



HOW DID WE COME TO THIS?



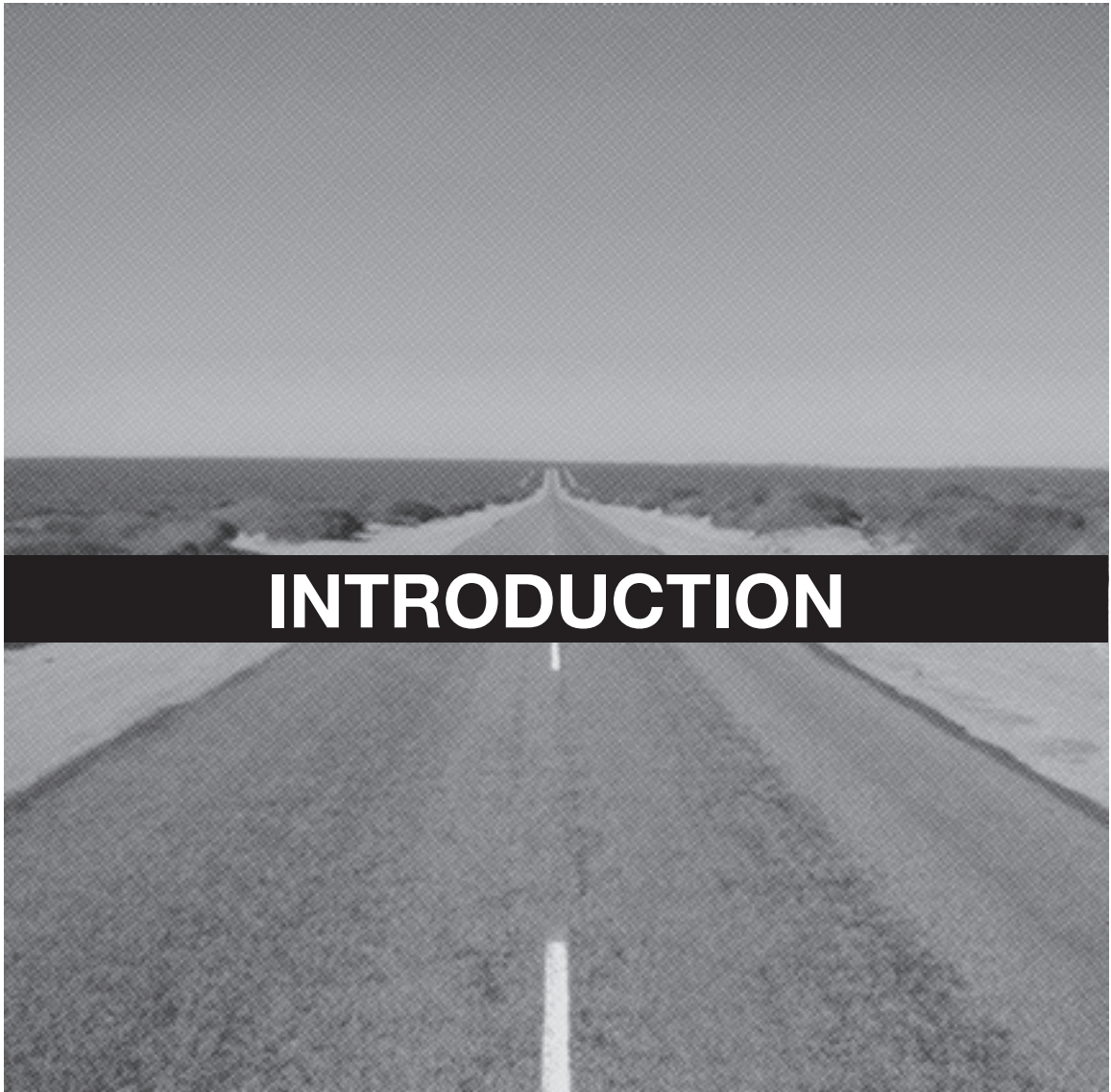
HOW DID WE COME TO THIS?

The relationship between media and politics under capitalist democracies.

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What is the desired outcome of this thesis and why do I want to achieve it?

I have always been interested in cultural values - what we as a society deem important and how we regard ideas like charity or individualism. My Bachelor studies in graphic design led me to look at the relationship between cultural values and media environments. What I was intrigued by was the way media could both reflect and influence our values - not only that what we see and hear around us can influence our opinions, but that it can also reflect the general priorities and values of a society. This realisation led me to various design projects that analysed western media environments in terms of their content and their effect on our ideology. During my research for this thesis I became primarily interested in why certain perspectives receive prominence over others in our media landscape.

That question has led me to investigate the trends of ownership, wealth and therefore control in western capitalist democracies, and to realise that nearly all aspects life have fallen under the control of a wealthy minority. The concentration that has occurred is surprisingly well understood: in 2008 opinion polls showed that 94% of people in the US believed that the government was run by a few special interests who did not pay any attention to the public will. In fact “the top 300,000 Americans collectively enjoyed almost as much income as the bottom 150 million Americans. Per person, the top group earned 440 times as much as the average person in the bottom half earned, nearly doubling the gap from 1980” [nytimes.com].

The control of information is one of many means used to maintain such social inequity. Noam Chomsky¹ once noted that ever since the general population managed to win enough rights to ensure it could no longer be ruled by force, business leaders and elite intellectuals realised that they would have to turn their attention to the control of attitudes and opinions to rule society. It was this desire, Chomsky states, that gave birth to the public relations industry in the freest countries in the world. Marshall McLuhan² also wrote about the importance of information in the electronic age in 1967: “Real, total war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle electric informational media —under cold



1



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conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front — a surround — involving everybody — all the time — everywhere. Whenever hot wars are necessary these days, we conduct them in the backyards of the world with the old technologies. These wars are happenings, tragic games. It is no longer convenient, or suitable, to use the latest technologies for fighting our wars, because the latest technologies have rendered war meaningless. The hydrogen bomb is history's exclamation point. It ends an age-long sentence of manifest violence!"

If it is understood that control of information is a key factor in perpetuating the social injustices that we endure today, then providing alternative media messages must be seen as a step towards solving those injustices. By doing so, people can be exposed to values that are not purely based on profit and thus form a more complete understanding of the world. I therefore aim in this project to find ways of achieving this diversity - by designing my own alternative messages and giving people the opportunity to make their own.

The opening section of this thesis looks to demonstrate the upward transfer of wealth that has taken place under neo-liberalism since the 70s. This is followed by a section looking at how this transfer has affected control of information and ideological debate in the media. Alongside these two chapters I document various design experiments I made that were inspired by my research. I then show some existing examples of various ways in which people have tried to diversify the media - laying out my conclusions afterwards. The last section is a design proposal that describes my final solution, followed by an evaluation.

A black and white photograph of several stacks of US dollar bills, including \$100 and \$20 bills, arranged in a cluster. A black horizontal bar is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text 'WEALTH AND POWER' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

WEALTH AND POWER

How has neo-liberalism effected economic and political power in the West?



1

Wealth and power under neo-liberalism

This chapter illustrates how neo-liberalism has transferred wealth and therefore power to the upper sections of society, whilst creating an increasingly difficult financial situation for the rest of the population. These facts form the basis of my motivation for change, and inform my understanding of how media is controlled.



2

Elizabeth Warren¹ is a US economist who has studied wealth distribution in America from the perspective of the average family, and has carried out extensive research comparing the financial situation of average family in 1970 to 2008. In a lecture titled “The Coming Collapse of the Middle Class” she showed her findings.

Warren notes that the biggest economic difference between the average family in the 1970s and today is that over the course of a single generation the average US family became one where both parents worked. This doubling of income would normally lead one to predict that families would be much wealthier, with more holidays and less debt and less bankruptcy. However, whilst the average family’s wages have gone up as a whole, individual wages for the average job have not increased at all, and the percentage of income being put into savings has fallen from 11% in 1970 to 0% in 2001². In fact since then it has become negative, and debt as a percentage of annual income has increased from 1.4% to 15% in 2005. All of which means that the family is spending everything that “moms new income” brings to the family, everything they used to save and went into debt another 15% of income on top. They spent it all.



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If one looks at the spending of today's family, expenditure on consumer goods has stayed constant or gone down. These items however are all things that are small and flexible - a family can decide to spend less on clothes or food should it need to. The increases on the other hand are large, fixed expenses that only took up half the family's salary in 1970 and take three quarters of it today: namely mortgage payments (up 72%), health insurance (up 74%) and car expenses (up 54%). One consequence of this is that the family today has to bring home two salaries to make the monthly mortgage payment, and if either of them loses their income through redundancy, health problems or family break up - they don't make it. The family in 1970 not only had more cash to cope, but also had the resource of another worker should they need it. Furthermore the risk of losing your job has not stayed constant - the chance of a family suffering a 20% drop in income or "income volatility" has gone up by 95%, whilst unemployment and other state benefits have decreased.

