The Little Book of the Cultural Hijacker

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Towards Critical Action Graphic Design

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THE LITTLE BOOK OF THE CULTURAL HIJACKER
- TOWARDS CRITICAL ACTION GRAPHIC DESIGN

Master of Arts Thesis

Aalto University School of Art and Design
Department of Media
Master Programme in Graphic Design

Printed in Aalto University School of Art and Design, Helsinki
Binded at Kirjansitomo Jokinen, Helsinki

Papers: Colorit 120g, Munken Lynx 120g
Font: Archer

Spring 2011, Helsinki
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Introduction

Good graphic design: raising awareness, advocating, calling for action

What is a good designer? What is the role of design in a world where each choice, despite the glorification of the individualism, still is made possible inside a precisely defined “system”? And what if we set about changing things for the better? How can we measure our social impact?

These, and many others, were the boiling questions arising within me when I had to choose the topic of my thesis. After having worked for one year within a multidisciplinary research group in Aalto University (MIND Research Group), our topics ranging from business strategy to social innovation, the prospect of focusing my final work on the formal aspects of graphic design felt unsatisfactory. I didn’t want to develop another brand system or corpus of illustrations: I am sure university archives are full of such works, made by designers much more skilled than me. So what would have been the point in doing that, what my personal enrichment, what the benefit for the field? Of course beautifully designed typefaces or books still impress me, and intelligently planned visual identities or infographics raise my admiration, but
In our complex world graphic design is just a small mosaic chip within the wider context of communication - which is also a detail of the whole picture of our society. The skills that with so much patience - and sometimes frustration - designers cultivate are just means, but where is the real content to be addressed and discussed? It is shortsighted to pay all the attention to the vehicle, when we are missing where we are going.

I would define myself as an idealist. In simple words, what I am seeking for, with my production and my whole existence, is to trigger a positive impact around me. And impact is the combined result of intensity and scale, or quality and quantity. One factor, without the other, will hardly change anything for the best.

I believe in personal involvement and this was taught to me by the design practice itself. If you want your project and your ideas to come alive exactly how you imagined them, you will willingly spend insomniac nights and all of your resources for it. *If you want it, come and get it.* The designer’s perspective and way of thinking can be very positive for society: it promotes problem solving, collaboration, self-initiative, human-centeredness.

In a contemporary world where governments and institutions proved their limits in addressing the needs of the citizens, a grassroots design culture would be very much needed. People should be put in conditions of challenge big and small issues by themselves, with creative solutions.

Visual communication can have three roles in this: raising awareness, changing the attitude of the audience and motivating towards taking concrete actions. The last task is the most difficult, both to achieve and to measure, but is also the real thing to aim for. While traditionally graphic designers have had a role in raising awareness about burning issues or in promoting certain behaviors, this is limitative in nowadays society, which is hungry for a factual commitment towards change. Promises or good words are not going to solve our problems.

These are the reasons why during spring and summer 2010 I decided to create a self-initiated experimental social campaign, *Soita Mummolle*
(“Call your Grandma”), in order to empirically explore how a graphic designer’s skills of communicator can be used to address societal problems, aiming to concrete actions as a result. I chose to focus on the issue of Finnish seniors’ loneliness, because due to my Italian background I found shocking that grandparents in Finland are almost forgotten by their families. “Famiglia” in Italian means both “perhe” (mother, father, children) and “suku” (including also grandparents and other relatives), so there is a conceptual difference of who actually belongs to the family already from a linguistic perspective. Grandparents have an important role in Italian society, something between always-present babysitters and second parents (who actually spoil you more than your own parents). Since childhood, we grow with the constant presence of our nonni, the grandparents, in our lives. The situation in Finland is very different: people are more individualistic and families move often, so it’s not rare that grandparents and grandchildren live hundreds kilometers from each other.

I had the quality-factor, since the elderly issue is just too real: what I needed to do next was to search for the quantity-factor and see how far I could spread the message of the campaign: take responsibility for the happiness of your own elders, become a better relative, don’t wait for a governmental solution! Even if making just a phone call might seem a small action, it is at least something concrete, and it can be the beginning of something bigger. This is why I decided to give the campaign an implementation as interactive as possible, creating occasions for people to do something in first person. Personal experiences leave their mark on persons and their memories; they support, hopefully, the development of a virtuous “chain-reaction of actions” in the future.

The quest-for-the-impact posed multi-faceted questions: about my capabilities as graphic designer and communicator, about my power as a citizen, about the media system, about the audience behavior. As a designer, was I skilled enough to get my message through? After all, I never planned a campaign before. As a citizen, how much power did I really have within the system? A foreign young female, with no economical relevant resources nor big sponsors or associations backing financially the
initiative did not seem the most influential voice to listen to. How could this individual emerge to the surface of the noisy media system with her campaign? How to gain the media space, if it is not possible to purchase it? After all, so many righteous issues are almost ignored, because judged not juicy enough for the news-making machine. And how to engage a varied and wide audience? Conceding that I would get my message through, would they actually react to it? It is not enough to be seen, or even gaining some fame, if in the end you fail to inspire people to act.

The Cultural Hijacker

A graphic designer has powerful tools to persuade and engage others. Visual language unites signs and words, which will be crystallized and amplified by media. It is a complex machine that can be used to reach important goals for humanity, but unfortunately it is used too often in the name of pernicious ideologies – from totalitarianisms to non-critical, compulsive consumerism.

As actors and makers of the cultural world, it is the designers’ duty to learn to say no to this. We know better than others how to use the communication machine, so if we want, we can hijack it towards more conscientious destinations. We should take the responsibility of becoming cultural hijackers.

The cultural hijacker is a designer who willingly tries, through intellectual critique and actions, to give a new direction and a new goal to the design practice and to society at large; a designer who deeply understands the communication landscape and masters the techniques of his/her profession, and decides to use this knowledge and means to do something about the problems of our world. The cultural hijacker is somebody who unmarks the contradictions and the injustices of the society and its structures; who communicates ethical messages and aims to modify negative behaviors; who searches for meanings and not only for beautiful forms; who designs to solve problems of the society; who uses design as a weapon of critical thought to tackle issues and awake the consciences. A visual communicator can make a very good cultural hijacker.
Structure of the thesis: 
towards a definition of “critical action graphic design”

In my case, I wanted the “sabotage” to aim to both critical and action-oriented results. The campaign was meant as a case study to explore the possibilities of moving people towards personal commitment through communication design. Literature about persuasive communication, but also about ethics in graphic design practice was reviewed to contextualize the project, give it a coherent direction and evaluate its outcomes afterwards.

Soita Mummolle campaign ran for 5 months, from April to August 2010, ending with Soita Mummolle Päivä (“Call your Grandma Day”) on 11th of August. During these months I had to plan the campaign depending on my personal limited budget, which set me into the context of the private citizen who starts a cause or a non-profit enterprise. The natural choice was to resort to a mix of old grassroot strategies, plus new social media and Internet free/almost free tools. I purposely did not search for a corporate sponsor to back me up, because I was not designing for a commercial purpose: if I wanted to explore deeply what are the solutions that work well, no matter your budget, I had to push the limitations to the extreme and truly commit to them.

The whole project, being a case study, was faced with an experimental attitude. The campaign was a prototype, undergoing a feasibility test: it could have succeeded or failed completely. Depending on the analysis of the empirical results, different considerations could have been summed up and confronted against literature references in this thesis. In any case, I believe that innovative solutions can be achieved only through a hands-on, try-and-fail, humble attitude, which accelerates the learning process and avoids ideological barricades disguised as accurate planning. Luckily, and interestingly enough, the campaign was a success, getting extensively covered by the media and even awarded with prizes.

This thesis reports about the project, and especially utilizes it as a starting point to develop a discourse at the crossroads of visual communication,
activism, media research and design ethics. The adopted perspective on the function of (visual) communication outside a purely commercial structure shifts from individual to collective. This is an attempt to find a balance between the needs of happiness of the single designer and the ones of its audience and the society at large.

In the first chapter I present the project Soita Mummolle and its outcomes. I feel that is important to start by explaining the project and the insights it provided me. After that, I will proceed to build a more academic discourse to contextualize my practical work, accordingly to some relevant aspects emerged during its implementation (prototyping-driven design processes, the online/offline dialectic, culture jamming, DIY attitude and gendered participation). It would be limitative to include the project report as an appendix, since the thesis often explores the personal moral choices of the designer: the campaign sets the context in which my perspective and my standing point matured. The chapter includes several design cases for comparison and contextualization.

