

2017

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Recommended Citation

Al Qur'an, Hussam (2017) "The Effect of Social Development on Graphic Design Practice," *An-Najah University Journal for Research - B (Humanities)*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 8 , Article 7.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/anutr_b/vol31/iss8/7

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The Effect of Social Development on Graphic Design Practice*

تأثير التنمية المجتمعية على مهنة التصميم الجرافيكي

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Received: (20/11/2016), Accepted: (22/3/2017)

Abstract

This study aims to explore the effect of social development on graphic design practice and how interactive technologies present new challenges for designers to deal with ethically and culturally. It also explores the issues of graphic design in terms of a form of art versus a form of social science or communication. The goal is to gain better understanding of the meaning of graphic design and the role of graphic designer in today's society. Reviewing the literature revealed how graphic design as a discipline has changed in response to number of factors. This study explained the core of the communication designers' job, which is to articulate society, responds to its issues, and help in social development. The study found that the call for design to become an art is a reduction of both design to aesthetics and designer to egoist. Likewise, treating design as a science is a conversion of design to a purely functional tool serving restricted economy. Fry recall the term "Design is Design". Although the call for "Design as Design" needs more investigations and discussions, still, it manipulates the other calls.

Keywords: Graphic Design, Social Development, Visual Communication Design, Art, Designism, User Centered, Design Practice.

* "This research is funded by the Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies in Zarqa Private University / Jordan".

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف اثر التطور الاجتماعي على مهنة التصميم الجرافيكي، والتحديات الاخلاقية والاجتماعية التي يواجهها المصممين بسبب التكنولوجيا التفاعلية الجديدة. كما تستكشف الدراسة بعض القضايا المتعلقة بمعنى التصميم الجرافيكي كاعتباره شكل من اشكال الفنون احيانا، مقابل اعتباره شكل من اشكال علم الاجتماع او الاتصال احيانا اخرى. الهدف الرئيسي من الدراسة هو الوصول الى فهم افضل لمعنى التصميم الجرافيكي ودور مصمم الجرافيك في مجتمع اليوم.

Introduction

Development of tools, product and technology imposed new goals for designers and responsibilities toward society. Graphic design as a discipline has changed in response to social circumstance, developments in technology and the growth of design practice. This study explores the effect of social development on graphic design practice and how interactive technologies present new challenges for designers to deal with ethically and culturally. This study also explores the issues of graphic design in terms of a form of art verses a form of social science or communication.

Purpose of the Study

Graphic design as a discipline has changed in response to social circumstance, developments in technology and the growth of design practice. This article aims to explore the impact of these changes on graphic design in today's practice and focuses on the issues of graphic design in terms of a form of art verses a form of social science or communication.

The finding would assist teachers, students, practitioners and audience to gain better understanding of the meaning of graphic design and the role of graphic designer in today's society.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the effects of social developments on graphic design as a discipline?
- What are the main goals/duties for a designer toward society today?
- What is graphic design?

The Development of Graphic Design Practice

For almost a century, the term graphic design has been used to describe the practice. In 1922, Addison Dwiggins^(*) (1880-1956) introduced himself as a graphic designer and this is believed to be the first time the occupational description was used. (Livingston & Livingston 2003, p75). Dwiggins was a specialist in type, illustration and stencil forms, working for Alfred A. Knopf in the Mergenthaler Linotype Corporation in the USA (pp.59-60).

In the period since 1922, graphic design as a discipline has changed in response to social circumstance, developments in technology and the growth of design practice (Haslem 2009, p22). In the last two decades of the 20th century graphic design embraced new media in print, motion, interactive technologies (Haslem 2009, p22). According to Frascara^(†) (1988, p22), “the practice of graphic design transcends the realm of esthetics” or in short, is more interested in functional communication than it is in overtly self-centered expression. Contemporary graphic designers work beyond print and visuals, using space, sound and interactivity in their work (Haslem 2009, p22). Victor Margolin^(‡) (2007, p14) believes that the expanded range of work undertaken by graphic designers makes their job more complicated and responsibilities more difficult to define. He implies that designers need to think carefully and

(*) Addison Dwiggins was an American type designer, calligrapher, and book designer. He attained prominence as an illustrator and commercial artist, and he brought to the designing of type and books some of the boldness that he displayed in his advertising work.

