

## **dear contributors - dear ...,** the jury dilemma and some other thoughts...

### **its summer!**

here i am sitting in my berlin flat - its finally summer after a non-ending winter, the sun is breaking through the window - which makes the pixels on the laptop screen laugh at my eyes - though i am not sure if i can share this laughter. so i drag this laptop and myself to a more shady place and post pound my date with the sun & analogue friends to later. hello memefest.

### **its jury time!**

"memefest - festival for radical communication" invited me to be in the jury for this 2006 competition. - being a juror is always a big responsibility towards the people who are contributing their works - who probably spend days and sleepless nights to "give birth" to their ideas and visualisations. - further it is a responsibility to one self: how do i relate to this event (practically, theoretically, strategically and content wise, ...) - and how do i manage to work with its settings, difficulties, limitations and contradictions ...?

this little text is the form i would like to try to do it - to expand a little the jury work for memefest 2006.

### **design is not enough!**

was the theme for memefest in the year 2003 - this was "based" on a text brian holmes, tony creadland and myself wrote 2 years earlier... - design is not enough means to me (aside to what is written in this little pamphlet) at its core, that you can hardly talk, judge or reflect in a *response-able* way about graphic design / visual communication without relating in your critique to the context, the distribution, the production circumstances (limitations), the work conditions etc ...

design is not enough is the idea to counter the dominant reduction to aesthetics, form and the ideology of "new-new-new" in design / visual communication discourse.

**the general theme for this memefest year**  
**- "declaration toward a global ethic"**

well well ... this is really difficult. difficult because i don't agree on this declaration - its gesture, its political implications, descriptions and conclusions. for me religious and spiritual believes are truly personal and private. so i am a little concerned when religious and spiritual thoughts are the ground for an analyses of the world - or try to be the platform for solutions...

the current rise of religious and spiritual believes is a very normal thing. we have seen this over the last centuries over and over again: in time of political crises - people orientate more than usual towards these kind of believes... - as mentioned - as a personal believe i totally respect this! as a political and theoretical tool i do find it quite problematic. - just to give you a brief idea where some of my problems are:

- "we - the humans" is a truly problematic category: it flattens a lot of contrary interests between people in societies - class, gender and race indifference is made invisible by this perspective. - the power structures and interests a neglected - as written > made invisible.

and further: "we" are all not talking from the same perspective - "we" are driven by different interests - of course "we" are all against war... - everyone is. so?

- the whole text is based on the idea of enlightenment - where politics is always a mix out of inlightment and struggle / battle. consciousness is often not enough for creating a change.

power has to be confronted - otherwise the interests of the power holders will remain - and so the power.

- the usage of terms like "chaos" as if they would be neutral i find problematic.

we know that wars have been and still are fought based on words and descriptions, like for instance freedom fighters vs. terrorists - or violence and peace (who define is the one who holds power)

i have commented a few more parts of this declaration - see below this text.

### **the works – some general points...**

you will have to excuse that i am here only sharing my thoughts in a very general matter on the submitted works. (some little more the contributors will find in their personal feedbacks). - this for sure tricky, since the submitted works are very different - in format, form, content etc. - some are very clear and others are still floating... some are poetic - where others scream ... etc..

but anyway - there are a few things which might be suitable for most from my point of view - use what you find suitable for critique on your works... some of these point i think are suitable for general approach...

1) be clear what you are submitting! specially for an internet based jury its important to know what media form we are looking at - even though most of you have written about you idea - a lot did not write what the media exactly is... - some of the submitted graphics could work as a spread in a magazine - but would most likely "fail" as a poster - some can work as a sticker - but as a more artistic piece in an exhibit they might loose a lot of their strength...

2) send only ONE image / design - and not 3 variations of more or less the same idea. the jury is not the one who will make the decision for you to choose which one is the best in the end... - being able to make a decision between some variations is part of he design work!!

3) the reading hierarchy for the less abstract designs could be better. 1-2-3 - tack tack tack. for posters > "a poster is a surface which jumps into the eye" - but its not a labyrinth of signals which is to be organised by the viewer! - unless its wanted as a communication strategy. in different words: be clear which path the eyes of the viewers is supposed to take. as we know the general rule for how we see things: first colour - second form - 3rd content... - that's just the starting point.