In the second chapter I concentrate on the topics of persuasion and behavior. A social campaign aims to change people’s mind and calls them to action: but what are the key elements of such persuasive process? Visual communication interacts with emotions, and that can be a catalyst for action, but is also important to understand how a message can become viral and spread into society. The chapter reviews two theories about persuasion and message virality – Gladwell’s Tipping Point theory and Fogg’s Mass Interpersonal Persuasion – and presents the interviews with two Finnish experts of communication and social campaigns.

In the third chapter I shift the focus on behavior from the audience to the designers. How can our socially responsible messages be credible if we do not take care of ethical questions more comprehensively? What does it mean for a graphic designer to be responsible and what are the criteria?
and boundaries needed to choose one’s own ethical standpoint? I identified eight key issues that are always present in the design debate on how to self-evaluate our professional actions, or at least, to be aware of the implications of our work. The behaviors of the audience and of the communicators mirror each other, because design has to be intended as an open process of mutual influence: we can try to change the world with meaningful projects, but those projects will change ourselves as well in the process. The ethical and professional point of view of the designer is not pre-constructed, but is formed through empirical experiences that are shaping the understanding of the individual. This is why the scope of action of design should be wide, open, interdisciplinary, critical, meaningful and challenging in order to benefit not only society, but also the practitioner in first place.

In the fourth chapter the question on behavior becomes even wider and invest design as a discipline. During this almost year-long project, started with an empirical experience and then crystallized into words, question and thoughts, my research scope naturally evolved: while developing this research, investigating how to create a successful social campaign became a limitative goal, and a boundary. Thus, my thesis question focus moved from social campaigns to the wider concept of “social action”, and its formulation evolved into: “What conditions must be reached to create an effective social action”? Such question has implications on the way we intend the nature and the scope of design. The behavior here analyzed is the one of the design field itself.

The concept of Critical Action Graphic Design is here introduced, as a suggested definition of what could be a new direction for graphic design, if finally disenfranchised from advertising and marketing fluff. Such definition finds its roots in the concepts of social, critical and relational design: it promotes a discipline that is at the same time more critical and more action-based, and aims at solving wicked problems of the society. It is not an artistic utopia, an anti-commercial escape: Critical Action Graphic Design is about concrete actions and initiatives that give propositional solutions to issues that are matter of critique.
In this last chapter I define my understanding and conception of design, trying to contextualize it in the contemporary issues and discourses. The experimental process of the campaign guided me in asking questions about what is good, what is worth doing and how I want to do it in my profession. This project was not a mere exercise of style, but helped me in developing a personal approach and clarity about what I wish to achieve through design practice and research: skills and sensitivity to address and solve different issues, focus on real, non artificially induced human needs, the ability to criticize, the courage to advocate and act in first person to achieve a more just society.

The appendices include the questions and the answers to the survey, the campaign press releases and the photographic documentation of the Soita Mummolle guerrilla initiatives.

Thesis Question

Influenced both by the personal experience of the project and a progressively deeper understanding of the issues at stake gained from my research, my thesis question naturally evolved. If at first, when I started developing the study case project, it was formulated as

“How to create an effective campaign model for small social enterprises, which typically have low budgets, but the possibility of employing motivated human resources?”

But during the development of the project and the deepening of the research work (ten months all in all, from March to December 2010), I felt not comfortable anymore by limiting my question to social campaigns only. I understood that concept design and visual communication can have a multifaceted approach, and, since I was searching for new effective methods for involving people into action, maybe the old, traditional concept of “campaign” would not have supported me too much further. Thus, since action was the core of this research project, I re-formulated my thesis question as such:
“What conditions must be reached to create an effective social action which is supported in its implementation by design thinking and visual communication techniques?”

In this thesis, both the questions are presented, showing the natural development of my investigation from a particular to a more general context. The conclusion of the work tries to answer to the latter question, selected in the end as the main one, drawing facts from the case study campaign and the theories presented in chapters 2 to 4.

HELSINKI, FEBRUARY 2011
soita mummolle
mind the seniors
http://soitamummolle.wordpress.com
In this initial chapter I will present the social campaign *Soita Mummolle* (“Call Your Grandma”, in Finnish), providing a detailed report of its activities, tools, timeframe and outcomes. Before expanding the context of my discourse through a more academic treatment, I feel that it is important to start the discussion from my personal experience, presenting first-hand experience and data that contributed significantly in shaping my opinions and setting my standpoint. Having a real, intense involvement in this campaign influenced me as designer and as an individual. It also helped
in refining the theoretical discourses to develop further in this research work: the empirical experience allowed for a more conscious selection of literature in the vast fields of design ethics, media and communication studies and “design ontology” (i.e. what design is meant for?).

1. The idea

In 2009 I joined MIND research group (Aalto University) as a summer trainee, becoming part of an interdisciplinary team of students. We were assigned to work on a concept design case: the brief was to “create concepts for products and services that would improve the life of seniors, granting them more independency and a longer, healthier life in their own homes”. After spending time with seniors in assisted living building and at Red Cross local meetings, the team started to understand their emotions. The statements of the seniors were quite recurrent: seeing their relatives and especially their grandchildren was the biggest joy; being lonely and bored was depressing them, affecting on their psychophysical health.

The Soita Mummolle concept was born as a reaction: the team realized that seniors do not need more products or more paid people to take care of them. It is the overall mentality of the society the real field of intervention: design should aim at changing the society and its perceptions about what should be done for the third age. The starting point of this bottom-top intervention is something that each person should be able to do something about: taking care of one’s own relatives. If nothing is done in first person for parents or grandparents, how can an intervention from the State be claimed? How can such intervention really solve any problem if the society is not ready to commit to solve social problems? There should be a shared, common responsibility.

The team decided to simulate a social campaign, something between a provocation and an alternative way to observe people’s attitude towards the issue of seniors’ loneliness: the slogan “Soita Mummolle” was agreed upon, and it got printed it as a logo on t-shirts and on A4 sheets of colored paper.
The day after some of us went to the streets to observe the reaction of the passers-by to our signs and outfit.

The first method attempted was to try to stop people to ask questions, but everybody rushed away: the team members were perceived as the usual volunteer, aiming at people’s time or money. Since it did not work, the opposite approach was tried. We just stood in Esplanadi, a popular green area in the center of Helsinki, smiling at the passers-by and showing them our signs, without uttering a word. The conversation was started only with those who smiled, commented on the signs or were curious enough to stop by and ask about the meaning of the street action. Once that the person attention was captured, he/she was asked to be photographed while holding the Soita Mummolle sign: the photo would have been published on the project’s blog, as a public sign of their support to this initiative. Surprisingly enough, 32 photos were collected in one hour. And, even more remarkably, people were quite enthusiastic about both the idea and the approach: it sparked conversation and comments. Through an instant experiment the team discovered that the idea could actually have a potential grip on people. During the experiment we had to change our attitude and instantly try out different solutions: thinking by doing is a crucially important part of prototyping and helped to reveal what the bottlenecks and the points of strength of the idea were. Planning carefully for a long time in order to implement a polished test has less value (at this initial stage of the process) than testing out quickly and roughly ideas that can be corrected and fine tuned “on the run” in case they are not working.

Unfortunately, since the timetable of the project did not allow planning and implementing the campaign on a bigger scale, our team had to renounce to the idea. Nonetheless, the concept remained in my thoughts ever since and, at the beginning of 2010, I decided to implement it independently and use the results as the practical part of my master thesis. The goal was to plan and organize a grassroot social campaign to raise awareness about the issue of seniors’ loneliness in Finland and to stimulate people to do something simple about it: call your own grandparents more often. The leading idea of the campaign was not to “design for”, but “design with”: 
I wished to involve other people, affect their behavior towards their own elderly relatives, make them participate in the co-creation of the social message, trigger smiles and a slight sense of guilt. My goal was to design actions and interactions, putting people in charge of the success or failure of the whole experiment. The field of intervention was not only the audience/society, but also myself: if I wanted to convince people to do something, I had to show contagious enthusiasm and energy in everything I planned and did.

2. Conditions of the experiment

As I already mentioned, I wanted the campaign to be an empirical experiment to investigate how visual communication can support actions of social change. The situation of a small non-profit was the easiest one for me to simulate, because I would have been working individually and with the smallest budget possible. So I defined my experimental question as such:

“How to create an effective campaign model for small social enterprises, which typically have low budgets, but the possibility of employing motivated human resources?”

