

Re-design in Public Space

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Abstract

Questioning the relationship between graphic design work as it moves from private studio development to the public realm and as it exists in a commercial and non-commercial context, the intersection of these realms are explored through interpretation of the work of Eduard Cehovin in Slovenia. In the context of the designer's role to generate forms of public identity, new non-commercial identity is formed as a commemorative or celebratory act.

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Despite the fact that it is generated to meet the needs of the public, graphic design in most cases results from a process that takes place in the privacy of a studio. The need of the society for the mediation of an identity is therefore a result of the studio work of an individual artist, carried out in a private space and producing public results. Consequently, the 2003 exhibition/action by Eduard Cehovin in the streets of Ljubljana represents, above all, a questioning of the relationship between the private and public domains. Ten graphic prints, displayed on commercial billboards, were created over a period of one month as a reinterpretation of the artist's different commissioned works, the main goal of which was to meet the need for the public mediation of identity. The original works were changed, reinterpreted, redesigned and adjusted to the large format of the public commercial poster.

If graphic design is one of the possible creative interpretations of someone's identity, this action primarily influences our thinking within the limits of the relationship between the private and public, it expresses the artist's opinion about the need for permanent reflection of the graphic ideas that he offers in the free market. The initial ideas are various identities, or, to be more precise, systems of identities created to meet the needs of commercial clients. Presented in large format on street billboards, these ideas are transferred to the sphere contained in the initial idea, but in a form that is not commercial at all.

The fundamental feature of Cehovin's design is typography or the written message as a basis of communication. The artist obviously starts from the perception that letters are images, that every type of letter is primarily perceived visually, thereby becoming a vehicle of complex meanings that are to be communicated. This perception is based on the structural exactness of the sign, but with the help of innumerable styles of letters known today, it creates a basis for the structuralist interpretation of letters as basic units, without which language (and, consequently, meaning) are practically impossible.

In the past, calligraphers and typographers created their own meanings by designing styles of letters and their variations. Today, a typographer selects from what is available and in every letter style he sees an aesthetic foundation for communication. The division of labor affected this segmentation of culture: once the typographer was a worker, now he is an intellectual arbiter of ideas. Fully aware of this, Cehovin places his own redesigned works in public spaces, deriving images of general meaning and aesthetic messages, without reference to the client's needs or their origin in fundamentally commercial projects.

In this sense, the project is an interesting attempt at a critical interpretation of present-day graphic design. Derived from a primary, original context and in a way "distanced" from the original intention, his typographic images are redesigns in public spaces. As such, they are a witty, later reinterpretation of the artist's own work and a public message that is the opposite of the indoctrinating language of commercial graphic design that we usually see in such advertising locations.

In present-day graphic design, is it possible to distinguish between the private and public, the artistic and commercial? This is the basic question asked by the artist of himself and of the society around him. Instead of giving the answer, he competently points at the possible solutions of relationships between the private and the public space by elevating graphic design works above the realm of the directly usable. Since he expresses them through a medium of distinctly defined meaning, Cehovin uses his fluid graphic art in the public space to introduce a new conceptual element into his own work. These "images" do not draw attention to anything, but compositionally and chromatically are attractive enough to trigger curiosity and to make you think. The motif and method of introducing paradox are clearly evident from his action that follows in the footsteps of dadaist projects and conceptualist art of the 1970s. In the public urban space, in the context that is normally used for commercial communication, this action makes us think about the possibility of creating graphic design works that would be completely different, non-commercial and purely aesthetic.

Author Notes

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