Unsurprisingly all this has meant that (according to Warren's research) numbers of families filing for bankruptcy per thousand has gone up by 400% proportionally since 1980, and the average family filing for bankruptcy in 2007 owed more than a year's income in debt (\$30,000)³. One must also bear in mind that all of these figures are for the average family, and that the situation of less than median earners is worse. One needs only look at the "tent cities" created by the recent mortgage crisis in the US to the inability of working class people to make a decent living from their jobs.

Dean Baker is another US economist who has looked at some of the policies that have brought about this situation in a book titled “The Conservative Nanny State: How The Wealthy Use the Government To Stay Rich And Get Richer”. He discusses many different aspects of neo-liberal policy, but to take a specific example I will look at how international trade agreements have been formulated to benefit the rich.

Design experiment (1)



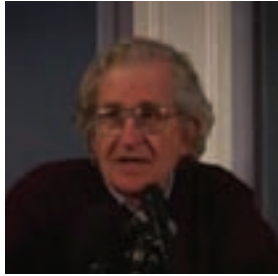
One of my first attempts to visualise income inequality was to design objects in the same proportion. Here two candles whereby 60 percent of the wicks are using 95% of the wax. These experiments however were too abstract and did not convey a specific enough message.

The basic effect of these deals has been to increase the supply of less skilled labour into the market (suppressing wages) whilst restricting the supply of more skilled professionals (inflating their wages). NAFTA and CAFTA were “explicitly designed to place manufacturing workers in the United States in direct competition with low wage workers in Mexico, Central America, Malaysia, and China.” In fact before any agreement is signed, a whole range of conditions are laid out that the partner nation must comply with - if it wants to secure the vast amount of investment offered. Those conditions, due to their nature, are best delivered by authoritarian/anti-democratic regimes. Noam Chomsky in his 1999 book “The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism” demonstrated that exactly constitutes “a favourable investment climate” in the third world. The conditions that are sought are things like: the removal of tariffs, the removal of health and safety

regulations, the removal of environmental regulations, decreased taxation for foreign investors, authoritarian measures to undermine workers unions, decreased workers welfare programmes and restrictions on any efforts to use the resources of a country for its own people. In fact his research shows that those countries with the worst human rights violations have received the most US aid and foreign investment.

While corporate CEOs are invited into planning sessions, if not the actual negotiations, of trade agreements, schools and hospitals are never asked what is inhibiting them from employing more people from developing countries. The free trade in physicians which might bring US doctors' salaries down to European levels, would save \$100,000 per doctor, approximately \$80 billion a year. If it were applied to University professors "Wal-Mart Universities could hire faculty of comparable quality to the faculty at existing universities, at a fraction of the price, [and] could hugely undercut existing universities' tuition. This would force existing universities to either go out of business or adopt similar hiring policies. But instead licensing and immigration laws have the very opposite effect... While it is hard to defend these protectionist policies on economic or moral grounds, the nanny state conservatives routinely deny that protection for highly paid professionals exists. It is obviously self serving to attribute their relative success to their skill and hard-work as opposed to their control over trade policy, but as long as the nanny state conservatives write the news stories and teach the economics courses it will be difficult to get free trade for professionals on the agenda."





Noam Chomsky on the same subject:

“Used neutrally globalisation just means international integration. Everybody is in favour of it. But the term has been appropriated by a narrow section of power and privilege to apply to their version of international integration - the investor rights version. And it makes sense for them to try and own the term, because it means anyone who’s opposed to it is anti-globalisation, which means they’re some kind of primitive who wants to go back to the stone age. Using the term neutrally now - has [globalisation] increased or has it decreased? In many respects its decreased. The core of free trade according to Adam Smith was what he called ‘the free circulation of labour’ meaning people can go wherever they want. Well if we measure that, it turns out that the peak period was about a century ago. Relative to population the ability of people to move around was higher then than its ever been since... In other measures globalisation has increased very fast. Like movement of capital between borders has escalated astronomically in the last 25 years.... Among its other properties are that countries

Design experiment (2)



Other early ideas were to design objects that made physical the illogical rational of capitalist systems. This example is designed to demonstrate the profitability of pollution - offering the user cash money to dispense the contents of a trash can on the street.

have to open up their borders to imports. So they have to accept imports from highly subsidised US and European and Canadian agribusiness, which of course instantly wipes out domestic production for domestic needs, and that means that poor farmers are stuck. One thing they can do is flee to the cities, which has the nice effect of creating a massive labour force which lowers wages and means that US and European manufacturers or by now Japanese and Korean manufacturers who are putting assembly plants abroad can benefit from cheaper labour”.

The way in which wealthy interests dictate public policy has been written about by Thomas Ferguson in his book “Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems”¹. In it Ferguson argues that elections are “moments when investors coalesce to control the state”. He notes that because of the money involved in political campaigns, only those policies who have the support of wealthy donors, will ever become “politically viable”. Indeed nine out of the last ten US elections have been won by the party that spent the most money, and the kinds of investors that are most numerous in any given election has been a good indicator of the sorts of policies that would be introduced.

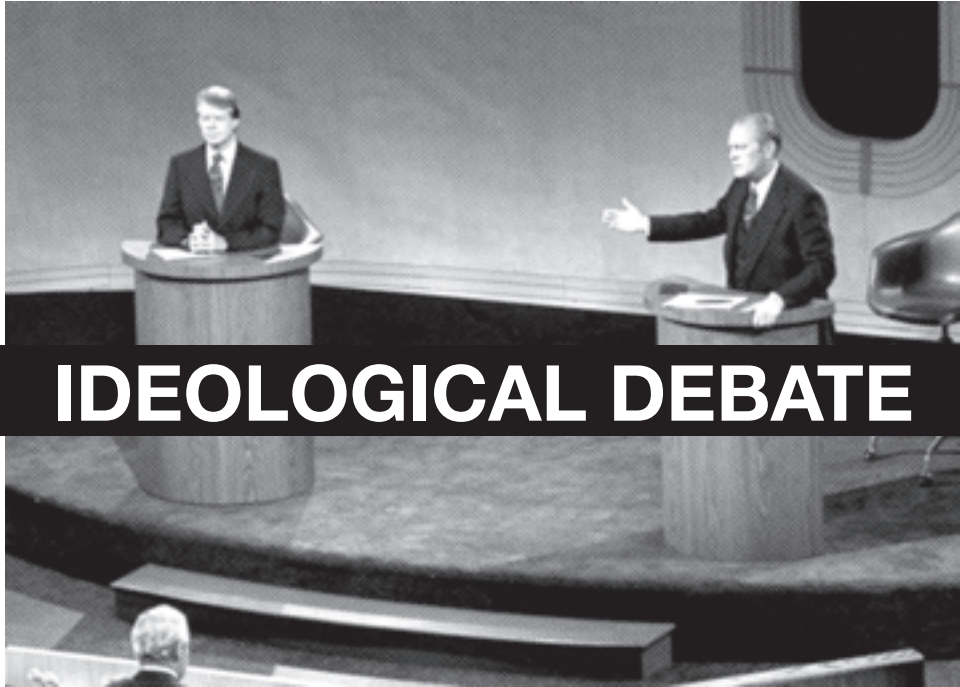


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This should not come as a surprise when one considers the massive costs involved in influencing government. One has to spend a great deal of time, money and effort finding out what the state is actually doing, you have to sort through all the different policy options that will benefit you, you have to lobby politicians to vote for those options and finally you have to monitor if they live up to the campaign promises - and if they don't you have to do something to persuade them back onto course. Ordinary voters can't typically afford those costs, but business leaders can. As Noam Chomsky has pointed out in lectures “the recent health care debate in the US has not come about because of a change in public opinion - the public has been in favour of universal

health care for decades - but because labour intensive industries like General Motors are being hurt by the huge costs of the privatised medical system". Because in the US the population is not well mobilised, businesses have not been forced into one party and to compete with Labour parties. As a result party politics is a competition between different sectors of the business community. This kind of competition, that occurs exclusively between business groups, results in some quite narrow parameters. Businesses are for example unlikely to offer higher taxes on themselves, medical care at their expense, unionisation, nationalised services or increased environmental regulation. They do however offer things like public works, military expenditure, investment in education and other things that benefit elites as well as ordinary people.

