Image as idea, graphic and message

By Julio Broca

What is an image? How is it conceived? How is it part of a message?

What is an image? Philosopher Walter Benjamin sustains "truth" is always an "image"; there is a relationship between truth and image. It seems like a simple phrase, yet it is profound indeed. However, we're surrounded by false images, persuading us of needing superfluous things; persuading us, for instance, that a cigar is "refreshing" or that these shoes will make us good soccer players. The list is endless. But if designers produce these images, how are they related to the truth?

The image

Early at my profession, image to me was something that would feed me, something I could sell. At some point, I forgot that image — the ability to create images — was a "moment of fulfillment", of absolute joy. This belief was motivated for an absurd, excessive concern for the client — a situation where lots of currents are still caught, unable to push their epistemic center towards creativity and quality.

I believe that, eventually, we all suffer such forgetting, because we're under a constant image bombardment, that only observe us as consumers, unable to take a stand before the message.

But when referring to image itself, it's interesting to conceive it as a territory prepared by image creators to communicate with others; for, to a graphic a designer, image has a communicative function that defines design, separating it from cinematography, painting, photography. It is the particular manner in which communication expresses itself through graphic design. Image isn't just a moment of fulfillment then, but also a moment to raise ethical questions through communication. Images capable of contributing to change, towards aesthetics and ethics.

How image is constructed in design's everyday work?

I do not know for sure if I construct images or they construct me — or maybe they deconstruct me, as Derrida would say. A designer's everyday life is one of search, reflection and learning, but also of experimentation.

The people I work with — the team of Social Sciences Institute — are very sensitive to design. I have to say images are a phenomenon, apparitions that, although sudden, don't come from nothing. "Nothing comes from nothing" — despite Sartre would might say that from

nothingness everything emerses when the being is for itself. I am convinced that there are roads of creativity that we can't even describe with words; secret labyrinths, underground rivers that make us feel like a little paper boat once we give into their stream. When I have the challenge of communicating through image design I cannot deny thought and reason are fundamental, yet not everything. With thought and reason you build something like a skeleton, a communicative structure; but that's not enough, that's information design.

There is a moment when the ship's engines must be turned off, and one must let the wind of ineffability to carry us. A moment of humility exists, before the world and its secrets; thus, flying with no engines, an "idea" appears and one knows it is the right one because you can sense its appearing, somehow you recognize what you see.

We should recover the courage of children, capable of wrinkling with anger the paper where they just drew something that didn't match exactly and worthily what was on their mind. We lose that attitude when we justify our mediocrity. Nietzsche said well: "to mature is to recover the seriousness we played with when we were children".

That moment of searching an idea can last for months; a designer generates tons of images every day, and also throws them away until an encounter — unexplainable — occurs with what one intuits, desires, feels and wishes to communicate. Very few people — or almost no one who isn't a designer — understand this. A very important part of the, shall we say, constructive stage of an image is reference, respect and mimesis of great designers and artists in history. We've mentioned this before: "nothing comes from nothing".

How a message and narrative integrate in graphic design?

The grand *rendezvous* point between narrative and a desire to design is, in first instance, the world of symbols. From symbols an universe emerges, an universe that the design must limit and this despends greatly on his experience and sensibility, on the amplitude of his culture and the depth of his critic analysis, so he won't become a mere slave of signification or melodrama.

Unfortunately, this cannot be transmitted by those who teach design and do not design, who are currently most of the teachers in many schools. Experience, sensibility, amplitude of culture and depth of critic analysis, cannot go unbound if one pretends the message to produce to be transcendent and emphatic. You cannot transcend or empathize with what you don't know, unless we're talking about a serendipitous happening or a designer of a unique good design.

When symbols are close, it's like some sort of alchemy of signification. Before our eyes flashes of resignifications appear. A designer cannot be a simple *parasite* of symbols. Symbols are there and do not need of a designer to be and have meaning. What designers do is to imprint meaning in them.

For example, our pre hispanic cultures are plagued of symbols that have survived over five hundred years to extermination and oblivion. We all vibrate when we see them, we keep them, protect them and exhibit them as treasures, with no need of being grandiose artists or

designers. Who created them — and how—? That question leads us to wonderful moments in the history of creativity and graphics.

A designer must have a "know-how" — that only comes with time, work and constant experimentation. As an alchemist that won't let himself feel impressed for a wonderful — yet unexpected — discovery, but despite of it, is capable of following his intuition until materializing it in a graphic form.

When a certain level of transcendental symbolic synthesis level is reached, a metaphor is born. Like it is for a poet, metaphor is the designer's horizon of desire that believes in poetry as much as in graphic design.

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