

Design: accomplice or ally to consumption?

By Alvaro Magaña

In response to the article “Sign consumption”, the question arises: which is, or should be, design's relationship with economical culture?

Perhaps Martín Álvarez Comesaña's diagnostic on [Sign Consumption](#) is accurate from a verification point of view: it describes the situation of exercising design and its immediate stage. However, I find arguable the language and implications connoted by the used concepts.

I do not argue with the “alienating” aspects of globalization, the gradual loss of power and symbolic representation that harms weak and recessive cultures in contrast with mega-corporations and its media power. However, this stage has become the concept framework that, whether we like it or not, has been imposed, with or without the people's consent. Against all “humanist” forecast —and let's not say “progressist” □□—, it has accomplished not only to install itself as a single discourse, but also convincingly proven to work, solidified as a verification of the human practices that make it happen; to the point that has come to believe that maybe market economy, that lives and outlives in consumption, is the evolution of the survival of the fittest. Something that undoubtedly sounds to us as shortly human (or plain inhuman), but nonetheless is happily accepted by the population turned both market and target group —through credit access—, symbol consumers, of status and brands.

Fetishes, fragmentation, consumption; concepts mentioned by Álvarez Comesaña, look to me that are usually applied as judgments of value over phenomenons that people itself has adopted in their actions and whose construction, even if demanding the presence of design (perhaps its complicity), is not its exclusive product, not by a long shot. At best, we could plead acquiescence, but we'd lack analyzing whether such acquiescence isn't also fruit of design's immediate interests: to create value, to open markets, to differentiate products, to give businesses an identity. Which forces us to think if design has clearly defined to who it serves, how and why.

The construction of contemporary reality, both western and not-so-western, simply demonstrates that there are logics and mechanisms (globalization, market economy, political and economical pragmatism) whose social cost cannot be accounted just to the power of a central axis opposed to a periphery, as it remains to be seen whether such periphery adapts, accepts or has a minimal organic that decides to oppose resistance to the change pushed by the dominant cultural center, which obviously is also of economical nature.

And that is a matter of legality and political constitutionality.

Hardly design will oppose such mechanics, at best it can provide criticism by merging with these, in the consumption logic and assimilating itself with the market, for there's its

justification as an economical value, and by the way, if it doesn't it's in danger of disappearing as a significant activity.

Design exists because there is industry and there are standards, because there is economy and consumption. I don't believe there's a point in analyzing its role or its participation in culture, from a certain anti-global suspicion, ignoring that fetish, consumption, aspiration, as negative as it seems to us, is part of human nature and an excellent work material for an effective communication. A chance for development.

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