In my opinion, many good-doers are at the moment simply wasting their money on the wrong promotion of their right actions. They follow mainstream conventions. But if you don’t have a lot of money for advertising, advertising will not work. So, spending your small budget on posters and flyers to be hanged on library announcement boards (that almost nobody will see) is not likely to work. My wish is that the experience accumulated through this experimental campaign could become useful to those who have a compelling social agenda to share with the public, but lack a sufficient budget.

The hypothesis was that a good-doer does not necessarily need money to promote his/her cause, movement or association successfully: what is important are the right perspective and a strategy, because also the “market” of common responsibility initiatives is already saturated. The righteousness and the goodness of the message are not enough
to persuade people to take action. Guerrilla marketing can be the most effective solution, in this case, and as Jay Conrad Levinson reminds us “small companies or individual entrepreneurs can flourish merely by gaining a tiny slice of an industry, a fraction of the market. Different wars require different tactics” (Levinson 2007, 17). Either for-profit or non-profit, this rule applies to all companies. The small actor should make flexibility its point of force and use all of its energy and intelligence to get the maximum impact with the minimum expense. This is what Levinson calls the “brute force of vivid imagination”, underlining that creativity in using your resources is more important than blind belief in money and ready-made traditional marketing recipes. Especially in the non-profit field, “small slices of market” can be a reasonable goal to aim to, because a project does not necessarily need to be huge to have a positive impact on society.

Social media and the net also provide nowadays many inexpensive tools and platforms for self-publishing and self-promotion. Technology becoming cheaper and easier has always been an ally for activists and artists in their work (Mc Quiston 2004, 16), as well as offering empowerment to regular people (Gillin 2007, 6). The web is the contemporary photocopier, a cheap medium that allows a message to be reproduced and made available to many, with the difference that the audience potentially reachable on the Internet is immensely bigger than the one of any poster or flyer. Social networks became quickly a part of our daily routine and our media diet: they are the natural environment for the “buzz”, since people using them tend not only to update their friends about themselves, but also share news and contents that they feel in some way significant. Everybody is a mini-broadcaster, offering their friends a daily portion of comedy, drama, romance and breaking news. And why not share content that we found interesting, after all, since it is just one click away? The whole network structure and the existence of content made easily shareable are the fertile humus on which viral messages can easily swarm and spread: the net is a field on which guerrilla strategies can be easily implemented.

Thus, a mix of old grassroot guerrilla action and contemporary social media communication were chosen as the communicative weapons of
the campaign. The aim was to create awareness about the message of the initiative. The cheapest way to do so is to have traditional media to get interested about your story and amplify it through their trustworthy voice.

I also imposed myself four conditions, in order to commit to a low budget, guerrilla implementation:

1) 800 € is the maximum budget for the whole campaign
2) Finance the campaign with my personal money (so as to motivate me to keep the expenses even lower than the 800€ set as limit)
3) Do not search for sponsors that would contribute with money
4) Work alone, to see how far an individual can push a social cause: your involvement is real

3. Timeline of the campaign and planning

The project started unofficially in March 2010, with few weeks dedicated to refine the concept and plan a campaign strategy; it became public in April with the beginning of the social media campaign, followed in May by the first of a series of guerrilla actions. The campaign had its grand final on 11th August, with a public flash mob held on the self-declared Soita Mummolle Päivä (“Call your Grandma Day”).

During the planning phase, I sought advice from two skilled professionals to better define the timeline and the relevant actions to be undertaken during the campaign so as to make it as successful as possible: Jaakko Veijola, art director at successful Helsinki-based advertising agency Bob Helsinki, and Pia Pihlaja, PR expert at communication agency Tekir and “social media aficionado”, as you can read from her Twitter account. I needed support mainly about media planning and social media conventions, since I didn’t have any expertise about it before starting this campaign.

Here is a summary of their tips, which became some of the general guidelines I followed in implementing the campaign.
Jaakko Veijola

- Research how often people are actually in contact with their grandparents or elderly parents by making a simple multiple choice questionnaire
- Use the results of the survey as content for press releases and the website
- Create editorial material for the website and try to be as visual as possible, to facilitate the newsmaking’s process
- Try to be exposed to the media, become a media lemmikki (“media pet”)
- Make clear your stance in the project and who has the ownership of it.
- Be the spokesperson of the project, take responsibility for the social message you are sending out to the community
- Decide how to present the project: is it artistic, social, research oriented...?
- When you cannot afford paid media, do your best to be visible in social media and earned media, and eventually try to cooperate with a partner media (e.g. a radio show in the morning which would endorse the campaign)
- Be transparent and sincere

Pia Pihlaja

- Be always clear about what is the campaign’s message and goal
- Be always clear about your reasons and show your emotions: why are you doing what you do? Why do you think the condition of seniors is bad and why do you want to do something about it?
- Synchronize all the output of your social media outlets: each new blog post or images published can become content to keep the attention of your followers alive on Facebook, Twitter and Flickr
- Try to get the attention of the blogosphere and know who are the influential bloggers you want to reach
- Be part of the conversation on Twitter: find who are the journalists and other actors that share your agenda, follow them and there is a 1 on 10 possibility they might follow you
- Mind the production timetable of different media and what kind of content do they care about when you send your press releases: monthly and weekly publications are interested in the concept of the story, news want to know what is happening hic et nunc
- “Follow the conversation” to discover who might be interested your story: who is speaking about the seniors and from which angle on the media?
4. Marketing tools

Being a grassroot and guerrilla-oriented campaign, the definition “marketing tools” might sound a little pretentious, even though I have been balancing on the edge between the acceptance and the refusal/hijacking of the commercial advertisement system and conventions since the beginning of the project. As “marketing tools” I will now present all the different media utilized in Soita Mummolle campaign. All means that contributed to communicate the message of the campaign, from street actions to press releases to flash mobs, will be considered a medium.

The campaign model to which I aimed is the “integrated campaign with event character”, as defined by Abraham and Behrendt of Innovative Thunder:

“You have a medium-independent idea based on an insight that suits your brand or product. Based on this idea, you come up with concepts for all required campaign media (TV, print, web, out of home, etc.). Compared with the adaptive campaign, the individual media display the campaign idea in their very own way. [...] (an) idea that feels already press worthy without any execution. Based on this idea, which is usually of an event nature, creating TV spots, banner ads or funny Facebook apps comes easy.”

(Abraham and Behrendt 2010, 96-98)

My goal was to engage the audience meaningfully and proactively, creating experiences, rather than passive read-only slogans. The declination of the message according to the specific characteristics of each media tried to maximize the impact on people and enhance their participation.

I will present first the web-based/social media, then the activities with guerrilla and event nature and in the end I will focus on public relations.

4.1. Blog

The first step taken was to establish a blog (http://soitamummolle.wordpress.com), the role of which was to become the official platform of the campaign. The blog had to become owned media, the news outlet of the campaign,
and be the aggregator of the content spread on the Internet, such as photos, articles and links. The blog was created on WordPress (http://wordpress.org), an open source Content Management System (CMS) mainly used as platform for blogging and personal publishing.

The blog format was preferred to the more static format of a website: it shows an attitude open to dialogue and comments; it has an informal style and points to the existence of an author, making acceptable and even positive the fact of speaking with a personal voice; it is easy and inexpensive to design and update; its frequent updating and consistency affects positively the search engine optimization, which indicates how easily the website can be found by search engines.

Following the precious advice of Veijola and Pihlaja, the language I used as the author of Soita Mummolle blog was informal and showed my personal enthusiasm about the project. I updated the site at least weekly, with news and pictures related to the various guerrilla activities of the campaign and collecting external articles and post talking about Soita Mummolle. The flexibility of the medium allowed me to be transparent about the whole process, revealing hopes, frustrations, goals and mistakes, as it kept on developing.

The blog was opened in April and within five months it collected 5445 unique views. It is possible to connect the busiest days (according to WordPress internal traffic stats) to external events that influenced the interest in the campaign, for example:

- 11th August, 1024 visitors: Soita Mummolle Päivä
- 10th August, 358 visitors: interview with Aamu TV, appearance in MTV3 news
- 7th August, 213 visitors: article on Iltaisanomat
- 6th August, 187 visitors: article on NYT-liite (Helsinki Sanomat)
- 26th April, 125 visitors: launch of the survey

This underlines that an Internet presence was vital, but it could not have had a very strong impact as a stand-alone medium. The blog was necessary
to welcome to a reliable page those who came in contact with the campaign through the mass media and performed a Google search for more information. An easily shareable address that other bloggers could refer to in their posts is also very much needed when playing a new media strategy.