This analysis has focused on the US because it is the most extreme example of neo-liberal ideology carried out to its logical conclusion. By looking at the US I believe one can learn those things that are desirable and less so in European systems which have adopted the same policies to varying degrees. With these realities laid down as a background, I will in the next section (again focusing on America) look at how ideological debate via political parties and the media has been affected by the economic inequalities of neo-liberalism.



How is political discussion manipulated by the wealthy?

Ideological debate under neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism has had a similar effect on media as it has had on the economic and political situation described previously - to place it under the control of a few rich people. The consequences of this are numerous and include: a narrowing of the range of voices and opinions being expressed in the mass media, an increase in the commercialization of news and information, a hollowing out of the news media's ability to conduct investigative reporting and act as the public watchdog and an increase of emphasis on the bottom line, which prioritizes infotainment and celebrity news over informative discourse.

This concentration has been encouraged by government deregulation and neo-liberal trade policies. For example, the US Telecommunications Act of 1996 discarded most media ownership rules that were previously in place, leading to massive consolidation in the telecommunications industry. Over 4,000 radio stations were bought out, and minority ownership of TV stations dropped to its lowest point since the federal government began tracking such data in 1990. In its review of the Telecommunication Act in 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) further reduced restrictions and allowed media corporations to grow and expand into other areas of media. Similarly in Canada in 1990, 17.3% of daily newspapers were independently owned; in 2005 that figure fell to just 1%.

With this kind of ownership structure in place, the kinds of issues that are afforded a prominent place in the media are explained by Thomas Ferguson. He describes how parties will focus on trivial issues to appeal to mass sectors of the population, but leave key policy decisions (that only benefit a small minority of campaign contributors) out of discussion:

“Look around you, read newspaper coverage and try to figure out - reading the New York Times even - which businesses are backing Obama versus which are backing McCain. The truth is they don’t cover it much... The press in the United States is almost entirely commercial [advertising], and it won’t print - for reasons of profit - stuff that makes them all look bad. All they want to talk about is the horse race, who’s up and who’s down in whatever poll... Each political party will carve out a kind of base for itself and keeps repeating a relatively simple formulaic set of things to appeal to that base. You can see this very clearly in the voting data - after the late eighties the Republicans stopped appeals to race and moved to religion much more. And the way they did that was to keep highlighting issues like abortion, and to keep manically concentrating on that in public. Building your base. Democrats aimed at women and various minorities - that’s your mass politics. But it’s not the same thing as what makes investors contribute.”



Noam Chomsky on the same subject:

“On almost all issues, citizens could not identify the stands of the candidates - as intended. Issues on which the public differs from elite opinion are generally left off the agenda... The public relations industry aims to keep issues in the margins and focus on personalities, character and so on. They look at public opinion studies and they know perfectly well that on a host of major issues both parties are well to the right of the population... Among working people, noneconomic issues such as gun ownership and religiosity were leading factors, so that people often voted against their own primary interests.”



Which one of Obama's policies Do you like the most?

“Well... not one particular policy, but his whole... his whole... all together... his whole bandwagon of change. That's all he wants, is to change”

What change do you like the most?

“In particular?..... I can't tell you”



What is your favorite policy of John McCain?

“Protecting the country”

And apart from that?

“The economy”

Which economic policy of his do you like?

“... I don't know”



Why are you going to vote for Hilary Clinton?

“Because I think she’s the best one for the job”

What is your favourite policy that she has?

“What? ... I haven’t watched too many of her debates”



Out of Obama's policies, which do you like?

"Well, I just like him because he's a democrat, and I don't really care for Hilary Clinton"

And what do you not like about Hilary's policies?

"Well... I don't... I don't know about the policies [laughs]"

Design experiment (3)



As I began to research how the politics was dealt with in the mass media, I thought that methods of helping people associate with different ideologies and thus learn more about the issues.

With this kind of deliberate framing of issues, ideological debate is reduced to a narrow choice between commodities. Commodities that are devised by the rich and marketed to the public by the PR industry. The effect of being deluged by such propaganda from infancy, is that people eventually begin to accept the idea of their lives being meaningless and subordinate. Even when they are motivated, the public's role is confined to one similar to Obama's Army - one that must take orders and "forget ridiculous ideas about managing [it's] own affairs" [NC].

Dean Baker comments on the narrow range of ideology in the preface to his book:

"The key flaw in the stance that most progressives have taken on economic issues is that they have accepted a framing whereby conservatives are assumed to support market outcomes, while progressives want to rely on the government... The reality is that conservatives have been quite actively using the power of the government to shape market outcomes in ways that redistribute income upward. However, they have been clever enough to not own up to their role in this process, pretending all along that everything is just the natural working of the market and progressives have been foolish enough to go along with this view. The frustration with this futile debate, where conservatives like markets and progressives like government, is the driving force behind this book."

One needs only to look at Rupert Murdoch's Fox News for the kind of "futile debate" that Baker is referring to:

"Tonight I'm going to tie some of these things together: how the government is moving to nationalise our banks. Does that sound like a good idea to anybody? We're setting salary caps for bailed out company executives. The move towards universal health care. I'm going to show you how these things are happening today and they line up with some of the goings on in history's worst socialist, fascist countries. When did socialism become a happy thing for us?" (Glenn Beck)



"If America is so bad, if capitalism is so bad, why do people in Cuba get in broken down dilapidated rickety boats or inner tubes to come here. Why do we have to build walls to prevent people coming in not going out... My parents came here for freedom. Not for guaranteed health care, not for guaranteed school, not for guaranteed housing - they came here for freedom... The government is incompetent. Why do you put your faith in government? I want Americans to be free. Capitalism made you, a kid from Flint Michigan a multimillionaire. It made me, the son of Irish immigrants, a successful person. Capitalism allowed that to happen. Castro would not let that happen. Socialism destroys incentive, it destroys wealth, it lowers the standard of living. America has created a standard of living that is the envy of the world because people in freedom were able to dig down deep in their hearts and souls to find their god given talent, and that made everybody rich. Even the poorest among us. I've been in some of the poorest housing projects and they live reasonably well by world standards". (Sean Hannity with Michael Moore)





Such analysis presents an incredibly narrow view of the world - and is hugely orientated to defending the principles of the wealthy. The goal is to demonise government, which is the only tool people have control over to press for their own rights. With such a view being broadcast into millions of people's homes, the need for other perspectives to enter the ideological spectrum is obvious. The next section will look at various examples of people who have tried to do just that.



Existing examples of people trying to promote alternative messages.

Media democracy

There are a great many independent political organisations dedicated to a range of humanitarian causes that use various media to get their message across. As explained previously however, the financial resources available to these groups are dwarfed by those available to parties that pander to multinational corporate interests, and as a result their message and their impact is smaller. The social movement that aims to democratise mass media ownership is commonly referred to as “media democracy” and advocates reforming the mass media, strengthening public service broadcasting, and developing and participating in alternative media and citizen journalism.



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Attempts to set up large alternative mass media outlets have been carried out in television by independent news networks like Democracy Now¹, a syndicated program of news, analysis, and opinion aired by more than 700 radio, television, satellite and cable TV networks in North America. The manifesto of the network is to “provide [its] audience with access to people and perspectives rarely heard in the US corporate-sponsored media, including independent and international journalists, ordinary people from around the world who are directly affected by US foreign policy, grass roots leaders and peace activists, artists, academics and independent analysts.” The Adbusters Media Foundation² is an example that uses the magazine medium and describes itself as “a global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs who want to advance the new social activist movement of the information age.” As well as publishing the magazine Adbusters has been associated with a variety of campaigns. One such campaign was “Media Carter” a charter that was signed by 30,000 people demanding that the public airwaves should be made truly public and

not just a corporate domain. In 2004 the Adbuster's Media Foundation filed a lawsuit against six major Canadian television broadcasters for refusing to air their videos in the television commercial spots that Adbusters attempted to purchase.



1

The internet

The internet has been a revolutionary tool in giving everyone the equal opportunity to cheaply spread media messages. You Tube, under the slogan “broadcast yourself”, is the epitome of the new era of user generated media content and “citizen journalism”. In this context everyone is free to add their opinion to a discussion. The last UK general election for example has seen web sites like “mydavidcameron.com”¹ appear - allowing users to change the conservative party slogan to whatever they choose.