(†) Jorge Frascara (born 1939) is a Canadian Professor Emeritus in Graphic Design. He has published ten books and more than 50 articles internationally.

(‡) Victor Margolin (born 1941) is Professor Emeritus of Design History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He has published number of books.

develop tools to keep up with rapidly shifting cultural and technical parameters, Margolin (2007, p14) declares:

Historically, the task of the designer was simpler than it is today, and the designer's responsibility was easier to define. Providing decoration for or giving form to products was the primary task. Consequently, design discourse was about visual form and, subsequently, about mechanical function Now faced with the growing complexity of the product milieu, designers have to think more profoundly about the future and their role in making it into the present. They need early warning systems to alert them to social trends that might have a bearing on what they design, and they require the intellectual tools to reflect on the meaning of these trends and their ethical implications.

Wim Crouwel^(*) believes that graphic design as an occupation faces greater challenges than fifty years earlier, yet Crouwel declares:

I am very jealous from designers who start now. On one hand, because their possibilities are so wide. Graphic Design is no longer graphic design. Graphic design with all the new media is so fantastic, it is wonderful world. On the other hand, I am not jealous because finding your way now -to my opinion- is much more difficult than it was in my time (Wim Crouwel's advice for young designers 2011).

Forlizzi^(†) and Lebbon^(‡), in *From Formalism to Social Significance in Communication Design* (2002, p3), believe that the difficulties facing designers today relate to changes in consumer's behavior. Consumers in the 21st century differing from those of earlier decades in age average, income, ability, expectations, influences, and education (Forlizzi & Lebbon 2002, p3). Likewise, contemporary consumers are increasingly

(*) Wim Crouwel (born 1928) is a graphic designer and typographer born in the Netherlands. In 1963 he founded the studio Total Design, now called Total Identity.

(†) Jodi Forlizzi is an interaction designer and researcher in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute and at the School of Design.

(‡) Cherie Lebbon, is a researcher and designer with particular expertise in inclusive design, with a proven track record of innovative and successful project work.

exposed to media and more experienced in responding to design messages (Forlizzi & Lebbon 2002, p3). Forlizzi and Lebbon (2002, p3) argue that designers need applied talent to cut through and create effective communication.

Frascara (1988, p22) looks at graphic design as a practice that goes beyond the aesthetic considerations to communicate efficiently. However, others believe that the old reputation of graphic design as a discipline that concerned only with the aesthetic aspects still used by the discipline as a tool to deny its responsibilities towards the society.

In his *Communication Design: Towards A 'Social-Situated' Practice*, Neal Haslem^(*) (2009, p21) argues that designers in general and graphic designers in particular keep denying their responsibilities toward the society. By focusing on presentation and technical considerations, graphic design has avoided adverse consequences of visual experiments by its practitioners. Yet despite its ability to side step complex issues of accountability confronting applied design (and industrial design), graphic design asks for greater recognition from the society and other design disciplines (Haslem 2009, p21). Haslem argues that graphic designers need to recognize themselves as part of the broader design community:

Graphic design cannot have it both ways, it cannot ask for recognition for its importance on one hand yet deny its social connections on the other, and it is unlikely that graphic design will give up its claim for greater recognition. The alternative is that along with the respect graphic design gains from recognition as a professional design discipline will come the awareness that graphic designers are interdependent with the society within which they practice (Haslem 2009, p21).

Graphic Design Vrs. Communication Design

In *Communication Design: Principle, Methods and Practice* (2004, p4) Jorge Frascara uses the term "Visual Communication Design". He

(*) Neal Haslem is a lecturer and researcher in the area of Communication Design within the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Australia.

asserted that this term is more descriptive and appropriate than “Graphic Designer”. According to Frascara, the term “Visual Communication Designer” includes three essential elements that represent the practice and they are respectively; medium, objective, and method. For Frascara (2004, p2) the term “Visual Communication Design” represent the activity of producing specific messages, using industrial means, for a specific target audience, while “graphic design is an object created by that activity”. DK Holland^(*) (2001) believes that the term ‘graphic design’ is difficult to define, therefore understanding graphic design can be difficult and confusing for outsiders. Holland (2001) asserts that the term ‘graphic design’ is “meaningless”, as it refers to printing which is not the main focus of graphic design in the new millennium.

