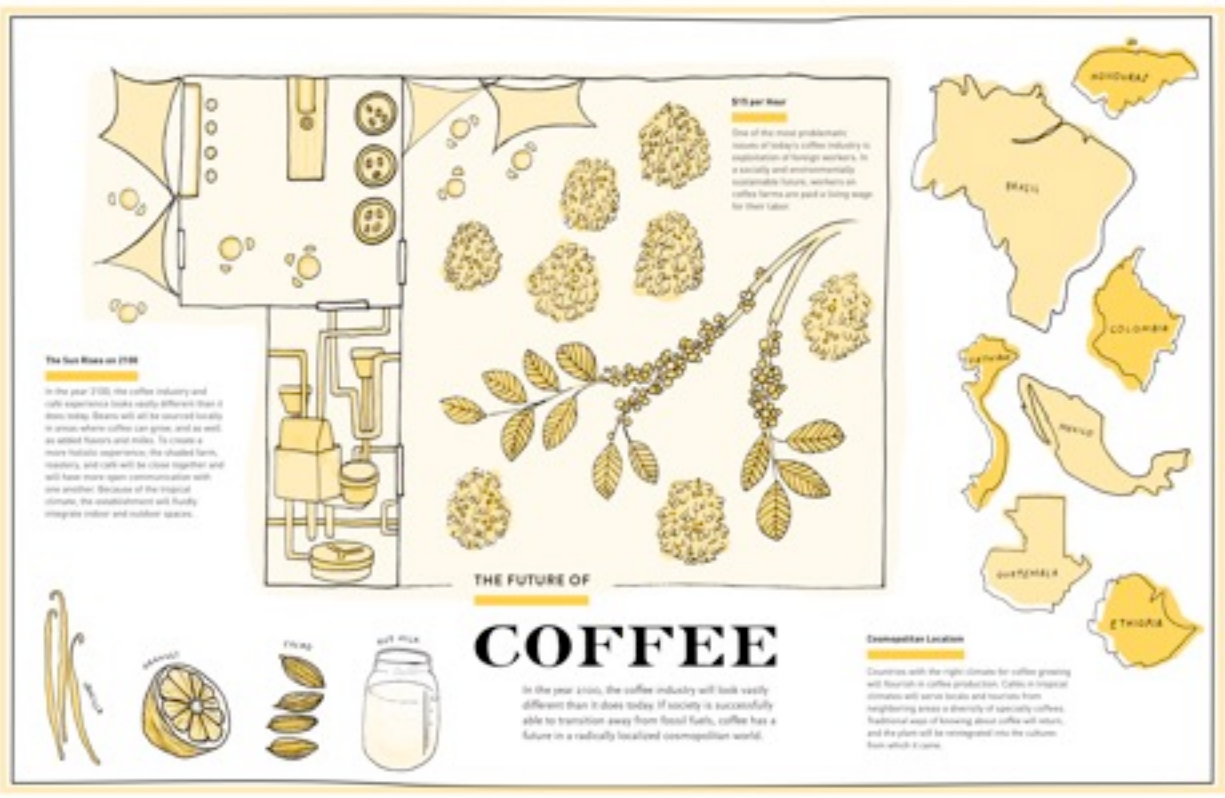
3. Visionary

In 2003, Ezio Manzini and François Jégou created an exhibition and accompanying book titled *Sustainable Everyday: Scenarios of Urban Life*. The exhibition and publication are dedicated to exploring what a sustainable future might actually look like. Partially utilizing technologies that already exist and partially exploring the potential for what is to come, the authors visually narrate viewers through an experience in the sustainable future. Using photos and illustration, they exhibit what subscription based vehicle systems, urban farms, community kitchens, and public office spaces would look like (Manzini &

Jégou, 2003). And according to Gideon Kossoff, one of the lead researchers in the realm of Transition Design, after these visual representations are seen by enough people, they tend to work themselves into the public agreement of what the future looks like and start to manifest in reality (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2013). We actually have begun to see this today with some of the imagery presented in *Sustainable Everyday* (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2013).

Visually representing how we want the future to be is an essential step in getting there. If people can see what a city with half the cars would look like, or a grocery store based around community supported agriculture, or a town in which wilderness was integrated into neighborhoods, they are more likely to expect that kind of future to happen and to work towards it. Living in a society so deeply entrenched in consumerism, it is difficult to imagine what a paradigm shift might look like. But it is the responsibility of the environmental graphic designer to “make a new consumerless world palatable and even enjoyable” (Madge, 1997). Kossoff stresses that we have a better chance of making the transition to a more sustainable way of existence if that way of existence looks desirable (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2013), and graphic designers in particular have the power to assign meaning to content through the way it is visually delivered. In so many words, the sustainable future needs a rebrand. As was begun in *Sustainable Everyday*, it is the role of the graphic designer to envision an entirely different reality, to design the future of how we eat, clothe, build, etc (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2013). We already know that visual communication can change and build meaning with any information or idea (Wahl & Baxter, 2008); we now must use it to advocate for the future we want to see. This is not to say that a graphic designer’s visual representation of the ideal future should be used as a blueprint, but just as a way to infiltrate ideas about what a happier, more sustainable world would look like (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2013). Based on Transition Design’s new theories of change, the best course of action is to start writing the future the way we want it, expecting that change and new pathways will appear along the way. Visualizing the radically localized and nearly utopic future that Transition Design means to move toward, is an essential step in one day perhaps arriving there. As visual communicators, we must take on the role of the imaginative creator and visualize a future that people will be excited to create.

In the piece below, I have exemplified one type of visionary design for transition. The piece reimagines a coffee shop in a localized, cosmopolitan society. The coffee farm is integrated more deeply into the landscape, as some shade-grown farms are already beginning to do. The roastery and café are located on the farm, and visitors can experience all the levels of coffee production and have a more intimate experience with their beverage. In a more localized society, coffee would become less of a norm and more of a specialized product, available in countries with the right tropical heat to grow it. In the piece, I show the countries with highest current coffee production and reimagine them as more touristic spaces for neighboring countries. I also include a new collection of ingredients for coffee alteration, including tropical vanilla bean and more sustainably produced nut milk. To try and only describe with words the coffee experience of 2100 would perhaps not do it justice, as many would stop listening at “lessened availability,” but a visual representation can highlight the positive changes and give people a dream or even a goal to think about as we move forward.



Conclusion

In both First Things First manifestos, the authors collectively addressed what they believed to be the most pertinent issues of the time. In 1964, it was national prosperity (Wright, et. al, 1964), and in 1999 it was environmental, social, and cultural problems (Barnbrook, et. al, 1999). In the year 2016, the most pertinent issue is the oncoming, worldwide effects of environmental degradation and climate change. A shift in society to a more sustainable framework is the absolutely necessary next step, and part of that shift will be assisted by visual communicators working under the tenets of Transition Design. Information design that can help people make better choices about behaviors and bring to light problems with the current system is essential, as well as persuasive designs using the visual language of marketing to exemplify the necessity of change. Graphic designers will be the ones envisioning and illustrating the future we move toward, creating the images that will one day be cemented in reality. Design has incredible amounts of power in the way that information is shared and received, especially when it comes to the way that people react to change. A successful transition will require new thought processes and methods of designing in, as outlined above, that can be applied in situations of radical change. If this is not the kind of meaningful work that the authors of both First Things First Manifestos intended for us to do, then I don't know what is.

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