Outdoor advertising

The democratisation that has taken place on the internet has not happened to the same extent in public space. The use of our physical environment for the display of messages is controlled more strictly than the digital realm, but has also been recklessly sold out and privatised. The use of public space to represent the priorities of wealthy elites for promoting commercial messages is sometimes referred to as “ad creep”. People in the advertising industry still consider a piece of physical ambient advertising as a medium with enduring power:

“Basically, if you want to build a brand, posters are the strongest medium. They can be seen everywhere, they’re impactful, they make you look big. People might miss a TV ad, but if they’re driving in on the same arterial routes every day, they won’t miss a poster. And you can do it quite cheaply. You can just take six arterial routes and have a poster on each of them and everyone thinks that they’ve seen the biggest brand around.”

Simon Sinclair, Director of Pravda advertising agency

“ When people are at their most inaccessible, billboards have the power to inform, entertain and persuade. They are unavoidable, larger than life, can’t be switched off, free to be consumed, and importantly, provide a cost-effective way of reaching thousands of people every week.”

Clearchannel

The power of outdoor messaging has sparked many efforts to change the tone of what we see and hear around us every day. The Loesje poster collective¹ is one example of a small group of citizens making an effort to spread their own messages in public space. Local groups of people meet weekly to write texts that are later turned into posters and spread around the city. The groups exist all over the world but report to a central office which directs how the posters should be generated and designed.



1

Similarly, graffiti has been a medium used by individuals to express their views in public throughout history. Graffiti messages are most usually sentiments made by people who lack the resources available to those in power (who use television and paid advertising to promote their beliefs). Sometimes these messages exist by themselves in their own right, but there are also examples of people altering existing messages in an attempt to subvert their meaning - this practice is sometimes referred to as “culture jamming”.





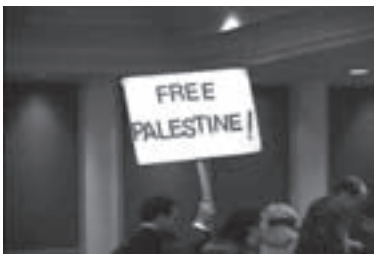
One example is the “speech bubble project”⁴ whereby one artist stuck blank speech bubbles onto existing advertising in US cities. These were later filled in by the public who were allowed to create their own meaning from the adverts.

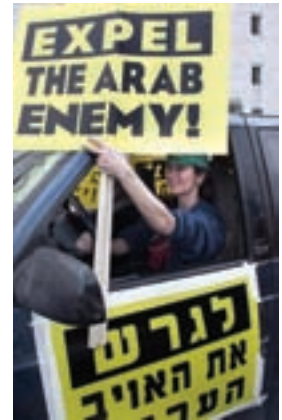
Protest

Another method people use to express a message they feel is not being heard, is through protest. Without the financial resources needed to access conventional mass media, protesters resort to the most basic means of communication: writing a sign and holding it in public. Protest is a powerful act that carried a huge amount of symbolism because it is so obviously a last resort of a passionate person. After the 9/11 attacks in the US it was fascinating to see how in times of crisis people instinctively expressed themselves through graphic communication, whether it be on a banner, graffiti or writing on a T shirt.









T-shirts

The objects we own, whether that be our car or domestic possessions have always been understood as extensions of our character and personality. T-shirts however have been used to express personal sentiment more explicitly than any other. The fact that they are the only piece of clothing commonly used for graphic communication, and because they are worn on the body - has made them a popular vehicle for carrying a message. T-shirts did not evolve from undergarment to fashionable, stand alone, outer-wear garments until after the Second World War. But when they did they quickly became a medium for self-expression and advertising, with any imaginable combination of words, art and photographs on display. More recently they have been commonly used as a means to express association with prominent designer-name logos, rock bands or other icons of culture.

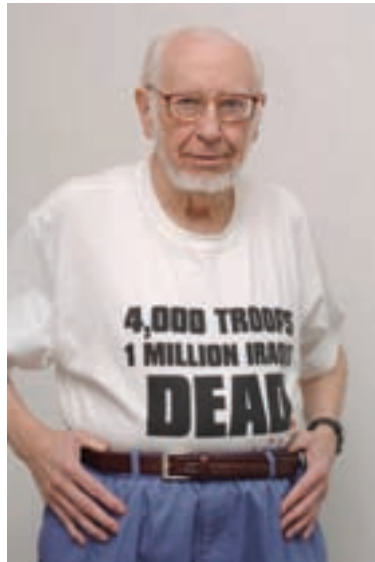
Designer Kathrine Hamnett is the most famous example of using the T-shirt for political messages. She began making t-shirts with bold ideological statements in the 80's:

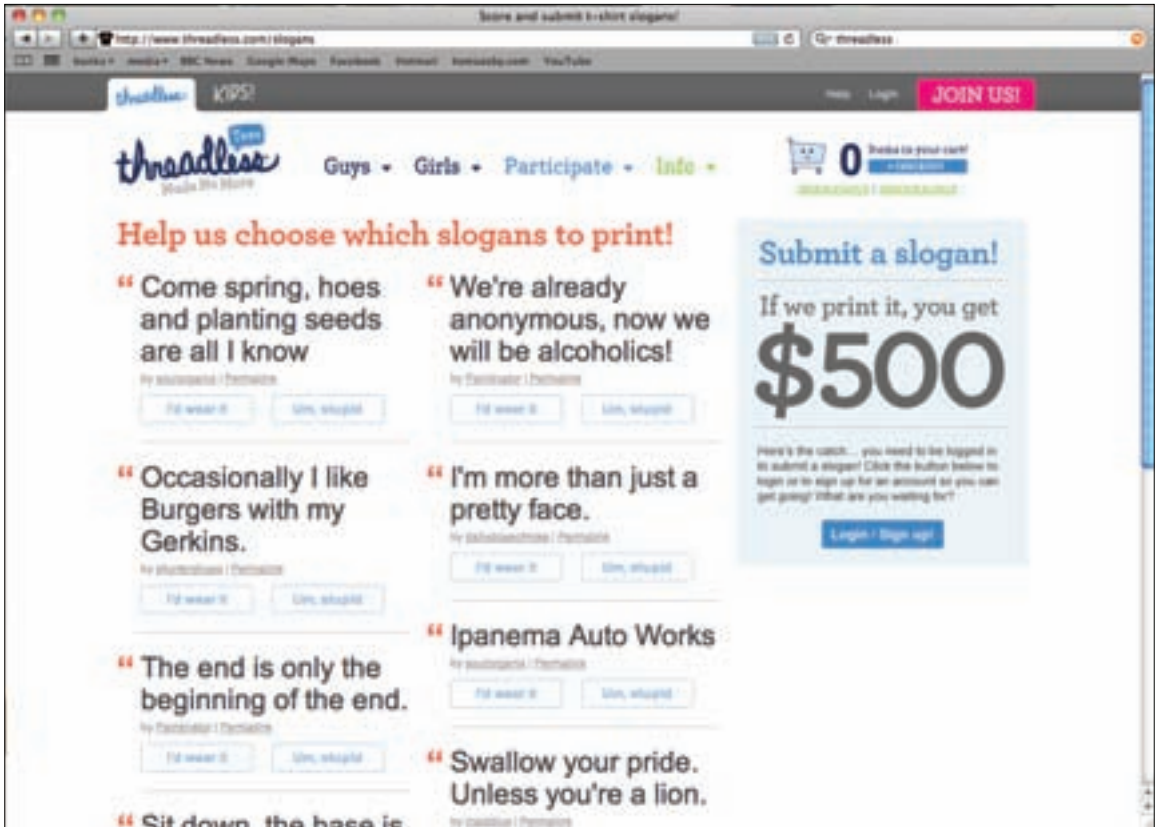
“The early 80's was a hard time for democracy. People were feeling voiceless and powerless. Thatcher was aligning herself with Reagan - railroading us into senseless wars like the Falklands. It was the time of Greenham Common and yet there was a European-wide proliferation of cruise and Pershing missiles, although 58% of the population was opposed. Democracy hadn't delivered, protest wasn't working. Voices were falling on deaf ears. In 1983 I launched the world's first slogan t-shirts. Slogans such as 'CHOOSE LIFE' became part of a movement to effect change. To this day my slogan t-shirts are copied, worn and reiterated. From a political perspective, it's exactly what I set out to achieve - to sow seeds of change and help people create a voice.”

www.katharinehamnett.com

Today people continue to use the T-shirt as a way of associating themselves with an idea, lifestyle or philosophy. Every corporation, political party or social movement - commercial or otherwise - is likely to have a t-shirt as part of its promotional material. Like the poster they are an enduring medium.







There are many examples of online companies that give people the opportunity to come up with their own slogans and imagery. However, when left with a free choice most people will still focus their attention on the vague trivialities of fashionable consumption, producing statements like: “24 cans of beer in a crate, 24 hours in a day. Coincidence?”