As with other professions, there are several definitions for the practice. The *International Council of Graphic Design Associations* (Icograda, 2011) definition will be adopted in this study. *Icograda* (2011) defines graphic design as:

An interdisciplinary, problem-solving activity, which combines visual sensitivity with skill and knowledge in areas of communications, technology and business. Graphic design practitioners specialize in the structuring and organizing of visual information to aid communication and orientation.

Graphic designer as defined by *Icograda* (2011) is:

One who has the artistic sensibility, skill and experience and/or training professionally to create designs or images for reproduction by any means of visual communication, and who may be concerned with illustration; typography; calligraphy; surface design for packaging; or the design of patterns, books, advertising and publicity material, or any form of visual communication.

The above definitions were used by ICOGRADA and affiliates to

(*) DK (Deborah Katherine) Holland (born 1947) is an American graphic designer, writer and educator. Her research interests involve graphic design, Design thinking and ethics.

describe practice by Icorada and its members since it was listed in 1984. However, in 2007, the Icograda executive board and secretariat ratified a new definition for the practice (Icograda 2011). Updating the practice definition was an essential need to cover the new practice aspects and to imply the new concept of the design meaning. *Icograda* (2011) changed the practice name from graphic design to communication design. Communication designer defined by *Icograda* (2011) as:

One who has the sensibility, skill and experience and/or training professionally to create designs or images for reproduction by any means of visual communication, and who may be concerned with graphic design; illustration; typography; calligraphy; surface design for packaging; or the design of patterns, books, advertising and publicity material; broadcast, interactive or environmental design; or any form of visual communication (Icograda 2011).

Icograda (2011) defined Communication design as “an intellectual, technical and creative activity concerned not simply with the production of images but with the analysis, organisation and methods of presentation of visual solutions to communication problems.”

According to *Icograda* (2011), this change broadens the area of practice and reflects the global shift in understanding the practice, which starts to focus on design as a strategic process that empowers communication in a visual format. Graphic design as a discipline becomes part of the communication design practice areas (Icograda, 2011).

Changing practice name from graphic to communication design reflects the fact that the discipline became a social activity (Haslem 2009, p22). The focus of the graphic designers today not only on the visuals and artifacts, the focus moves “into the operational qualities of that ‘graphics’ and its location, facility and agency within the social setting it inhabits” (Haslem 2009, p22). Meanwhile, the change in name and values of the practice helps reframe the practice and assists the practice “to accept some of the responsibility for the effects of that practice within society” (Haslem 2009, p22).

Desingnism: A Graphic Design Commitment to the Society

In 2002 Forlizzi and Lebbon (p8) noted that there are few designers who systematize the understanding of communication messages, an exception being Jorge Frascara who points out that:

Although designers need not rely totally on the stereotypes, they cannot disregard the codes of the public; they should work with the public and improve its visual and conceptual language as much as possible, without breaking the communication link. (Frascara 1988, p20)

On the strength of their commitment to the community values, a number of design leaders gathered in the Art Directors Club, New York, in September 21, 2006, to discuss the relation between design and the social change or what they call “ design and –ism” (Art Directors Club 2012). On the panel were Milton Glaser^(*), James Victore^(†), Jessica Helfand^(‡), George Lois^(§), and Kurt Andersen^(**) (Art Directors Club 2012). In this evening Milton Glaser coined the term “Designism”, when the gatherings moderator, Steve Heller^(††), asked Glaser to define “designism” (Designism 2006), Glaser explained:

“-ism” expressed the idea of a movement and the assumption of a political position that says something about your relationship to the world. In this case it raises the issue of whether design, as an activity, has a social context, whether or not it’s only about persuasion and selling goods, or whether it has a social intention that creates a better world

(*) Milton Glaser (born 1929) is an American graphic designer. His designs include the I ♥ NY logo, the psychedelic Bob Dylan poster, and the Brooklyn Brewery logo

(†) James Victore (born 1962) is an American art director, designer, and author.

(‡) Jessica Helfand (born 1960) is a designer, author, and educator. A Senior Critic at Yale School of Art.

(§) George Lois (born 1931) is an American art director, designer, and author. He is best known for over 92 covers he designed for *Esquire* magazine from 1962 to 1972.

(**) Kurt Andersen (born 1954) is an American novelist and creative consultant.

(††) Steven Heller (born 1950) is an American art director, journalist, critic, author, and editor who specialize on topics related to graphic design.