The typical contemporary dichotomy blogosphere/mainstream media, as described by Tremayne (2007, introduction) and many others, was well exemplified in Soita Mummolle’s case: news and events in the non-virtual world fuel the blogosphere; the blogosphere offers topics and news for the mainstream media to create their stories. The blog traffic benefited from events related to the campaign, the media found on the blog plenty of information and visual material not included in the basic press release to produce their articles.

Despite aiming to become a platform to support the conversation about the campaign and its issues, the blog did not manage to encourage comments and foster an interactive community. This happened perhaps because readers need to have a WordPress account in order to comment.

Luckily, Facebook offers a non-committing virtual environment with very low barrier to community participation and there it was possible to create a dialogue with the audience and listen to their opinions.

4.2. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr)
In the campaign three social media platforms were used: Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. Each of them had a specific role in the campaign, aiming at different audiences and goals.

Facebook was the most generalist medium, due to its very differentiated user base in terms of demographic and psychographic factors. It targeted potentially everybody in the Helsinki region, exploiting the word of mouth effect that social networks tends to foster. After creating a Facebook page for Soita Mummolle, I invited all my friends living in Finland to join, and I posted messages on other Facebook pages focused on social issues (e.g.
The Hub Helsinki, SYY - Suomen Yhteiskunnallisten Yrittäjien yhdistys ry, Aalto Social Impact etc.). Pages, as opposed to groups, are particularly viral, because every time an user “likes” a page and joins it, this action appears in the news feed of all his/her friends: this allows the page to be effortlessly “marketed” to hundreds of unknown people and this all conveniently happens automatically.

This, combined with two Facebook ads campaigns, one in May and one in June (each of two weeks), helped the page to gain quickly plenty of followers: the community counted around 4100 member by the end of the campaign on 11th August 2010 and it kept on growing to over 5000 fans during the following months.

After gaining people’s attention, the next step was to provide contents for the community to start the discussion. The Facebook page was updated every two weeks with the photos taken during the guerrilla street actions and also national and international news regarding seniors and their lives were posted. Using message statuses I updated my followers about the different steps of the campaign and “recruited” volunteers to participate in the street actions. I also shared articles about the campaign, making the community feeling as an integral part of something being judged good by the media and the rest of society. Soon, the page members started commenting on the contents, giving positive feedback about the initiative, writing about when they were actually calling their grandma and sharing with each other anecdotes about their grandparents. Also many grandmothers participated, posting mainly about the happiness they were feeling when grandchildren went to visit them or stayed overnight.

Facebook was the main tool to attract audience, due to its low threshold to participation in the page and the ease in sharing multimedia content among the users. Twitter, instead, aimed still to a wide audience, but it was more oriented towards social media enthusiasts, journalists, bloggers and activists. Since on Twitter the user is just not linked with friends, but is mainly “following” individuals writing about topics he/she is interested in, it is very important to join the conversation about certain issues with
likeminded people: posting tweets and links unilaterally will not bring any benefit. This need to be inside the conversation was problematic for me, since the people I wanted to connect with were tweeting in Finnish: this barrier prevented me to make *Soita Mummolle* a lively actor in the Finnish Twitter scene and this resulted in not having too many followers, only 55. Nonetheless, among these 55 there were journalists and bloggers, which helped to keep up the word of mouth about the campaign. My inexperience with Twitter – I never used it before setting up a profile for *Soita Mummolle* – also contributed to the clumsiness in its use.

Flickr was employed as the online photo gallery of the project. Instead of posting the same photos on different websites, I just centralized and organized by date all the photos taken during the street actions, and then just shared a link and a preview on the blog and on Twitter (Facebook had instead its own photo albums, to make it easier for the wide community there to browse through the images). The passers-by who posed with the *Soita Mummolle* sign were also given the possibility of downloading their portrait in high quality, since Flickr does not compress the pictures uploaded there. The tagging system allowed users interested for instance in “guerrilla advertisement”, “social campaigns”, or “Helsinki” to discover the photos, and consequently the campaign.

On Flickr I also stored the layout files for the *Soita Mummolle* sign and for other signs used during the campaign, so everybody who wished to participate could just print them and start billposting, or having street actions in other Finnish cities. For example, I received photos taken in Jyväskylä by members of *Keski-Suomen Vasemmistonaisten* (“Leftist Women of Central Finland”), who printed the sign from Flickr and independently took support photos for the campaign.

Social media allow both flexibility and synchronization in communication: platforms and tools can be easily connected with each other, so as to be an interdependent entity building your message and your identity in the Internet. Each service, nonetheless, maintains also its own independency to support specific functions in the most optimal way (e.g. Flickr is the
medium of preference to share photos). Moreover, with their horizontal, non-hierarchical structure (i.e. the author is, at the same moment, also a reader and stands at the same level of his/her own readers) they work particularly well with the informal, enthusiastic and sincere register that has to be adopted when advocating for a cause.

4.3. Survey

At the very beginning of the campaign I created and distributed through e-mail an online survey (Appendix 1) about the communication habits of Finns with their elderly parents and grandparents. I wanted to confirm the impression I got from talking with seniors in assisted living buildings, i.e. Finns are not visiting and calling their old relatives too often. Collecting the answers of a small panel of interviewees would have shed some light on the issue.

Once again, I decided to rely on the web for the ease it provides in contacting people. It is faster and simpler to share a multiple answer questionnaire via e-mail rather than interviewing face-to-face, or asking back the questionnaires by mail. I sent the questionnaire to all my personal and to many of my professional contacts, asking them to please reply and forward the questionnaire also to their own contacts. In addition, I posted the survey on discussion forums addressed to families, for example on the portal www.vauva.fi. In this way I hoped to get answers from a target with a significant differentiation in age and background. As reward, I randomly extracted a name from the participants and gave a 30€ gift card for shopping in the classy Helsinki department store Stockmann.

I did not want to explore the reasons why Finns are not much in contact with their elderly relatives, I rather decided to concentrate on the frequency of their phone calls and visit, to see how widespread the phenomenon was. This was because I already decided the content of my campaign, which I wanted to be as minimalistic and universal as possible: the reasons of course are important, but I wanted the viewers to personally find an interpretation and an emotional response based on their personal experiences.
I received back 319 answers in one month and, after that, I clustered the results according to sex and age group, to check if there were significant patterns (Appendix 1). The data gathered seemed to confirm the initial impressions. The question “How often do you call your grandparents?” revealed, for example, that 13% calls “once a year” and 18% “less than once a year”. It means that roughly one third of the panel has very minimal contacts with their grandparents.

Apart from the data collected through the questions, the online survey revealed two facts. First, the survey worked as a communicative artwork, drawing traffic to the blog and raising the interest of the interviewees in the campaign. In the digital era everything is information and communication, even an apparently neutral and visually unattractive survey. Second, the most of the interviewees were female (which also matched the readers’ profile of the Facebook page). This fact motivated me to stick with the slogan “Soita Mummolle”, even if I had initial doubts because I wanted people to call their grandfathers too. But in the end I thought that being my active audience mainly female, perhaps the reference to the grandmother would have raised more involvement and self-projection (“Will my children and grandchildren call be when I will be an old lady?”). There are two other reasons why I decided for the name Soita Mummolle: in Finnish language soita mummolle is shorter and, in my opinion, sounds better than soita isovanhemmillé (“call your grandparents”); also, statistics show that in Finland there are more over-60 women than men (1,075,025 VS. 570,195 as of end of 2009; source Tilastokeskus, 2010), so it is more probable that the target audience would still have a grandmother but not a grandfather.

4.4. Street actions

The street actions were the signature feature of the campaign and they considerably contributed to the visibility and the mildly humorous tone of voice of the whole project. Basically, the street actions repeated the scheme already identified and successfully tested during the first instant experimentation in summer 2009: volunteers, showing the A4 colored Soita Mummolle sign, are standing or slowly strolling in a busy spot of the city for about one hour, smiling to people without making any particularly
active approach to stop them. When a passer-by smiles, comments or asks what is the whole thing about, the volunteer explains that Soita Mummolle is a social campaign, which aims to raise awareness about seniors’ loneliness. After specifying that the project is not in search of money, but just of support and a change in personal behavior, the passer-by is asked to contribute by lending his/her own face as public testimonial of the campaign: he/she has to pose for a photo holding the Soita Mummolle sign and agree that the picture will be publicly posted on the campaign’s blog.