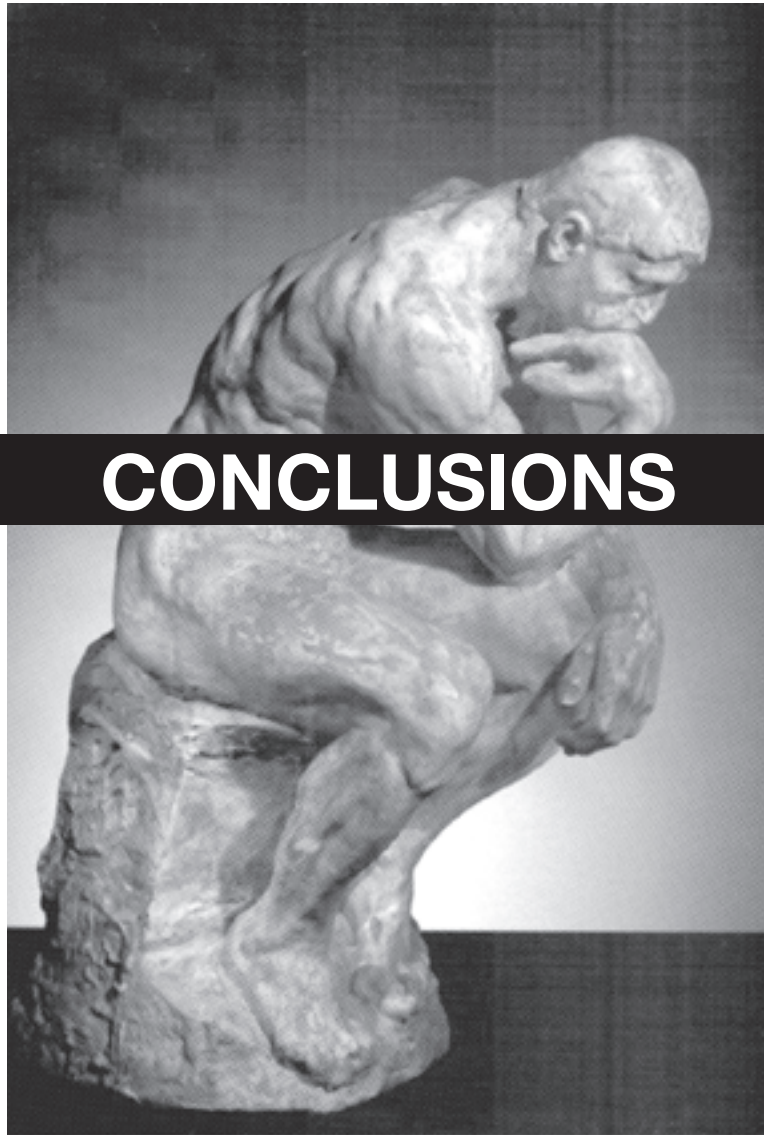
The Arts

In all cultural expression there exists a constant battle between mainstream monied interests and people that go against them. In art, films books and songs people there are people talking and speaking out against injustice. As media ownership has concentrated however, the opportunities for film makers, writers, or musicians to carry out such projects has been greatly reduced. Michael Moore's book "Downsize This" for example was banned from all US Borders book shops because it advocated workers unions. However, companies operate on the bottom line and when it sees a profit in something it will fund a project - as was the case with Michael's film Farenheit 9/11, but such opportunities are reserved for established artists who are guaranteed to make a profit.

Publicly funded museums and art galleries, precisely because they are publicly owned, enjoy greater freedom to exhibit work that addresses social issues. Artist Mark Wallinger¹ for example exhibited an exact recreation of protestor Brian Haw's thirty foot anti-war display in the Tate Britain, after it was removed under newly introduced laws banning public protest within a mile of the houses of parliament in London.



Tate Modern in London states that part of its priorities “to promote public knowledge, understanding [and] inviting debate and exchange through art”. In 2007 for example the museum held an exhibition in response to the fact that of that year more than half the world population would be living in a city. “Global Cities” showed work by more than 20 artists and architects that offered interpretations of urban conditions in ten major cities as well as a host data originally assembled for the 10th International Architecture Exhibition at the 2006 Venice Biennial. Individual artists, through the context of a publicly funded gallery have also used the opportunity to raise important political issues.



CONCLUSIONS

What are the positives and negatives of the examples I have found?

From all the research that I have carried out for this project I have reached conclusions in three areas. Firstly the more factual research of the first chapter lead me to conclude that wealth has indeed congregated in a few hands, and has been the direct result of neo-liberal capitalist policies. From the second chapter I concluded that the imbalance of economic power has translated into monopoly control of major mass media outlets, which has resulted in a very limited and specific understanding of political issues. I would thus like to use my design to challenge these trends and make people aware of what is happening in the political domain. People can only challenge unjust systems if they are allowed to learn about the various political forces acting upon them, to learn to question the validity of what they see and hear from their rulers. By providing this understanding, another side of the argument as it were, people are better equipped to formulate their own opinions. The final step in the process of political engagement is the opportunity to express one's own point of view and stand behind it.

Through researching into various ways of diversifying media messages, I reached conclusions as to what the best was to achieve this. I saw the art gallery or museum as an interesting context that was free from commercial restraints on content, and one that held a unique position in society as somewhere to address and contemplate important social ideas. I also loved the way people used protest signs and shirts as ways to express their political beliefs and wanted to use this in conjunction with an exhibition as a way for the ideas inside the exhibition to exist outside the gallery walls, and thus to effect the media environment that we encounter every day - and exist alongside commercial advertising. In contrast to this I felt that through my own experience of researching through the internet, web based information has a very isolating effect. It is an often noted phenomenon that although we are more connected to each other than at any other time in history, we are increasingly lonely and have fewer close personal relations. Swiss writer Max Frisch once described it as effectively "arranging the world so that we do not experience it". For this reason I felt it was important to incorporate some kind of physical activity and artefact that could exist in the real world as a reminded an memento of the ideas raised in the exhibition. Combining the act of looking at an exhibition with making a personal message also serves as a way to focus the viewer's mind and control what they will express - thus avoiding the banal statements that are produced when a user is given free reign.



DESIGN PROPOSAL



My design proposal consist of an exhibition of political ideas. The goal of the exhibition is to expose the viewer to political analysis that is rarely heard, but sorely needed, in mainstream media. The viewer's experience begins by being confronted with a series of questions that provokes them to consider how much they actually know about political systems. This is followed by a section explaining how information is controlled in western society, and with what effects. The final section offers visitors the chance to use the content of the exhibition to create their own meaning from it, and applying it to a shirt that they can take away with them. By the end of their experience the visitor will hopefully have been shocked and awoken to the otherwise invisible political forces acting upon their lives.



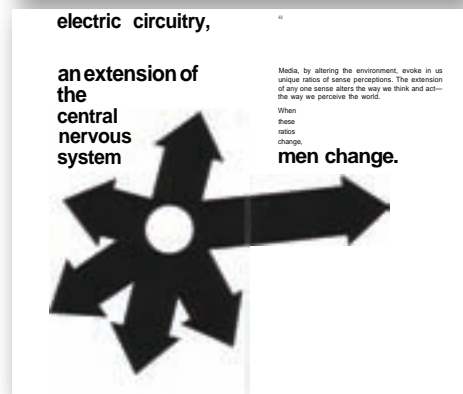
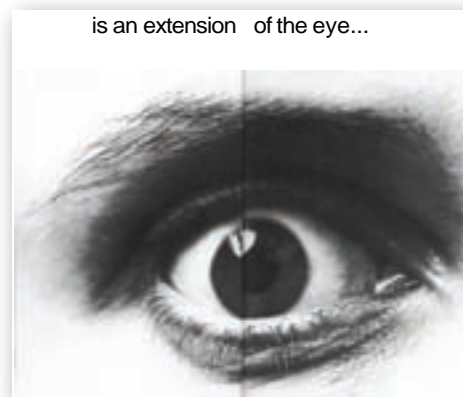
There are two possible target groups for this exhibition. The first is young people (18 to 25). Historically young people have been those most motivated by injustice, and humanitarian causes. For example, during the Vietnam War an article entitled, "Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America", found that students were more likely than any other age group to accuse the United States of having imperialistic goals in Vietnam. Students were also more likely to criticize the war as "immoral." The younger generation, with the unprecedented access to information, understands the world better than their seniors and is more in tune with global solidarity than any other. The second target group would be working class people, who suffer from the present system the most. These groups would be community centres, schools, youth centres, city art galleries and

museums, churches or public spaces in deprived neighbourhoods.