(Designism 2006).

The emergence of the “Designism” reflects a growing sense of responsibility a number of designers have toward ethical social values. Designers started re-examining the effect of their creative works on their societies. According to the ADC official website (2012), the main aim of ‘Designsim’ is to explore the responsibilities and causes embraced by the designers in their creative work that specifically targets social and political life.

Designsim as an ideal that addresses ethical behavior is one that deserves to be spread to every community of designers on the globe.

Frascara (1988, p22) believes that graphic design has number of responsibilities toward society. Among responsibilities of concern to graphic designers is the influence and impact of visual communication on the visual environment, as well as the need to ensure that communication works toward community safety in an appropriate way. Solving a design problem is not just about visual appeal and clarity, it also needs to be effective as a communication tool, preventing and reducing socially and personally harmful outcomes. The design process should not only produce symbols but also test the effectiveness of design after delivery (Frascara 1988, p26).

Unser-Centered Methodology as An Interaction Tool

Haslem does note that graphic designers do express themselves in response to global issues through their designs (Haslem 2009, p23). The role of the “design savior” does promote issues to public (Haslem 2009, p23). However, Haslem claims that some designers insists that by persuading others toward their personal opinions creates a gap between designers and their immediate society rather than a strong connection (Haslem 2009, p23). Steven Heller (2002, p6) asserts that a designer’s main goal is to solve his client’s problems, not to express his personal opinion, which can result through the solution developed, Heller declares:

Although individual personality routinely plays a key role in visual

communication, it must be the result, not the goal, of solving design problems. Confusion ensues when the desire to express the singular "me" overpowers the client's message. When every one is conducting experiments, no one is really experimenting-every one just follow the fashion. Design it self should not be the sole message, although in the "me too" era it was often mistaken as such (Heller 2002, pp5-6).

The core of the communication designers' job is to articulate society, responding to issues and helping to develop, which strengthens communication designs role in society and the social identity of communication design (Haslem 2009, p25). Designers need to be team players and should have the ability to delegate and cooperate with other parties to deliver the message (Haslem 2009, p23). Frascara (1988, p23) stresses that designers need to be always part of an "active dialogue". A designers dialogue should be with their clients and others involved in the immediate project, such interaction helps the designers goals set for best practice.

Haslem not only asserts that the communication designer should remain neutral in their opinions, but that they also have to maintain quality and performance through their designs (Haslem 2009, p24). According to Frascara (1988, p21), measuring the performance for 'graphic' design is based on achieving the goals set by the design problem in which it was created for. Frascara sees this as a proof for the correlation between 'graphic' design and the communication system. 'Beauty' and clarity in graphic design may contribute to success, but they are not a compulsory aspect that determines objective achievement (Frascara 1988, p25).

Frascara (1988, p23) asserts that the measure of the quality in 'graphic' design is the change it makes to the audience. Aesthetics and stylistic innovation are no more than value laden tools used by critics to dispute the quality of 'graphic' design outcomes (Frascara 1988, p23). Aesthetic remains an importance aspect that affects the performance of graphic design as communication, in this regard Frascara states:

Esthetic appropriateness and quality are certainly of high importance,

both as factors that affect performance and as responsibilities designers have to the community. My proposition is to place the concept of quality in context and to establish its relativity, as well as to clarify that the esthetic quality of a design does not determine its overall quality (Frascara 1988, p25).

By esthetic (aesthetic) quality Frascara appears to be referring to the combination of elements that make-up a design solution measured against its appeal to audience taste as discerned by the success of the design (advertising, publicity, etc) outcome.

Unlike most of the product designers, through the design process communication designers often follow their insights and intuitions more than collecting data about their end users. Working by intuition often results in a failure to communicate the messages or inspire the audience to change their behavior (Forlizzi & Lebbon 2002, p3).

An approach that reduces the chance of failure and maintains the purpose of the message is to employ the user-centered method in design process. Designers need to create dialogue and empathy with end users, in short both designer and end user need to be actively involved in design process (Forlizzi & Lebbon 2002, p5). Applying user-centered methodologies in communication design process changes the role of the communication designer from decorator to an agent in social behavioral (Forlizzi & Lebbon 2002, p4). Yet Matt Cooke^(*) (2006, p131) argues that not all design methodologies work in every design situation and can solve all design problems. However, it is argued that, “in the right circumstances, user-centered research can make designing easier and more effective” (Cooke 2006, p131). Cooke believes that in applying the user-centered methodology throughout the design process enhances the designer’s creativity and make the design more “socially responsible” by focusing on reception of the design by the end user (Cooke 2006, p145).