This street action, mixing curiosity, humor and performance, aimed at two goals. First, it confronts people with a sensible and socially good idea, proposing it in an unexpected context, such as streets or public parks: the apparently innocent and sweet sign compels people to think about a serious issue and to self-evaluate their own behaviors. In certain cases, participants told me that they felt guilty, because they have not called their grandparents in a long time and they promised that they would have changed the situation. So the simple imperative of the message – and this is the second goal - aims at “you” and calls for “your” active participation, even if the action required is apparently simple. The whole idea standing behind the project is that everybody can do something good and have an impact, not only the activists and the campaigners, but each random passer-by. Even if the world has to face serious issues and awaits courageous resolutions, many problems (such as the condition of loneliness of our own relatives) can sensibly improve or be solved just by a small change in behavior on a mass scale.

Between May and August 2010 seven street actions were organized in the centre of Helsinki. over 480 people were photographed (Appendix 4), either alone or in groups. A crucial role in the success of these actions has to be attributed to Facebook, which was the channel through which I recruited the volunteers to join me in setting up the whole action. Facebook, the blog and Flickr also hosted the pictures taken during these events, virtually extending the one-hour lifetime of these performances and crystallizing them as unique content of the campaign media.

These actions were at the same moment stand-alone experiences and raw material for the production of content and news. Their highly visual
nature made it easy for them to become something to be talked about, shared on the web, and later re-presented and amplified by the mainstream media. The real visual quality of this campaign does not stand in its logo, in the photographic compositions nor in the web layouts, but in the capacity of the documentation artworks to work convincingly and vividly into the media system. The whole visual identity of the campaign is purposely minimal, understated and neutral: the font used is a simple Helvetica Bold, there are no striking images to support the copy text, the signs are in a standard A4 format. The intentional shallowness of the overall identity, just lightened up by the use of colored paper, is the graphic designer joke addressed to the insiders. As to say that quality design in itself is not important, but it is how we use it what matters.

Maud Lavin well defines this perspective on the role of graphic design and clarifies its power:

“... design is a montage, a recycling of common symbols in new combinations and visual environments. It is precisely because design recirculates easily understood and shared imagery – and is widely distributed – that it is so powerful. Given this immense ability to communicate, the challenge to graphic designers is to focus less exclusively on formal concerns and more on the context and the content of the message.” (Lavin 2001, 80)

The signs and the street actions are an understandable format to the public: people are used to posters, sandwich men and campaign volunteers asking for donations. But still, a subtle détournement hijacks the apparent normality and stimulate reflection: no money is asked, because no money can buy the solution to the problem.

4.5. Knit guerrilla

One week before the conclusion of the campaign on Soita Mummolle Päivä, another guerrilla action took place, different from the previous ones described as street actions: 150 crochet hearts “were forgotten” on Helsinki’s
metro train and trams, attached to a small flyer reminding about *Soita Mummolle Päivä* and the flash mob organized on that date (Appendix 3).

I chose to have knitted handmade objects as medium, because in Finland so many grandmothers have the hobby of knitting and crochet. It is typical for them to knit socks for all the members of the family, who end up having more that they could ever use. I thought that when Finnish people see a crochet or knitted item, it could remind them of their grandmothers.

In traditional guerrilla knitting, a knitted fabric or a crochet is stitched on elements of the urban environment, such as statues, benches, grids, poles, trees, bike racks etc. with the purpose of creating a piece of public urban art with a soft and colorful impact. I decided not to have the pieces attached to urban elements, because I thought that for many seniors this could be perceived as an act of vandalism. Thus, I planned to have the crochets simply “sitting” on public transportation seats, giving the possibility to people to take the hearts home or even throw them away, if they considered it vandalic.

At first, I tried to obtain these hearts organizing a “knitting & sauna night” in collaboration with Sofia Elderly Home in Laajasalo, but unfortunately all the old ladies who have this hobby were away for all the summer in their cottages. The same problem arose when I tried to start a co-operation with Marttaliitto, a popular Finnish home economics organization, or with seniors’ knitting clubs in Helsinki. So, despite I strongly wanted to organize an event that would involve grandmothers to be active part of the campaign, I had to find another solution.

Once again, I chose to rely on the power of social media. I was told about [www.ravelry.com](http://www.ravelry.com), a social network dedicated to knitters and crocheters, so I decided to post there a call for knitted hearts as donation for the campaign. Many members of the community replied to my request for help and seven of them enthusiastically contributed to the project, knitting and sending me handmade crochet hearts. The most surprising and exciting fact was that the contributions came from many different countries:
USA, Netherlands, Australia and Finland, of course. I received 100 hearts for free and I purchased 50 extra hearts from www.etsy.com, a website specialized in trading handmade and vintage items.

In this case the net proved itself a powerful tool in linking together persons sharing a similar agenda, despite the distance. The participants were motivated and enthusiastic in giving a hand: not only they sent me very punctually their works, but the initiative also stimulated online activities. For instance, they shared the patterns they invented on Ravelry for others to use, while many wrote me supportive e-mails. The knitters who had a personal blog alos advertised the campaign there. Nonetheless, it is slightly humorous that it was impossible to find Finnish grannies to knit and that I had to resort to the help of an international online community. A coordinator of a knitting club told me that this happened because it was *the wrong season*; the old ladies would have been thrilled to participate, if only this would have been organized in the winter.

The hearts on the public transportation were very well received: even though the passengers initially took me for one of those fake deaf beggars trying to sell gadgets for money, they changed their attitude when they noticed that I was not walking back the aisle to ask for the payment. When they noticed that I was quietly waiting for my stop after completing “my mission”, curiosity became stronger: they picked up the hearts and read the flyer. Almost all of them took the heart away with them, with a smile. Some came to speak with me, praising the intentions of the campaign and asking for more information about it, or for an extra heart to give to their mothers, grandmothers or mothers-in-law.

This guerrilla initiative had a positive impact in generating discussions and provoking smiles among the passengers, as well as capturing the attention of the media. In many interviews, I was asked about the meaning of the hearts and the journalists seemed particularly interested in the unconventionality and the emotional touch of this artwork.
4.6. Billposting

Billposting is perhaps the most typical DIY solution adopted not only by activists and social movements, but also by bands, local circles and event organizers, sport clubs, owners of lost kittens and in general by each individual or group acting at grassroot level. It is an ambivalent practice, either explicitly rebellious or naively innocent: in any case, together with street gatherings or processions of any kind, it is the most simple and inexpensive way to obtain public space by circumventing the logic of the commercial system. Mitchell argues that “public democracy requires public visibility and public visibility requires material public space” (Mitchell 2003, 148) and sets the question of who does have the right to the city space. He points out that an urban life worth living is made of publicness itself, despite those “experts” pushing to make space more secure or to put a price tag on it (Mitchell 2003, 3). Democracy needs a certain degree of chaos to manifests itself into spaces because it needs the active and heterogeneous participation of different citizens: in a way right of representation in public spaces and right to speak are incredibly near. Posters, as well as the guerrilla and street actions presented before, are exemplary in supporting these two rights, because they are visual and verbal creations at the same time.

I have been using the already mentioned A4 Soita Mummolle signs as small posters, attaching them with transparent tape at bus and tram stops. I decided to focus on these places, because people are standing there waiting, and thus have time to read the message. I did not want to paste posters everywhere in the city, contributing to the urban waste, so I selected a placement solution that would help maximizing the efficacy of the posters.

The reception of the posters was mixed: for some it was a refreshing experience to encounter this type of message on the street, for others it was simply vandalism. Comments were coming from unexpected people. An elegant lady, who later introduced herself as a Member of Finnish Parliament, stopped me to praise the posters and the poignancy of their social message. Few minutes later, a drunken guy would mutter something, looking at me with despise.
I decided to discontinue this activity after a man verbally attacked me. He harshly pointed out that bus stops were private property so I was doing something wrong and illegal: he forced me to take down the colored A4. I was alone, the man refused to speak English and his aggressiveness scared me. So as not to compromise the whole campaign with episodes of this kind, and fearing that they could even end in a worse way, I regrettfully stopped billposting.