The graphic design of the exhibition will translate particular political ideas into quick visual symbols 1. In order to emphasise how meaning is can be created through word and image I will visually use very simple design language. The way Barbara Kruger¹ for example manages to change an images connotation by the her choice of words, is a good example of how, stylistically, to do this. Marshall McLuhan's seminal book "The medium is the message" is another good example of text and image being used in a simple but powerful way².



1





1



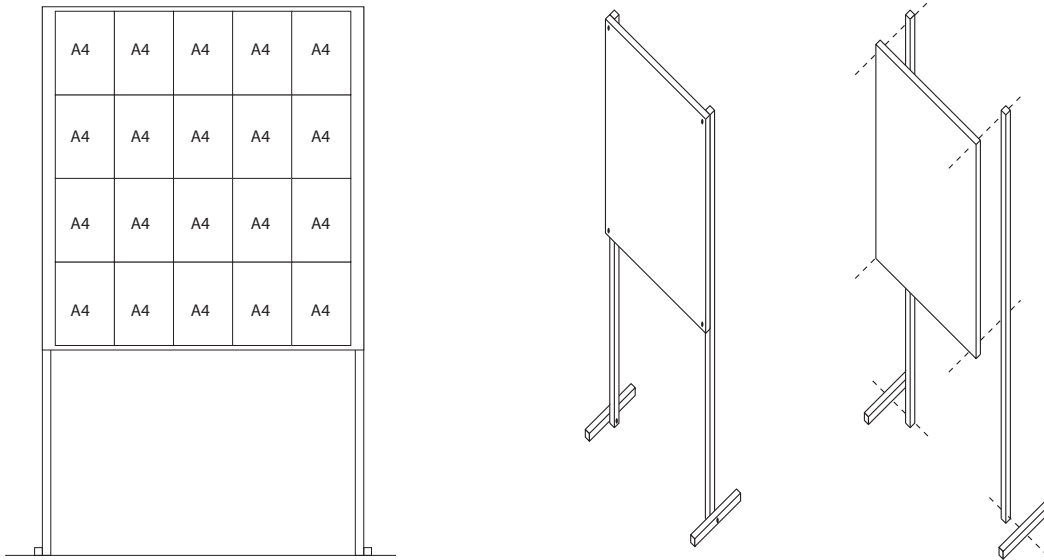
2

As mentioned at the end of the exhibition people will be given the opportunity to create their own messages. This will be done by providing a set of letters and images used in the exhibition printed on heat transfer paper¹. These elements can then be arranged by the visitor and transferred onto a T shirt using a heat press².

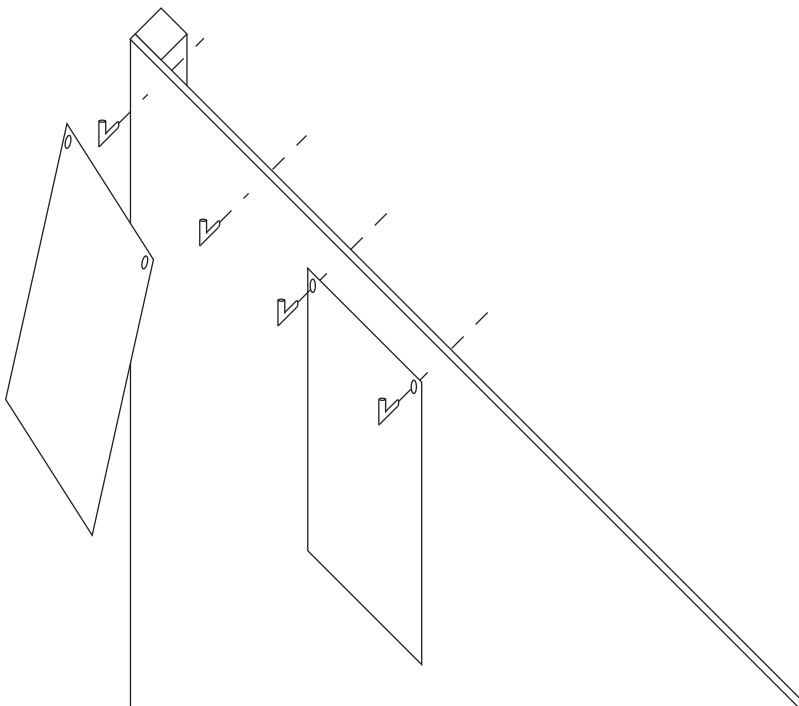


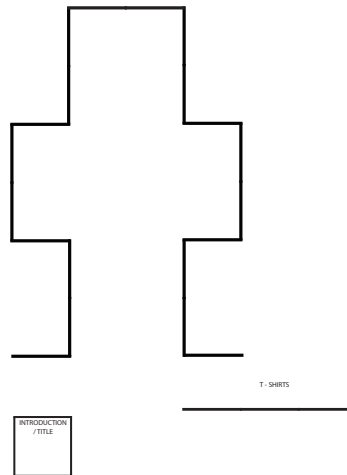
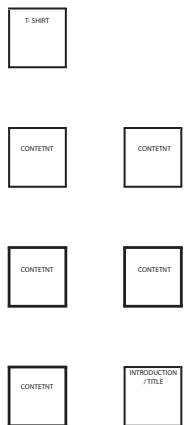
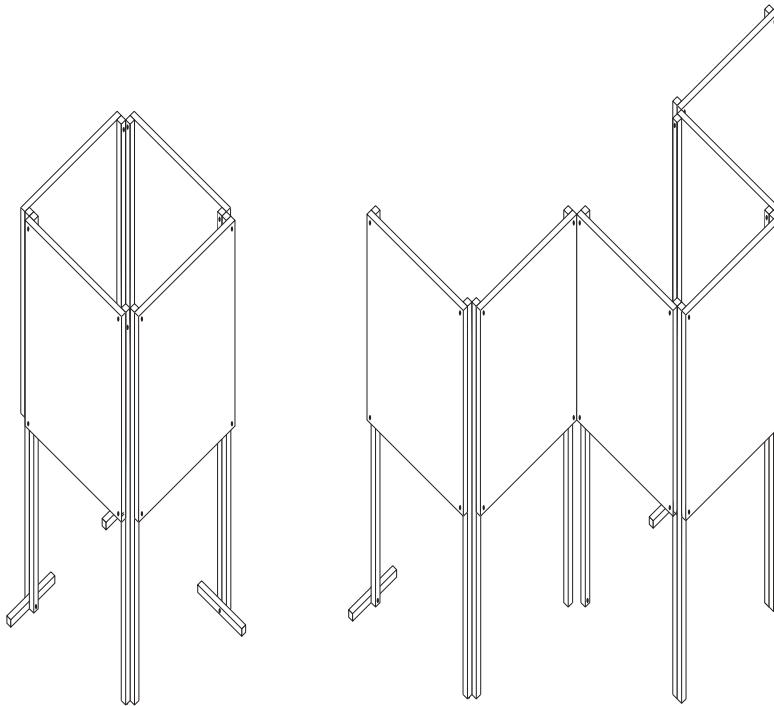
1

Because I am trying to emphasise the way information can be manipulated to create a great range of meanings, all design aspects will have a modular aesthetic. It is important that the content feels changeable and the expression of a certain point of view, that could be easily changed or produced by anyone. For this reason I will use the A series paper format, and build larger images by tiling smaller ones⁴. Similarly the display frames will use a simple materials and joining methods. This will help the show be more versatile to different spaces, and easily transportable and constructible, and will keep with the theme of making meaning with simple means³.

