Civility in Design: Cultivating Social Responsibility in the Design Studio—A Case Study
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Introduction

Design education faces a difficult task: balancing the needs of industry with cultivating a student's design philosophy. Each year, a multitude of ID professionals weigh in with their opinion of the latest skills that should be taught in the studio. Each design institution must pick and choose which innovations and skills they can afford to include into the core of their Industrial Design programs. With the world in a constant state of change, often design philosophy is lost in meeting the demands of technical proficiencies.

At the core of design is an innovative calling to utilize design to make life better; a noble sentence to structure a philosophy around. However, the interpretation of this has grown loose with mass consumerism rising over the last century. All too often this sentiment is sacrificed for a more practical profit motive. When the emphasis becomes quantity for profit over quality, the market gets inundated with cheap expendable goods. While this model is good for immediate sales, the long term effects of this raw consumerism adds more to landfills than to the quality of our lives. A new generation has called for an innovative answer: one that speaks of social responsibility.

Asking the hard question…

The idea starts with asking a simple question: "What kind of designer are you going to be?" The premise is simple; we as designers possess a gift and we must choose how we want to use this gift. We can create things. These things can help us, hurt us, protect us, etc…The guiding principle of design is to better the world around us. However, the driving force behind industrial design is the practice of business for profit. The goal of this project is to marry the profit driven business models with modern idealisms that embrace consumer desires.

The "Civility in Design" project acts as a discussion incubator for addressing ethical business decision making, situational design strategies, and the effects of design on humanity. This platform also allows the students to define their design philosophy with their own virtues. The problem with asking students, "What kind of designer are you going to be?" is that they think they already know the answer. Hence a better series of questions must be asked, ones that make them truly consider the deeper cognitive levels of the question itself.

If you ask a room of students, "How many people here have done a sustainable project?", usually most in the room will raise their hands. However if you ask, "How many of you thought it was successful?", many of the hands go down. This observation led to the conclusion that not all students buy into sustainable design and do it well. So how does one create a project that addresses critical issues in design and also cultivates a sense of social responsibility? Due to the project topics being self generated, this platform allows the students to define their design philosophy with their own virtues.

What is Civility in Design?

What is civility in design? It is a rhetorical question with no single right answer. Students are made aware from the start that they will be asked to define what civility in design means to them. Universally the student's first attempt for clarification always leads them to the dictionary. A source that eventually becomes irrelevant because the definition is dependent upon the individual student virtues.

ci·vil·i·ty
1. courtesy; politeness
2. a polite action or expression: *an exchange of civilities.*

3. *Archaic.* civilization; culture; good breeding[1]

The project begins with an introduction to *The Ice Palace that Melted Away: How Good Design Enhances Our Lives* by Bill Stumpf. The book is a commentary on what's missing from design and according to Bill Stumpf, what's missing is civility. Through insightful observation he offers a myriad of examples in which civility has manifested itself.
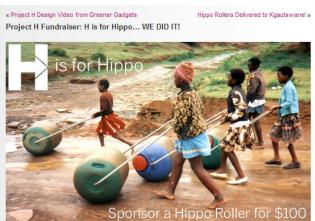
"I think of civility in three ways—things of civility, places of civility, and paths of civility. Civility is the something extra—the added measure of grace—in the way we shape human behavior through objects and custom. Civility is comfort, hidden goodness, social lubricant, personal worth, helping others, play-civility is the joy we take in our human achievements and the compassion we show toward our all too human faults. Civility is toleration, understanding. Civility can be extended by technology and obliterated by it. It is the integration of differences not heightening them. Civility can be found anywhere—the faux city of Las Vegas and the backwaters of the Midwest. I have seen civility in many places, and I am writing this book to show that civility does exist and adds daily to the potential of human beings to move beyond survival to real achievement." [2]

Creating a dialogue

Stumpf's unique views spur class discussion into the nature of civility in design. Fueled by his words, the class is asked to add to the discussion by describing new opportunities for civility, sharing observations of where civility is lacking, and identifying products and systems in which they feel exemplifies civility in design. Each year students bring new issues to the round table discussions. Topics range from general examples to specific instances for occurrence.

Brainstorming from class discussion 2009   Humanitarianism Design Example: Hippo water roller[3]

Examples of student contributed topics:

Systems of Efficiency	Nation of immediacy
Opportunities for action	Designing for dignity: 70+yrs
Consumerism & Consumption	Products from products
Sound byte youth	How to turn technology off?