4.7. Flash mob

A flash mob is “a large group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and pointless act for a brief time, then disperse. The term flash mob is generally applied only to gatherings organized via telecommunications, social media, or viral emails.” (Wikipedia). It is a practice appeared at the beginning of the new millennium and common flash mob performances are pillow fights, silent raves (the participants are dancing with earphones) and freezes (the participants are immobilizing in a certain position until the signal of the end of the performance). Usually the goal of a flash mob is to disrupt daily routines in urban spaces and it is an apolitical, non-religious and non-profit event. Nonetheless, these techniques have been borrowed also by companies and various associations for promotional and political reasons, even though “purist” mobbers are against calling these events flash mobs.

The event organized on 11th August as final of Soita Mummolle campaign is, in this sense, a non-pure flash mob, because it was intended to support a social cause. What it shares with the flash mob technique is the use of social media to gather the participants, the limitation of the action in a specific time and place, fun as a tool to disrupt the urban routine and the temporary appropriation of public space.

The flash mob was organized to celebrate and give legitimacy to the self-proclaimed Soita Mummolle Päivä (“Call your Grandma Day”). A public event was needed both in terms of visibility and storytelling: once that I manage to gather people’s attention about the issue of seniors’ loneliness,
I had to transform its energy into action, even if into a symbolical one. People were invited to gather in Narinkkatori, a square in Helsinki centre next to the well-known shopping mall Kamppi, and, once there, call their grandparents publicly, so as to show everybody a sign of their love and commitment to the issue.

I managed to have at my side two partners in the realization of this event: Sonera and Agricola Church. The telecommunication provider Sonera supported the initiative by lending ten mobile phones for participants to make their free calls. Agricola Church, especially thanks to the influence of its priest Teemu Laajasalo, provided the “human resources”: about fifty teenagers and Laajasalo himself came to Narinkkatori to help, offering the sponsored phones to people and waving the event’s colorful signs. It was very crucial to have so many young persons there, because they symbolized the new generation willingness in overcoming the age gap between them and seniors. It was also important to have a numerous group of people to be present all in the same moment, so as to attract other participants more easily.

The flash mob took place between 16:00 and 17:00 and about a hundred people (including the teenagers from Agricola Church) participated. Many of them heard about the event from the media: national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat listed the flash mob as one of the must-go of the day (alongside, for example, Chemical Brothers’ concert) and many radios invited their listeners to join. A local TV station came to interview me and to film the event, while a reporter from Ilta Sanomat interviewed some of the mobbers, including a seven-years old and her grandparents, who came to call the girl’s other grandma. The blog had its peak of traffic on that day, attracting 1024 visitors.

It was beautiful to see both adults and children participating, and having fun while doing it. The stereotypically privacy-loving, shy Finns came out in the street to demonstrate their support for an important social issue and let me take pictures and videos of them. The cheerful, relaxed atmosphere exemplified perfectly the soft and tongue-in-cheek tone of voice of the campaign.
4.8. PR

The public relations activities aimed mainly at getting media attention and searching for the support and cooperation of likeminded people. The press releases were sent to journalists and bloggers in different moments and with differences in the content: monthly magazines were contacted already in April-May, focusing on the concept of the campaign, other media (daily /weekly outlets) instead received three press release during the ten days preceding 11th August. These three press releases had mainly the same body text, but each time featured in the title and in the introduction a new piece of information taken from the results of the survey (See examples in Appendix 2). I targeted national and local newspapers; free press; radio stations; TV news; female magazines; magazines about health, family, third age, environment and social issues; blogs about Helsinki, environment and social issues. All the press releases were sent as plain text e-mails with no attachments, so as to avoid to end up as junk mail in the spam mailbox.

The press releases, supported by all the information and visual material available on the net, worked well in granting media attention. In the week before 11th August there has been a real swarm online and offline and I received plenty phone calls, e-mails and requests for interviews from journalists. I had the attention of Helsingin Sanomat, Ilta Sanomat and Vartti. The story appeared in MTV3 news and in the popular morning program AamuTV. I managed to become the media lemmikki, the media pet that at the beginning of the project I thought it would have been so hard to become. After five months of patient work I gained quite widespread media attention, and just in time before setting up the grand final of the campaign.

Media coverage in numbers

• Press articles: 18
• TV features: 3
• Radio features: 6
• Online press articles: 16
• Web articles (portals, zines etc.): 5
• Blog posts: 20
• Discussions in national online forums: 3
• Tweets: 22

5. Evaluation

But in the end, did anything change after the campaign? As I mentioned, the desired outcome of the campaign was not only raising awareness about the issue of seniors’ loneliness, but to motivate and support people in doing something about it in first person. Evaluating the campaign from the perspective of impact is problematic: apart from the qualitative first hand data I could provide (emails, Facebook messages, how many participated to Soita Mummolle Päivä, forum threads, personal “confessions” of people who said that they called), I do not have an answer.

If we consider the media reaction, the issue of seniors’ loneliness appears to be strongly perceived as something fundamental. It would be possible to make rough calculation of how many average contacts the media coverage might have granted, but this quantitative aspect will not solve the doubt: being aware of a campaign or a piece of news does not necessarily makes our behavior change.

Perhaps we could use smiles as a both quantitative and qualitative indicator. It is said that we smile when our brain creates a new mental association, for example when we understand a joke. In this case, the campaign managed to cause many smiles, both in participants, passers-by and media audience. The message of the campaign was perceived as humorous, because it was unexpected, but true at the same moment. From this point of view, it definitely managed to make people think, even for one moment.

It is also not to forget that actually people participated in the project: some volunteered as photographers and some knitted hearts, other agreed to be photographed or came spontaneously to Narinkkatori for the flash mob.
The numerical result might be not massive, but sheds certainly a positive light on the possibility of using design as a tool to influence behavior and spark new interactions between people. So the answer to the experimental question seems to be yes, actors with small budgets can still do a lot to influence the public opinion and raise participation. But is important to play by a different set of rules in order to overcome resource limitations and stimulate a non-superficial response from the audience: creativity helps in achieving both goals.

My opinion is that the campaign needs to be repeated for some years in a row to really manage to imprint a new direction in the general public attitude towards the seniors. In the meanwhile, it would be useful to monitor with surveys and trend observations if new behaviors and attitudes develop. Only time would grant the possibility of measurability.

My regret is not to have been able to push even forward my intention of designing with people. I would have liked to actively involve seniors in the production of the campaign and I would have hoped in a more flexible collaboration on Sonera’s side. In both cases the immediacy of the guerrilla tactic worked against the project, because organizing a satisfactory cooperation with third parties would have required a much longer timeline (or more luck).

Big organizations such as Sonera have their own marketing plans decided months in advance, so the request of placing a Soita Mummolle sign in each of their Helsinki shops was refused. The marketing department justified this decision because summer is the most profitable and active moment of the year for phone providers: shops are full of offers and new products, so not even the space of an A4 can be “wasted” for a purpose which is not selling. Only the shops in Kamppi and Citykäytävä were allowed to exhibit a campaign sign, after Sonera’s Common Responsibility Manager strongly insisted within the company for this to happen. Planning the terms of the cooperation well in advance would help to attract possible cooperators and sponsors, because they could more easily decide their role and what is their gain.
Also when it comes to the individuals, in this case the seniors, it is difficult to set up collaborations quickly. Summer is typically a difficult moment to reach anybody in Finland. Also in this situation, a timely planning months before would have solved the problem. Nonetheless, one should consider that creating a contact network and finding like-minded individuals to work with is terribly time taking too.

In co-design not only the goodness of the aim is important, but also a fair negotiability of the participation conditions for all the actors involved. Nonetheless, all the support received, even if small, was definitely relevant. Without the knitters, I would not have been able to organize the knitting guerrilla. Without the ten Sonera phones, no free calls would have been possible. Without the people of Agricola Church, the flash mob would have been pitifully not crowded. Networking – both online and offline – is essential and any kind of help should be welcome: this will also contribute to create better collaborations in the possible future steps of the project.

An evaluation of the effective utility of social media remains somehow ambivalent instead. Even though these tools are undeniably helping in reaching targets never thought before (and with a relative ease) and empowering grassroot and amateur actions, it is also true that they trivialize, in a way, one’s commitment to a cause. It is just too easy to join a social responsibility cause or sign a petition online. These actions wash our consciences and they can appear on our Facebook feeds, as a virtual medal of honor for our goodness.