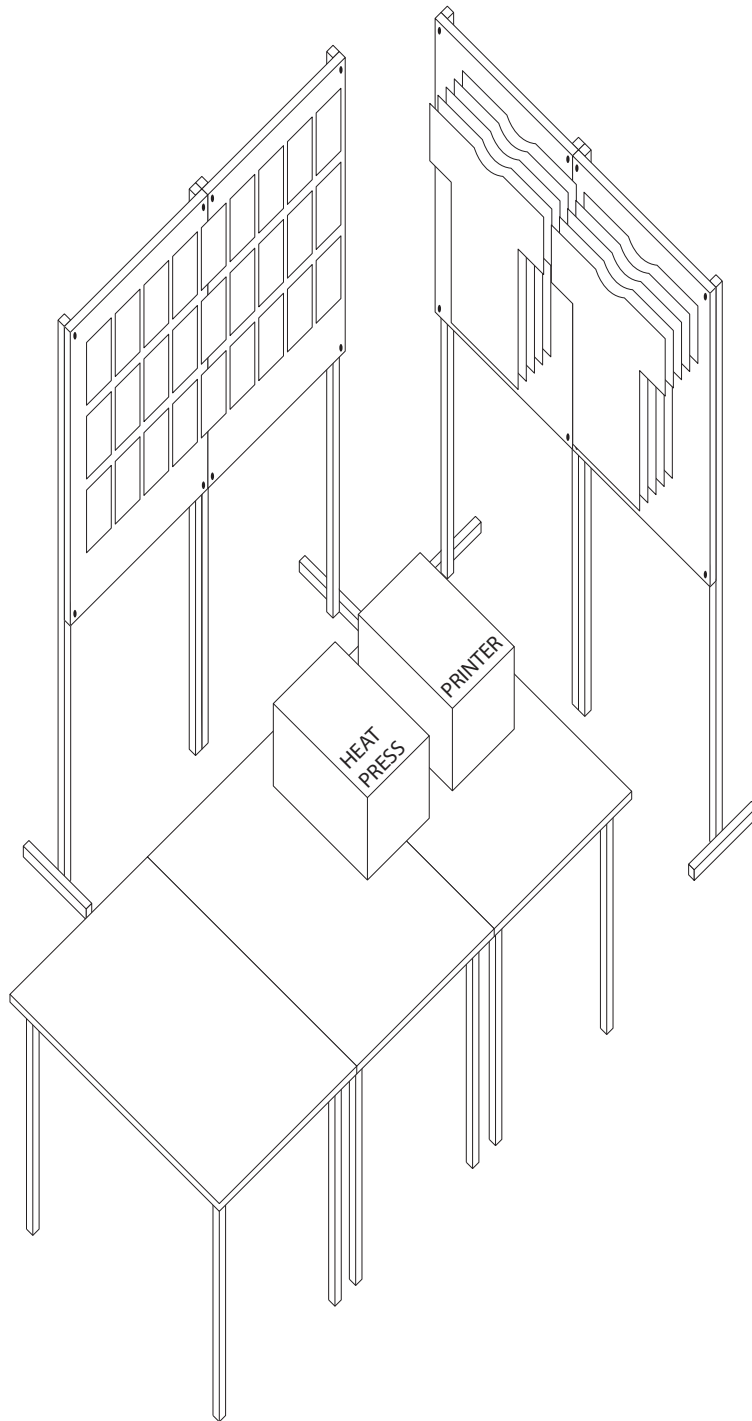


The exhibition stands will be made from two by four inch lengths attached to mdf sheets. In order to keep construction simple and allow for easy transportability, all joints will be secured by butterfly bolts that require no tools to tighten. Individual posters will be hooked onto the boards individually, to emphasise the changeability and subjectivity of the information.





Multiple stands could be arranged in various ways allowing the exhibition to be adaptable to different spaces.



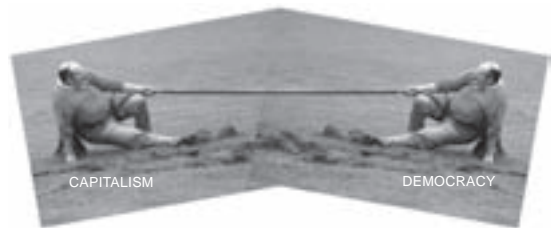
At the end of the exhibition visitors will be able to press their own shirts.



CAPITALISM'S APOCALYPSE



Whenever I've talked about capitalism, there would always be someone in the audience who would raise their hand and say "what about the entrepreneur, who starts a new business, creates a few jobs and does something for the community." I'm not talking about mom and pop grocery stores and other places that perform sensible services at a reasonable rate. We're not talking about that capitalism. We're talking about mega-capitalism. The trans-national corporations - Monsanto and Exxon and all these giant bruisers. A thousand small businesses, in terms of political economic power, have less influence than a few giant cartels. The small business today is like a squirrel dancing amongst the elephants.



There is a close relationship between capitalism and democracy - it's an antagonistic one. Historically capitalists have opposed democratic advance: the elimination of property qualifications for voting and holding office, the freedoms of an independent press, mass demonstrations, the right to collective bargaining, the right to public education for all, the living wage, safe working conditions, proportional representation. Today democracy still diluted and subverted, smothered with disinformation, media puffery, and mountains of campaign costs bringing faux victories to more or less politically safe major-party candidates.

Some examples of graphic design that translates political ideas. These images were part of a series of small booklets that presented lectures from Tony Benn, Noam Chomsky and Michael Parenti (pictured).




While fearful of democracy, the capitalist class claims democracy to be it's own invention - at home and abroad. But in the last half century the leading capitalist states have undermined, attacked and destroyed political reform movements and revolutionary movements in countries throughout South America, Central America, Africa and the Middle East.




Terrorist

Any nation that is not "investor friendly," that attempts to use its land, labor, capital, natural resources, and markets in a self-developing manner, outside the dominion of transnational corporate hegemony, runs the risk of being demonized and targeted as "a threat to security."



People think the middle east is a place where they did not have democracy, and we have a phony president who wages a war on Iraq to "teach" them democracy. Well, the Iraqis had a democratic revolution in 1958. It was a broad based coalition, and it was slowly undermined and destroyed through violence, and assassination and everything else. The leader of the counter-revolutionary movement, was a guy who was trained and advised and backed by the CIA - his name was Saddam Hussein. But you never hear about that, it's as though he was born in 2001.

MOST OF THE WORLD IS CAPITALIST



AND MOST OF THE WORLD IS POOR

Capitalism makes a claim not only to democracy but also to prosperity. But most of the world is capitalist, and most of the world is poor. One need only think of capitalist Nigeria, capitalist Indonesia, capitalist Thailand, capitalist Haiti, capitalist Colombia, capitalist Pakistan, capitalist South Africa, capitalist Latvia and many others - these are the models of utopian free-market societies. The goal of the capitalist class is to create more Indonesia's and fewer Denmarks.

POOR PEOPLE

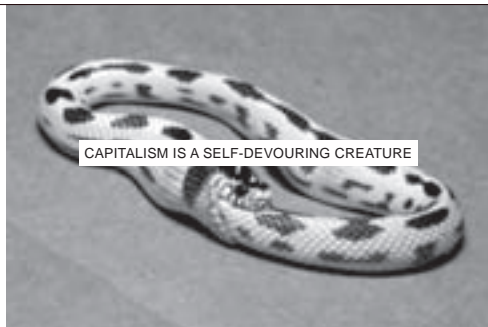


WORK HARDER

A prosperous, politically literate populace with high expectations about its standard of living and a keen sense of entitlement, pushing for continually better social conditions, is not the plutocracy's notion of an ideal workforce and a properly pliant population. Corporate investors prefer poor populations less equipped you to defend themselves against the abuses of wealth, because the poorer you are the harder you will work and for less.



Why is it that we won't work for 14 cents an hour the way the Indonesians do? Is it because we are more self-respecting? No, any prosperity we do enjoy exists because millions of people have waged bitter class struggles to advance their living standards and their rights as citizens, bringing some measure of humanity to an otherwise heartless politico-economic order. Struggles that have given us minimum wage law, the right to vote and public services.



As well as maintaining and protecting the process of capital accumulation, the function of the capitalist state is to protect capitalism from capitalists. There have been a number of Latin American countries that have experienced near meltdown because of a failure to reign in free marketeers who stripped enterprises, pocketed vast sums, and left the country's productive capacity in shambles. In the United States, the multi-billion-dollar plunder perpetrated by corporate conspirators at Enron, WorldCom, Harkin, Adelphia, and a dozen other major companies turned successful enterprises into sheer wreckage, wiping out the jobs and life savings of thousands of employees in order to pocket billions.



THE RATIONAL OUTCOME OF AN IRRATIONAL SYSTEM



Was the financial crisis of 2008-09 caused by a chronic tendency toward overproduction and financial accumulation, or was it the outcome of the greed? In other words - is the problem systemic or individual? The two are not mutually exclusive. Capitalism breeds immoral leaders, and rewards the most unscrupulous among them. The crimes and crises are not irrational departures from a rational system, but the opposite: the rational outcomes of an irrational and amoral system.



The multi-billion dollar government bailouts are themselves being turned into an opportunity for pillage, pulling vast sums from the national money machine, leaving the taxpayers to bleed. Those who scold us for "running to the government for a handout" are themselves running to the government for a handout, and have been offered a record feed at the public trough. While hundreds of billions is being doled out to the very people who had caused the catastrophe, the housing market has continued to wilt, credit has remained paralyzed, unemployment worsened, and consumer spending down to record lows.