4) less is more - try avoiding illustrative use of images - if you already say things with the text - you don't need to double it with an image - and the other way around... - the text work is very important.

5) image - inventions: one of the strongest visual strategies for sure is the invention of images - basically this means that we as designers are using well known images and shift them into a direction where they are not "normal" anymore - to create a "a wow! or blink in the mind" - a "smile in the eye"...

(and again - if you have a strong image - you don't want to explain everything to an end in your text - trust your audience...)

6) communication strategy: a dilemma i feel for a lot of designs is that the communicative process ends at the edge of the designs > the audience is put in to a situation where one can only say "yes - i agree" or "no - i don't agree" example: imagine a black poster with white letters saying "SAY NO TO WAR". now imagine the same poster - but now with the word "war" written very small in the lower right corner... - you now have already interrupted the reading flow - and created some space for reflection or thoughts... the big black surface of the poster becomes an image for war - and not just a good contrast background for your lettering...! - now as a second example: imagine this slogan with an image of an tank or a soldier. - and now imagine the slogan with an image of daily life (like having a cup of tea) ... - in the first you will now have a illustrative usage of image - in the second you a creating a gap between the text and the image which is constructive for thoughts and reflections on the issue - you are here now more in a dialogical communications strategy - you are placing a question in combination with the slogan in the head of your audience... - you are establishing a deeper relation here i would say.

in other words: think about how you want to talk - you can talk with a megaphone - you can talk with a fishing hook - you can scream with a whisper.. etc. to set a exclamation mark in a sense of a slogan (like "this is bad!" or "this is sad" or "stop this!") can be done by many ways - what i have been trying to explain here is the way HOW and WHERE you are setting / placing the exclamation mark. >> generally i would say its more interesting the further we reach with our designs to what is behind the eye - rather than just scratching and screaming at the surface of the eye - trying to place the exclamations mark (or question mark or ...) in the brain of the viewer - rather than leaving it on the paper (or other media).

(without being really an expert on new media (video, website,...) what

is said for the static visuals also applies to them. this means that media are a tool but not an end - the idea should be on the foreground - in video the music, the images, the rhythm should be meaningful - the music is not supposed to be only a place on the images they have to be complementary) - for internet the interaction should not be just a fake but a thinking tool - interactivity thought as dialogue!)

"we" are not selling ethics! we are communicating points of view - we are raising questions - we are debating and representing problems... "we" are trying to open an engaged dialogue... (i hope)

7) the distribution & relation to actual interventions is as important as the ideas and visuals

**evaluation - why i did not judge  
/ evaluated the submitted works**

i hope its clear that i am talking here from my perspective belives on graphic design and politics. - take what you like from it and excuse my spelling mistakes ; ) (also in the personal feedbacks)

ok.- a lot of the submitted works i liked! - and even more i liked the idea of so many people - from so may places relating to this project in a practical way.

i have decided to NOT judge the works - but to give all works the same points. 10 points were given to all.

generally the problem of political competitions is content wise, that on one hand "we" are criticising a system/s which create inequality and suffering - "we" are fighting for equal rights and a "better world" and at the same time (in a competition) we are creating a situation where some are winners - and some are losers - the logic of winners and losers is basically the logic of capitalist societies! - where everybody is supposed to be a winner. but we know in order to have winners - there is a need for losers... this is the core logic of a unsolidaric system i oppose with my work and life...

a competition as a tool is fine and maybe even quite valuable (...) - as a system it is reproducing a system i would always criticise in the first

place.

what is really great about memefest is - that it is trying to give more information about the context and thoughts behind the works by giving the opportunity to the submitters to write some info in addition! - this is unusual and great!

on the other hand - after having read about 50 descriptions aside the submitted works - a lot of times i had the feeling - gosh - i need - i want to know more!

so the only thing you can do, is to follow you instinct and the love of your eyes and the little experience you might have gained over the years....

again - just to give you an example in relation to one submitted work: i don't know much about the women fights for equality in the united arab emirates or other countries in the region- i do know a little about the relation of women from the arab and persian region towards western feminism - (just by the accident that i did grew up in saudi arabia and oman and my mother is from afghanistan...) - i organised antiwar demonstrations against the second gulf war in the beginning of the 90ies and was at the same time degaussed by the superficial descriptions of the western political activists of the realities of women in "muslim" countries - these images did not match with what i had seen in my childhood...