(*) Matt Cooke is the former head of education and communication for the World Cancer Research Fund in London and founder of Matt Cooke design studio.

Design as Science, Design as Art, and Design as Design

Testing and predicting graphic design impact ought to be parts of the design process, making design essentially about problem solving. However, design problem solving using similar processes to those applied in the sciences could be confusing, as it suggests that design is a science. Herbert Simon^(*) (cited in Willis 1999, p14) points out that there is a difference between design-in-general and science. On a simplistic level it maybe argued that science is concerned with how things are, while design is concerned with how objects and ideas can be proposed and realized in respect of utility (cites in Willis 1999, p14).

It is popularly asserted that design and art have a long interface with each other throughout history. Unfortunately, this shared history can result in the designer's desire to play a central role in the design process (Winters 2007, p19). The fine arts legacy positions the designer at the center of the artifact project, just as it does the art project. In most cases, the artist is usually the focal point of the artifact and artists are encouraged to produce art outcomes that are largely self-referential. Norman Potter^(†) in *What is a Designer* (cited by Poynor in Coles 2007, p95) answers the question, is the designer an artist with an emphatic: NO! As Potter explains, the designer often works for others solving their problems, while the artist is working for himself/herself to solve his/her own problems and express his/her own visions. According to Poynor^(‡) (cited in Coles 2007, p95), Potter's central point hinges on:

The essence of a designer's work, as a planner, problem solver and supervisor, is to supply clear instructions so that others can complete the production of the design. By contrast, a painter or sculptor is more dependent on feedback from hand and eye and develops the work through direct experience of the materials. Potter suggests that the

(*) Herbert Alexander Simon (1916 – 2001) was an American political scientist, economist, sociologist, psychologist, and computer scientist.

(†) Norman Potter (1923–1995) was an English cabinetmaker, designer, poet, and teacher.

(‡) Rick Poynor (born 1957) is a British writer on design, graphic design, typography, and visual culture.

designer will need to be capable of more detachment than maybe necessary for the fine arts (cited in Coles 2007, p95).

Yet Poynor believes that Potters's estimation of the difference between designer and artist is "rarely as straight forward as this makes it sound" (cited in Coles 2007, p95). Poynor argues that there are as many passionate designers as there are detached artists (cited in Coles 2007, p95). Dorst (cited in Coles 2007, p8) agrees and believes that the artist can act as designer and the designer an artist: "So the boarder between art and design is permeable, and not just from art toward design" (Coles 2007, p80).

Lucienne Roberts^(*), in an e-mail interview with a team of three graphic designers from Experimental Jetset (an independent graphic design studio based in Amsterdam), asked Experimental Jetset their opinion on the relation between graphic design and art. The team replied that they don't look at graphic design as an art, but they look at art as part of design. (Coles 2007, p103). The team recalled the history of the relation between art and design, which has been changed during the modernism period:

Early modernists such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky were absolutely driven by the idea to unite art and the every day; the idea of art, not an added, decorative layer, but as something fully integrated in modern life. While late modernists such as Crouwel and the late Rietveld -as opposed to the early Rietveld- were -and in the case of Crouwel, still are- radically against such synthesis of art and design (cited in Coles 2007, p103).

In his *Stepping Back and Looking Forward*, Tony Fry^(†) (2004, p83) argues that design should not be claimed as an art or science. He believes that the call for design to become an art is a reduction of both design to

(*) Lucienne Roberts is the founder of the design studio sans+baum, which focuses on projects outside the commercial mainstream. A contributor to Eye and Grafik magazines, she lives in London, UK.