FREE-MARKET CORPORATE CAPITALISM IS BY ITS NATURE A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

The essence of capitalism is the transformation of living nature into mountains of commodities, and commodities into heaps of dead capital. When left entirely to its own devices, it foists its toxicity on the public and the environment - and eventually begins to implode. The inequality in economic power that exists in our capitalist society translates into a formidable inequality of political power, which makes it all the more difficult to impose democratic regulations. But if the champions of capitalism want to know what really threatens "our way of life", it is their way of life. Their boundless way of bankrupting their own system, destroying the foundation on which they stand and the community on which they feed.



WORDS ADAPTED FROM WWW.MICHAELPARENTI.ORG



Reflection on my design proposal and process.

This project has been an extremely engaging process intellectually. I have deepened my understanding of political theory and learnt a great deal that I didn't know before. The themes and issues raised in this thesis, are what I firmly believe designers should be focusing their attention on. The battle for equality has been a bitter and bloody struggle that has preoccupied the greatest minds in history, from Socrates, to Aristotle, from Descartes to Kant. It has been a philosophical struggle whereby people who criticised power structures like the monarchy and the Church, have been killed and tortured for their beliefs. And so today the anti-capitalist, environmental and international solidarity movements, represent the forefront of human development, and are unsurprisingly demonised by elites.

My design proposal addresses the fundamentals of graphic design: to communicate ideas to people visually. The impact that such images can have will always come into question. Can wearing a t-shirt, or making a poster really change the system? Perhaps not. But graphic design is as much about holding a mirror up to society as anything else - like much of human endeavour - it is an analysis of the self. An analysis of the fundamental questions of human society. By doing so, graphic design can act as a document of our priorities and value systems. Because of economic imbalances, such issues will always be consigned to the margins, but as stated, this has been the case throughout history. When philosophers were questioning the validity of monarchs as deserving of their privilege by "divine right", they were persecuted, lived in poverty and their ideas only lived in subversive circles - by no means accepted into mainstream theory that was marketed to the population.

The fundamental question of how to affect change in the capitalist system remains unanswered - but that does not render the effort meaningless. As mentioned, considering the endeavor is worthy in itself. There are indeed significant barriers to change. Democracy has been corrupted significantly to serve the status quo. We have undergone a coup d'état in slow motion and that has left activists unable to push corporate, industrialised states towards serious environmental reform, to thwart imperial adventurism or to build a humane policy toward the masses of the world's poor. The levers of power have become so contaminated that the needs and voices of the population have become irrelevant. Even in the democratic west politics has become "junk politics". Junk politics does not demand justice or reparation of rights, it personalises issues rather than clarifying them, and ignores real debate for manufactured scandals, celebrity gossip and spectacles. It promotes eternal optimism, endlessly praises our moral strength and character, and communicates in "feel-your-pain"

advertising jargon. The result is zero interruption in the processes and practices that strengthen existing, interlocking systems of socioeconomic advantage. We can write letters, vote for change, compost in our gardens, protest and remember to turn off our lights, but the power elite is impervious to the charade of democratic participation. Power is in the hands of moral and intellectual servants who are ruthlessly creating a system of neo-feudalism and killing the ecosystem that sustains human life, whilst the masses to their best to appeal to their rulers' better nature.

Obama, like leaders of other industrialised nations have proven as craven a tool of the corporate state as George W. Bush. Political philosopher Sheldon Wolin described our system as inverted totalitarianism. Unlike classical totalitarianism, it does not rely on an openly dictatorial leader. Political candidates are elected in popular votes by citizens, but are ruled are ruled by armies of corporate lobbyists who author legislation and get legislators to pass it. A corporate media control everything we read, watch or hear and imposes a bland uniformity of opinion. In classical totalitarian regimes, economics was subordinate to politics, in inverted totalitarianism, the reverse is true. Economics dominates politics, and with that domination comes different forms of ruthlessness.

Inverted totalitarianism wields power without resorting to crude forms of control, such as gulags or mass terror. It doesn't forcibly suppress dissidents, as long as they remain ineffectual, and as it diverts us with trivia, it dismantles manufacturing bases, devastates communities, decimates institutions of social democracy (like social security, unions, welfare, public housing etc.) and ships jobs to countries where fascists and communists know how to keep the workers in line. "The United States has become a showcase for how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed" Wolin writes.

It is easy to forget, but great ideological struggles are ranging today as much as they were during the Cold War, or any other period of history. They are part and parcel of civilization. Today globalisation, like all "inevitable" utopian visions, is being exposed as a fraud. The power elite, confused is clinging to its disastrous principles to mask looming chaos. Resistance must respond to the harsh new reality of the global capitalist order that will use ever mounting forms of overt repression. Once credit dries up for the average citizen, once massive joblessness create a permanent and enraged under class and the cheap manufactured goods (that are the opiate religion of our culture) vanish, we will head towards a system that more classically resembles totalitarianism.

Well being and survival in this scenario will depend on small self contained communities that do as little harm as possible to the environment, with access to sustainable agriculture, that are able to sever themselves as much as possible from commercial culture and that can be self-sufficient. Isolated areas of land will be paramount to avoid the food deserts and violence that will emanate from the cities - as goods become prohibitively expensive and repression harsher and harsher.

In the face of all this - knowledge too, is power. Our acts of resistance should not be shied away from - they are moral acts. They should be carried out, not because they are effective but because they are right. But they must be carried out with the discomfoting realisation that change may not occur in our lifetime. Philosopher Theodor Adorno once said that "the inability to identify with others was unquestionably the most important psychological condition for the fact that Auschwitz could have occurred in the midst of more or less civilised and innocent people". Indifference to the plight of others cannot be an option if we are to preserve our humanity, we must resist the temptation to ignore the cruelty outside our door, and confront the terror of our civilisations. to discover the real truth behind our lives and societies, and to defy the elites who control them may be for now the only victory possible.

Video

Tony Benn
Thomas Ferguson
Noam Chomsky
Harold Pinter
The Richard Heinberg
Brave New Films
Elizabeth Warren
Glenn Beck (Fox News)
Mark Achbar
Matt Simmons

Big Ideas that changed the world.
The Investment Theory of Politics
Assorted Lectures
Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.
youtube.com
Rupert Murdochs War on Journalism
“The Collapse of the Middle Class”
youtube.com
The Corporation
youtube.com

Printed Literature

Jasper Morrison
Marshall McLuhan
Dean Baker
Noam Chomsky
Ruis

Super Normal
The Medium is the Message
The Conservative Nanny State
Hegemony or Survival
Introducing Marx

Online literature

Wikipedia
FrontPageMagazine.com
Walter Lippman

wikipedia.com
The sick mind of Noam Chomsky
Public Opinion

Design

Dunne & Raby
Andrew Friend
Value and Service
Browns Design
Ivo Vos
De Makers Van
Tord Bontje

<http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk>
<http://www.andrewfriend.co.uk>
<http://www.valueandservice.co.uk>
<http://brownsdesign.com/>
<http://www.ivovos.com/>
<http://www.demakersvan.com/>
<http://www.tordboontje.com/>

Expert Interviews

Christian Democratic Appeal
Party For Freedom and Democracy

<http://www.cda.nl>
<http://pvda.nl>

CV

Education

2008-2010

Deign Academy Eindhoven
MA Humanitarian Design

2004-2007

Camberwell College of Arts
BA Graphic Design

2003-2004

Oxford Brookes University
Foundation Diploma in Art and Design

1994-2003

Magdalen College School Oxford
English Advanced Extension Award
A levels
English(A), Spanish(A), History(B), Art(B)
10 GCSE's A - A***Work Experience**

2009

Visiting Lecturer
Charterhouse School

2008

Design Intern
Black Dog Publishing

Art Technician

Charterhouse School

2007

Graphic Designer
Duval Moortgat

2006

Design Intern
La funcacion Abril (Bolivia)**Exhibitions**

2008

"The Calendar"
London College of Communication

2007

"Camberwell Graphics"
U-Block London

2006

"How much for the little one"
Old Truman Brewery London

2005

Scratch My Itch
Tea Building London**Skills**

Software

Adobe illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop
Flash, Dreamweaver

Languages

Spanish

English



The words, pictures and images we see around us every day shape and reflect our values as a society. This project aims to explore how those values are controlled, like much else in capitalist societies by an elite minority who look after their own interests at the expense of the population and the planet. “How did we come to this?” is an exhibition that tries to present socio-political ideas in a visually engaging way, and give people the opportunity to create their own meaning and share it with the world in a tangible way. Being aware of the unjust political and economic forces that affect our lives is the first step in devising solutions. Indifference to the cruelty that occurs outside our door cannot be an option.