what am i saying? - i am trying to say than even with this little more insight i have on the issue i don't feel that i know enough to place the submitted work in a field where i could directly critique the work in a productive way. - i still have more questions open... and i would feel embarrassed to critique without having another round of feedback on this... - and further to explain the sensitivity i feel is necessary: the issue of women rights has been used by western governments to implant their imperialist politics on countries hand in hand with the opposition in the west... - so we are in a minefield of politics where one has to be very precise - who talks - to whom and from where?! - this is just one brief example i'd like to give here about the difficulties and responsibility in the jury work...

further - after having been member of several jury's i know that the decision process is very very unsharp and always unfair - because its

always a compromise between the jury members - and they are usually quite different ... just look at some poster festivals and their competitions - and check who the jury members were in these years - and you will see that there is always a very close relation between the decisions and the interest of the jury members... - in other words - a jury - a competition implies some kind of objectivity where there is none.

the other side: i have sent few posters to some competitions which i believe they are good posters. - they were not taken (...) and i still believe that they are good. - further - i have designed things which i totally dislike today (...) - but which have been taken by the clients (for instance political groups) and which are still circulating after many many years... so they are "bad" in my eyes - but are still doing a good job. so what is good in the first place if we don't want to reduce design / visual products to its surface - but also want to judge things by its usage - its impact etc..?

well - i hope it is now clearer why i did choose not to judge the submitted works. - maybe in the future we can think about finding a different format for all of this...

if you want a more specific feedback on your work feel free to contact me.

**now!**

ok - so far for now - now is time to catch some sun and see my friends...

i would like to thank the organisers from memefest again here for this invitation - and further i would like to thank pierre maite (who is also working at bildwechsel / image-shift studio) and valeria ossio (who is currently doing an intern at the studio) for their input and discussions on the memefest festival. >> and i would like to thank the submitters for sharing their work with us.

merci!!

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### **some quotes and my comments from the declaration**

*"It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial, and ethnic conflicts, the abuse of drugs, organised crime, and even anarchy."*

well - this all sounds appropriate in the first moment - but at a second view we see how unprecise such kind of installed perspective is: in our cities? - whose cities? - where? and what about the country side? -- the terms "social, racial and ethnic" are used as if they were neutral terms - they are not! - race is for instance a constructed category - very different used in Europe and the US - ethnic is a category which has experienced a rise in the last decade - looking at the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan - or some African countries - you can see that these "ethnic groups" did not exist in the discourse to this extent as they do now - this basically means that the differentiation of ethnic groups is used in power-politics... we know that most of these so-called ethnic conflicts are in fact conflicts about power and resources (money) - the production of "the other" - the construction of race and ethnic groups is very much in relation to modernism and colonialism. - don't forget that! - they are not neutral terms!

and - ha ha ha - anarchy - that's a term which functions as terrorist vs. freedom fighters - who defines what a freedom fighter is and who a terrorist - anarchy by the way - by its historical definition is the highest form of democracy - self-governance - and the total opposite of chaos!

it's the communists and social democrats in the west (from my point of view) who have discredited this political theory (read Bakunin)

next:

*"A **vision** which can lead women and men away from despair, and society away from chaos."*

so - again - what is chaos? - i feel that a lot of western countries - so-called civilised countries are very chaotic because they don't provide equal rights and equal opportunities... but these - for instance European countries - are seldomly assumed when one talks about chaotic countries...?

next:

*"As **religious and spiritual persons** we base our lives on an Ultimate Reality, and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom, in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence. We have a special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and care for the planet Earth. We do not consider ourselves better than other women and men, but we trust that the ancient wisdom of our religions can point the way for the future."*

well - i guess - even though i have my personal spiritual beliefs - i have visited a lot of churches - i have travelled to Mecca twice and also visited some Buddhist temple - i still - or even therefore don't believe in a "ultimate reality" - and i do find it also problematic. it's the sound of a "soft universalism" which irritates me in these lines.

i believe that beside "wisdom" (insight maybe also?) that progress in the sense of equal rights and peace was always achieved through political battles in history - no power will move

without resistance and struggle and the solidarity with others in their battles.

next:

*"We are all fallible, imperfect men and women with limitations and defects. We know the reality of evil."*

evil? - sure - but what's evil again? - who defines what evil is?

...so far for now...