These two aspects are coexisting, just as they coexisted before. As to say in with Mc Luhan, media are simply an extension of what we already are: so, social media will be definitely a powerful tool for activists and change-makers, while it will not trigger any further response from those who do not want to seriously join anyway. One positive aspect, though, is that even if online participation in the second case can be superficial, at least contributes to the public awareness of the audience about the campaign.
6. Beyond the case study

In the conclusion of this chapter, the campaign is analyzed from four different perspectives present in literature, in order to have further reflection about some interesting topics emerged from the case study.

These four subchapters are not necessarily building together a unitary discourse, since they are stand-alone reflections. Each of them aims to better describe a thematic area according to which the case study can be contextualized. Despite these themes would offer wide spaces for discussion and analysis, I chose to present them briefly, as a lens to better interpret the cultural scenario in which Soita Mummolle is collocated. I am taking here the opportunity to focus on important aspect of the campaign that will not be developed further in the thesis, but nonetheless deserve few words.

6.1. Prototyping as a trigger for innovative communication strategies

Usually, the starting point of design cases coincides with the client brief, a wish list of specifications that define and describe an idea and its desired outcomes. Most of the times, clients know what is the final effect they want to achieve, but not how to achieve it. They think they know, but in many cases they do not: they will ask the designer to design something that works/seems like [put a successful example here]. What they wish is to obtain the same impact of such successful example, but they tend to mix the cause with the effect. This will create biases and limiting assumptions over the topic, preventing a free exploration of the possible alternatives.

I argue that briefing is often endowed with assumptions, which later on will create bottlenecks into the innovative potential that the design wants to reach. As Schrage (1996) points out, “some innovation cultures are specification driven; others are prototype driven”. In order to obtain innovative results it is important to substitute specification-driven prototype processes with prototype-driven specifications, meaning that only after the confrontation with real context and needs we can define concepts that are really fresh and effective.
The lack of an extensive brief was the unique condition of the original project from which Soita Mummolle originated: the team was just asked to design “concepts for products and services to make the life of elderly people happier, easier, healthier and more independent, so that they could live longer in their own homes and avoid hospitalization”. The team was not given any further direction along which address the efforts. The project didn’t have a title, and it was up to the team to define it - along with a focus on the subject matter and the goal to achieve. Conversely, observing and listening to the target group was encouraged, as well as trying out quickly every idea considered having a potential and keep a “failure resume” in order to learn as much as possible from failures (Seelig, 2006). A hands-on, action-oriented, experimental attitude was more than welcomed.

The intention was to implement an experimentation within an experimentation: the student team was asked to try to instantly prototype their ideas, but by doing so they were at the same moment testing out if such a brief-free, explorative methodology could generate innovative concepts and lower the threshold of prototyping. The process used to investigate and refine the ideas was re-iterative (Figure 1), proposing a model of explorative prototyping, based on many of the elements often linked with the concept of design thinking: the prototyping process was systematic (Sato et al. 2010), rapid (Holloway 2009, Carr et al. 2010, Lockwood 2010), continuous (Drews 2009, Holloway 2009, Fraser, 2009 & 2007) and “from day one” (Brown, 2008).

Brainstorming focused on the generation of as many as possible different ideas; we were then conducting a brief qualitative research with seniors (interviews, informal meetings, phone-diary, following and helping seniors during their daily tasks), to decide which ideas to kill or develop; we then refined ideas and plan how to prototype them; we used material brainstorming techniques and tested the mock-ups both within the team and with seniors; finally we considered feedbacks from the users and from the “stakeholders of their wellbeing” (family, caregivers, nurses, doctors, friends, …) who typically influence the life of seniors and their decision process. We then started the process all over again on the ideas that worked out better, so as to explore them deeper and refine them further.
What makes *Soita Mummolle* an interesting project is that it was not a concept born out of theoretical guesswork and observations about what is “trendy, cool and works well”: it emerged during a concrete experimentation, which shown that an unconventional and slightly humorous approach to a serious issue had quite a grip on people. The five months long campaign organized during 2010 can be considered as the second re-iteration of the prototyping process, rather than as a final result: many elements were left open to improvisation and negotiation, partly to have a more experimental attitude and partly to flexibly overcome the limitedness of resources (figure 2). In such a situation, following a fixed plan would have not been beneficial, because time and budget limitations required to act fast and tactically, searching for likely opportunities while the project kept on developing. As guerrilla skirmishes in unknown territories, the only way to proceed forward is to create occasions for must-win battles. The project might evolve during the next years, creating variations on the initial concept; the optimal final goal would be the creation of a social initiative developing autonomously in different places, with no need of a centralized organization. A phenomenon in this sense similar to Carrotmob and Buy Nothing Day.

Even though prototyping is more easily understood and applied in the field of product/industrial design, I would suggest its beneficial effects also in the field of communication. Prototyping new ways of communicating a message, or interacting with an audience, can be interesting not only from a theoretical point of view, but it could lead to innovations in a field too many times disputed just between banal marketing persuasion or artistic self-oriented pretentiousness. This is limitative: communication designers should care more about creating experiences supporting human enrichment.

Though, prototyping intangible practices could be a challenge. Välikangas (2010), for example, writes about the difficulty of inventing and experimenting innovative management practices. She underlines how it is vital for companies to create their own, rather than copying “best practices” without regard to the context that generated them.
Figure 1: Reiterative process, used to define prototype-driven specifications in Soita Mummolle.
In my opinion management and communication practices share points in common: they both are intangible and exist in the relational in-betweens among different individuals, their success depends strictly on the context in which they are applied and they so widely influence all the activities happening in that context. As communication style influences how we interpret and react to situations and messages, management style subtends to every process inside of the company, fostering or mining their success. Both are invisible and difficult to control, and so important in facilitating human interaction and creation.

It is useful to consider some of Välikangas’ insights to recognize how experimentation can help us in conceiving and testing new meaningful formats of communication:

- Experimentation should not aim to give a theoretical explanation to already observed phenomena, but should offer the possibility of creating new, different phenomena or testing variations of existing phenomena

- Inventive experimentation works at the crossroad of theory and practice, and allows for the serendipitous discovery of new ideas and practices

- Experimentation helps in redefining problems and enhancing the understanding of their characteristics

- Experimentation reveals what is possible, what is preferable and what is true

- “Learning-by-doing” is not enough to generate new solutions, so it should be substitute with “learning-by-trying”, which is the only way to experience something novel

- Experimentation accelerates the pace of invention

When we are designing a service, an event, a campaign or a form of interaction it is vital to understand how our creation will work in real life. Nowadays, communication is becoming more and more about experienc-
FIGURE 2: FLEXIBLE PATH OF THE CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTATION.
es and less about unilaterally spoon-feeding the audience with messages. Ty Montague, co-president and Chief Creative Officer of JWT New York said that advertisement is dying, but the good news is that “engagement, interactivity, participation” are flourishing around us (Lucas and Dorrian 2006, 11). The visual communication designer has to be aware of this complexity: the easiest way to balance the different variables while creating an experience-natured concept is to simply act it out on a small scale.

6.2. The online/offline dialectic

The example of Soita Mummolle puts the spotlight on the dialectics existing between the online and the offline worlds in contemporary activist practices and DIY politics. Graham Meikle defines this relationship as “backing into the future”: even though the Internet is a new tool in the box of activists that potentiate interactivity, there is little evidence so far of tactics relying only on the specific properties of the Web (Meikle 2002, 24). Pre-Net tactics that proved successful are still widely used, now in combination with online tools that can potentiate their effects (mainly by “networking, publicising, educating, organizing and mobilizing”). This situation should not surprise and can be explained considering these points:

- Interactivity does not mean digital, but digital media are often the easiest way to implement interactive concepts. It is vital to execute ideas on the medium, which support better their implicit characteristics (Abrahams and Behrendt 2010, 60).

- Our generation is experiencing a fast time of change, our media behavior is changing and already now we cannot imagine a world that is not digital (Abrahams and Behrendt 2010, 16). It is simply unrealistic to think that is still possible to do without the Net.

- Any technology adds itself to what we already are (McLuhan 1964, 11)

- Getting together in the physical world is important to legitimate the agenda of the group and to coordinate views and actions. Anthony
Vidler (Mitchell 2003, 3) depicts urban public space as the cradle for “real communities”: “The street as a site of interaction, encounter and support of strangers for each others; the square as a place for gathering and vigil; the corner store as a communicator of information and interchange”.