(†) Tony Fry is a design theorist and philosopher who writes on the relationship between design, unsustainability, and politics.

aesthetics and designer to egoist. Likewise, treating design as a science is a conversion of design to a purely functional tool serving restricted economy. Fry (2004, p83) believes that design should be treated as design, according to Fry (2004, p83) "Design is design" is not a new call, however, it should be elaborated either anthropologically or phenomenologically:

While this position has been uttered on numerous occasions it has never been adequately elaborated either anthropologically, as an ontological characteristic of human being that is, and has been, culturally manifested in vastly different ways, or phenomenologically as an act of the prefiguration of the immanence some 'thing' or the agency ('thinging') of the thing as it assumes its designing ontology"

Ontological designing, described by A-M Willis^(*) (1999, p81), is the way to determine the relation between human beings and life worlds:

Ontological designing, then, is (i) a hermeneutics of design concerned with the nature and of the agency of design, which understands design as a subject-decentred practice, acknowledging that things as well as people design, and following on from this, (ii) an argument for particular ways of going about design activity, especially in the contemporary context of unsustainability (Willis 1999, p81).

Haslem (2009, p25) believes that linking design to ontology could reveal how society benefits from design:

An ontological framing of practice reveals that the artefacts communication designers produce are metonyms for our understanding of the nature of being. Designed artefacts act metonymically to embody our ontological understandings. Their material presence enacts, exteriorises and encodes our foundational ontology. They give our understandings of the world material form in the social realm. Once materialised those objects become a negotiated text between all the parties that interact with them.

(*) Anne-Marie Willis is a design writer, editor, and educator, and currently professor of design theory at the German University in Cairo.

In brief, Haslem holds that the relation between design and society is reciprocal, as each party contributes to the understanding and building of the other party. However, the relationship between art and design is not so clear cut, for instance Tony Fry (2004, p83) rejects equating design and art: and he is not alone. Poynor (cited in Coles 2007, p98) proposes that unliquestions:

- What are the effects of social developments on graphic design as a discipline?
- What are the main goals/duties for a designer toward society today?
- What is graphic design?

In the following we will answer each of the art, design “has no such hang-ups about the beauty of visual form” (cited in Coles 2007, p98). The reason behind art's resistance to beauty, in Poynor's opinion, is because beauty is “too easy, too compliant, or insufficiently critical” (cited in Coles 2007, pp98-99). On the other hand, design has no issues with popular notions of beauty that attract the attention of a wider audience (cited in Coles 2007, p99). Poynor also takes a stand against the term “design art” as it is “an awkward compound term and may not catch on” (cited in Coles 2007, p99). Poynor (cited in Coles 2007, p99) defines design (in contrast to art) as “means of personal and cultural expression with the potential to equal and even exceed art's reach”.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the following question and analyze the results,

What are the effects of social developments on graphic design as a discipline?

Throughout history, graphic design as a discipline has changed in response to social practices, technology, and communications protocols. The difficulties designers face is responding ethically and in an appropriate form to changes in technology, society and consumer behavior. The shift in name by the professional association ICOGRADA

for the practice of graphic design to communication design was necessary to better describe newer practices and approaches to concept development. Despite the importance of this change, ICOGRADA failed to reflect this importance. Better announcement and larger exposé would assist spreading the new name to non-academic and non-design sectors, which represents the majority of the society.

What are the main goals/duties for a designer toward society today?

The designer's main goal is to solve problems for a client, rather than express a personal opinion, which in any case may result from the solution developed. The core of the communication designers' job is to articulate society, respond to its issues, and help in social development. Working purely by intuition often results in failure to communicate clearly a message to a specific audience or assist in changing their attitudes and behavior. However, purposeful communication does often occur if a less design-centered and more user-centered method is applied during the design process.

The emerged of the 'Designism' reflects the growing sense of responsibility in designers' behaves towards their social variables. These responsibilities concern for the influence of visual communications and its impact on community, the visual environment beside the need to ensure that any communication work related to community's safety is done in appropriate way.

What is graphic design?

The question of a relationship in practice, aims or theory between art, science and design is open for debate. Herbert Simon (cited in Willis 1999, p14) has pointed out that the difference between the science of design and social science, a simplistic statement would assert that science is concerned with how things are, while design is concerned about how things are to be. Norman Potter believes that the designer is not an artist, as the designer often works for clients to solve problems, while the artist works to express a personal vision. Tony Fry (2004, p83) believes that the call for design to become an art is a reduction of both design to aesthetics and designer to egoist. Likewise, treating design as a science is

a conversion of design to a purely functional tool serving restricted economy. Fry recall the term “Design is Design”. Although the call for “Design as Design” needs more investigations and discussions, still, it manipulates the other calls.

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