What does civility in design mean to you?

At the end of the discussions, students are asked to formulate their own definitions of what civility in design means. By creating these definitions, the students have taken the first step toward cultivating their own design philosophy. At this point the students are then invested into their chosen paths and begin the design process with observations, research and problem definitions. The students are also allowed to move at their own pace as long as they all adhere to the deadline. This also reinforces the ownership of the project as they are setting their process development to meet their needs.

The Project Brief

Overview:
The "Civility in Design" project will act as a discussion incubator for addressing ethical business decision making, situational design strategies, and the effects of design on humanity. Student will be asked to define what Civility in Design means to them individually and then base a project from this definition.

Reading:
The Ice Palace That Melted Away: How Good Design Enhances Our Lives by Bill Stumpf
This text will be used as a platform for discussing civility in design.

Assignment:
Research and write a paper on a product that you believe exhibits civility in design. Explain why.

Group research:
Define civility and social consciousness in your own terms and then conduct a series of observations in public that exhibit it. Record your research and present it to the class.

Individual Research:
The group research will act as a platform for you to launch your project. Continue research as we progress through the project process.

Project Deliverables:
Each student will make an individual project timeline using the base model provided.
Definition of Civility in Design
Identify 25 areas for problems research with in your definition- PIM Rating
Problem Definition- Clear and Concise with support data
25 Solution Ideas- SWOT
5 Final Concepts
Final Direction- Research & Development
Final Model- Computer or Actual
Final PowerPoint Presentation & Process Book

Conclusions

Designing for social responsibility can create innovative solutions that serve the greater good of the public without hindering it. Students one day will be able to make decisions that advocate ethical business and design decisions. One might ask, "What does cultivating social responsibility in the studio have to do with business?" Students with a defined sense of social responsibility can actually serve the needs of industry even more effectively than those students who merely address profit needs because they speak to the greater situational needs of the consumer from a proactive stance. Consumers are increasingly asking for clarity in products. Clarity like what is the product made from? What are the working conditions of the work force that made the product? What is the products lifecycle? Is the product harmful to the earth? By engaging in this type of thinking early on in the design process the students will continue to meet the demands of consumerism as they grow.
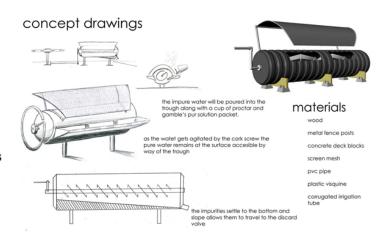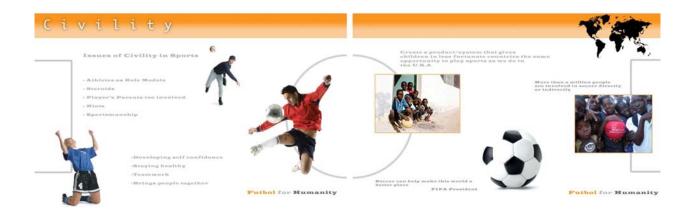
Examples of Student Projects

Fig. 1. Elliott Bowser- Humanitarianism Design 2008

Fig. 2. Matt Johnson- Recyclable Cardboard Hanger 2005
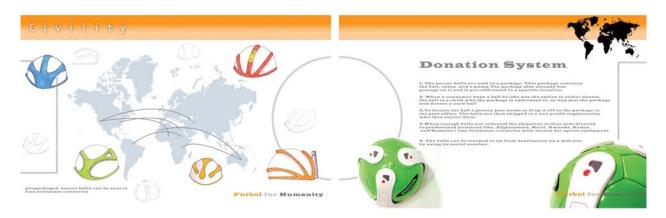

Fig. 3. Austin Doten- Recycled Purse 2007

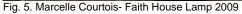Fig. 4. James Breaux- Global Futbol Donation System 2007

Fig. 5. Marcelle Courtois- Faith House Lamp 2009

Fig. 6. Hunter Hebert- Recycled Foot Wear for Generations 2009

Works Cited

[1]Website Source http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/civility?qsrc=2888

[2] Stumpf, Bill. *The Ice Palace That Melted Away: How Good Design Enhances Our Lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

[1]Website Source http://projecthdesign.org/