

Abstract: response_ability, ethics and sustainability in design education

Title:

ReBrand and ReNew (the total package)

In the spring of 2008 I began integrating my research in sustainable Graphic Design with the curriculum at New Mexico State University as the basis for infusing theory and criticism with Graphic Design studio practice. I have developed student projects that demonstrate the power of design to contextualize and visualize the complex issues surrounding environmental concerns. Students are expected to develop design concepts in keeping with the standards set forth by the Designer's Accord and to undo damage done, embrace new material options and reject standard issue design. Students are encouraged to reconsider their assumptions about the role of design as both an agent of consumption and as an agent for positive social change.

Students begin their education in the green Graphic Design through Art 355 a junior level course in production. The course now integrates issues of sustainability through projects in packaging and culture jamming. The package is investigated for ways to increase efficiency and decrease waste as well as a site to advocate for sustainable practices. Culture jamming projects allow the student to ascertain the meaning of green claims in advertising and branding and to subvert/invert these messages. The students also study the History of Graphic Design in order to appreciate the significance of design's role in the history of consumption.

ReBrand and ReNew is a semester long packaging assignment that is the basis for the Art 355 production course. Students re-brand an existing product and package to not look greener but be green. The product must be something that is ingested or used on the body and that has a presence in the retail environment. The re-brand must include a new logo, mark and package redesign.

The basis for this collaborative design project is exhaustive research into every aspect of the product. The students perform a LCA (life cycle analysis) of the product and package to learn the complex web of sourcing, producing, selling, marketing and finally consumption and waste. The students focus on their primary role as designer as mediator between production and consumption to eliminate waste by altering the linear process of production and consumption. The students create a minimum of three interventions in the design process. The students also perform an exhaustive audit of the brand and its competition to reveal the visual language used by companies to describe and identify their products and their market. Their goal is to renew the brand so that it will speak to the consumer's desire to actively change their lives to reflect their values and ethics. It can't seem to preach its own agenda but must feel as if it reflects the target audience's genuine aspirations and ethics. It must be persuasive, beautiful, smart and accurately describe its contents.

In fall of 2009 I began collaborating with a colleague in Engineering who is developing Canola based biodegradable plastics. The students worked with Engineering graduate

students to further refine their LCAs and develop a prototype. In addition they produced a narrative piece inspired by the popular video *The Story of Stuff* to help the average consumer understand the LCA. One of their pieces can be seen on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcKBqIoGM_Y.

Student quote

“Green design, for us, comes from a very genuine place. We don't see it as a bandwagon to jump on so we can please people; we see it as a social responsibility.”

–Nate Turner | student New Mexico State University

Project Description:

–ReBrand and ReNew

Goals:

ReBrand an existing retail package to not look greener but be green. The product must be something that is ingested or used on the body. The redesign must speak to the consumer's desire to consume ethically. The package must advocate, persuade, inform, accurately describe its contents and contain a minimum of three interventions in the life cycle.

Process:

complete LCA

audit of consumer, competition/category

design of new name, new logo/mark

design of new package

design of unique LCA narrative

specify plastic derived from Canola

Challenges:

Long hard road to get to a final mock up

Working as a group and across disciplines

Going through all the steps and number of variables

Contact Information:

Peter Fine

Assistant Professor/Graphic Design

Art Department

New Mexico State University

P.O. Box 3001, MSC 3572

Las Cruces, NM 88003

575-646-7550

fine@nmsu.edu

Short Biography

Peter Fine

MFA –University of Arizona, 2004, Visual Communication

BA –California State University, Chico, 1993, Visual Communication

In my teaching and in my own work I explore the role of the designer past, present and future. I seek new ways to integrate design history, theory and criticism with practice. In my course Visualizing Race students compare their DNA, personal identity and medium to understand how race and representation operate within Visual Culture. I am currently exploring ways to make environmental concerns a vital component of the graphic design curriculum.