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Do Good ~~Design~~, David Berman

Do Good is a book on graphic design's impact on the world. David Berman claims all individuals are designers, and "the future of civilization is now our common design project". Graphic designers create ideas that drive our inclinations toward interactions, and consumption by connecting information and understanding. Two main ideas in this book are the "deception of design", and the world's existence as a "teenage civilization" (22, 16)

With much of the world still developing, Berman says humans live in a "teenage civilization", and now is the time to guide how society on Earth matures. Instead of accepting our current consumerism trend, individuals in developed societies should choose to live more sustainably. In so doing, they do good design by providing the basis for propaganda that spreads to the rest of the world. But this is where the importance of design comes in.

One of Berman's examples of a powerful design is Coca-Cola, and its acceptance around the world. We all know making Coke is cheap, and probably enjoy drinking it. The argument made in *Do Good* is that if Coca-Cola is branded well enough to be a universal product, they should do good in their current market—instead of simply carbonated sugar water, Coke could be re-designed to include malaria medicine for African countries. Since the brand is already trusted, and people spend the little they have on it, this method could be more effective than a new company's efforts to sell malaria medicine.

Most people expect to be lied to by graphic designs (ads). If Berman is right that "[g]ood design … a strategic, sustainable, ethical response to a business problem", then it should tell the truth, and good designers should sell products with factual information (125). This may cause problems for products with associated health risks (cigarettes, soda, and alcohol are all examples in the book), as consumers must blatantly face the consequences of their choices. I think this discomfort in recognizing the deception of design could inspire change toward healthier consumption habits, both for people and the planet.

This was not a typical book. Pages were full of pictures, Sharpie-style notes made snarky comments about ideas in the text, and most importantly, every few pages a side column was dedicated to an individual or group who did good with their design. Whether these were about individuals or groups, who designed without objectifying humans, or were honest about their product's health implications, or promoted something helpful for their community, it was good to see supposedly successful designers doing good.

Berman closed by asking his readers to take a pledge (146-147):
1) "I will be true to my profession"
2) "I will be true to myself"
3) "I will spend at least 10% of my professional time helping repair the world"

We rarely think of graphic design as an appropriate technology, but maybe it is time to evaluate the messages it sends. Consider the above "do good pledge". Would you take it?