Pre-Net tactics will not simply disappear, because sometimes they are simply the best media to obtain certain effects, so as digital media are the best in other occasions. On the other hand, Internet significantly helps alternative media production: anyone can be a publisher or a writer and it is common to experimentally mix informational and communicational forms online (Atton 2002, 150). The publicity of the content is maximized and does not have to rely on distribution, even if there is always the possibility of the message getting lost in the overwhelming amount of electronic data. Also journalists are online, so there are better chances to get their attention on the topic.

Online and offline worlds are bound to fruitfully co-exist. Campaigns, and communication in general, are becoming more and more of the integrated kind, in which each medium is independently used at its best to communicate the concept. Activists are often borrowing effective commercial media tactics and make them fitting to their purposes through détournements and cultural hijacking. They can be perhaps the best practitioners of online and offline guerrilla tactics, since their need of low-cost maximum impact is more compelling than the one of commercial companies.

Though, before enthusiastically welcoming the Internet as a democratic tool for social action and grassroot politics, there is a critical remark, which is worth to keep in mind. The access to this technology is still out of reach for the emarginated, the poor and populations of areas where the necessary communications infrastructure are missing (Atton 2002, 135). We have to be aware of the imperfection of the democratic nature of the Internet, as the existence of the digital divide still points out.
6.3. Design techniques, appropriation, focus on media

Soita Mummolle was a campaign created from a graphic designer’s point of view. The communication of the social message was not my only goal: I also wanted to achieve it using design techniques and conventions in a critical, oppositional way. For “design techniques and conventions” I mean the wholeness of the graphic designers’ professional skills, the methods and standards of image production, the knowledge of contemporary communication/marketing/media scenario, the clichés and escamotages we use in our work.

Maud Lavin describes how during the 80’s many activist groups resorted to the “critique-from-within” as their strategy of choice. Activists with an artistic background started appropriating design language made popular by magazines and posters, going back to the model proposed in the 20’s by John Heartfield with his caustic collages: “pragmatic, media-savvy approaches” to resist against and to criticize the main culture. Groups such as Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury and WAC -Women’s Action Coalition- all concentrated on single issues (respectively: gender and race exclusion from the art world, AIDS intolerance and ignorance, women’s rights), using a strong unique image and a simple, advertisement-like copy text. The common traits of these creations are irony, humor, playfulness and artistic borrowings from different visual styles. All these activist groups see mass media as something to both criticize and learn from, since the media machine could inexpensively amplify their message. (Lavin 2001, 96:101).

The focus on the media is an approach that is not limited to the 80’s. One example of it is Adbusters, which was founded in 1989 but is still alive and kicking today, having become a reference point in the anti-consumerism movement and for those designers fed-up by the omnipresent power of corporations. Adbusters is a non-profit magazine “concerned about the erosion of our physical and cultural environments by commercial forces” and a web platform, which also promotes yearly worldwide famous social marketing campaigns such as “Buy Nothing Day” and “Digital Detox Week”. Also known as The Media Foundation, they present themselves 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. Our aim is to topple the existing power structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century” (Adbusters).

According to Meikle, the approach of Adbusters clearly identify the media as the enemy, but at the same time they manage to monkeywrench so explicitly the media system that they receive amplification and resonance. They label this varied ensemble of activities (altered billboards, campaigns, pranks, etc.) as culture jamming. Drawing inspiration from postmodernist aesthetics and Situationist ideas, such as appropriation, ironic inversion and detournement, the jammers point the finger not only at social issues but also on the problems within media. Admitting to live inside a jungle of messages and signs, while they aim to turn those “familiar signs into question marks” (Meikle 2002, 131:132).

The approach chosen in Soita Mummolle belongs partly to culture jamming. Even though the main goal was not to unmask the media system, daring to propose a different truth about the seniors’ issue undermined the status quo. Moreover, this alternative story was told choosing design and communication knowledge as the main tool. The representation of the main “positive agent” was different than usual: the good guy was not some organization and its volunteers, on the contrary each individual could become the protagonist. The aim was to make people interrogate themselves about their individual responsibilities and suggest to simply do something good by themselves. The wellbeing and happiness of our families cannot be bought with money alone. As a culture jammer, I subverted the well-known rhetoric of social campaigns into questions about the individual, his/her family and perhaps about our ways of living in society.

As the project kept on developing, I became aware of my ambiguous position towards the media: I searched for their coverage, but I criticized the
commercial system in which they worked; I advocated for a different narrative about seniors, but I would not have reached my audience without the project itself becoming a story in the news; I looked critically at advertisement, but I resorted to some of its conventions to reach my goals.

6.4. Female participation and the do-it-yourself attitude

In analyzing the surveys, looking through the demographics of the Facebook page and seeing who was more willing to donate their support pictures to the campaign, I noticed a very imbalanced participation between the sexes: almost all my public and the journalists interested in the story were females (figure 3).

![Figure 3: Percentages of males and females participating in different activities related to Soita Mummolle campaign](image-url)
I am not fond of easy classifications, so I was comforted in reading that also sociologic and gender studies confirm that gender characteristics have an overlapping patterns: we cannot see gender traits as opposite, even though stereotypically men have agentic and instrumental traits, while women have communal and expressive traits (Lamanna, Riedmann 2006).

Nonetheless, the experience of the campaign highlighted a very stereotypical pattern. Women seemed to show the expected gender characteristics of "warmth, sensitivity, the ability to express tender feelings and placing concern about others' welfare above self-interest" (Lamanna, Riedmann 2006, 81) in their response to the campaign's message and activities. I am wondering whether this "gendered" different response depends on nurture/nature or on the fact that I am myself a woman, so the speaker unconsciously influenced the message, making it more appealing to one of the sexes. Perhaps, acting as a group where both sexes are represented, rather than individually, or defining the main copy as "Soita isovanhemmille" (Call your grandparents) would have had a different effect on the audience.

Accepting the gendered appeal of the campaign, I would like now to briefly underline few considerations on female DIY culture and social commitment in graphic design, since this work focuses not only on the impact on the audience, but also on how I, the author, was affected by certain choices and actions.

Amy Spencer (2008) describes how the act of crafting (sewing, knitting and everything else made by oneself) has recently come into a trend, continuing into the path set before by zines, blogs and other do-it-yourself activities. It is a lo-fi activity that follows the experiences of female DIY culture, such as, firstly, feminist publications in the 70's and, then, the zine and band scene of the riot grrrl movement in the 90’s. Crafting marks the rise of what Spencer calls “New Domesticity”(2008, p. 61), which is a way to recognize, appreciate and enjoy all those activities that women have been practicing for millennia. It is women’s right to practice and enjoy crafting, re-appropriating its meanings and not rejecting it as part of a male chauvinist oppressive culture.
Soita Mummolle has something in common with this discourse, primarily because it obtained help from a female crochet online community in producing the heart artworks for the campaign. These women decided to become co-creators and supporters of the campaign, and they used their crafts as an activist tool. The crafted item was intended as a symbol itself of “being grandmother”, so the public could immediately get a mental association. The crochet hearts were something created by women in order to speak about women: the grandmother is the lovely matriarch of the family, that spreads warmth and love through knitted socks, food and long chats. Her role, at least stereotypically (but stereotypes are often useful in communication campaigns), is all about caring for others, so she was utilized as an inspirational figure to trigger the same caring feelings in the public. Personal memories were an important factor, since most of us might recall being the pampered object of grandmothers’ care.

As the crocheters, I also used my craft - if graphic design can be called so – to produce the independent message of the campaign. Its role, though, empowered me in the same way crafts empower others: it is a means that allow independent self-production and distribution, engagement, authorship and involvement in something I believe is right and relevant. Maud Lavin (2001) interviewed female graphic designers, famous for their self-generated works, about the balance between this activity and their commissioned work. Lavin is interested in the results of research that suggest that women are more likely than men to use design for personal, political and social scopes (Lavin 2001, 109). Her question about these results is two-fold: it is because women are still denied the same level of retribution of their male colleagues that they have more time to set a different agenda? Or is it because they tend to follow their priorities that they end up doing more meaningful but less profitable works (Lavin 2001, 112)? Lavin points out that women are “multitasking” to keep together works that pay the bills, meaningful use of design and their families’ well-being. Graphic design has proved appealing for the possibility it offers to choose a cottage-industry approach to the profession. The designers interviewed by Lavin are quite successful in the field, so the money issue was not a preoccupation: still, the interviewees remarked that maximizing earnings
was not their priority, while they aimed at “self-fulfillment and making a political difference” (Lavin 2001, 111). These designers had such priorities even though most of them were the primary or even the only breadwinner for their family/themselves, so Lavin points out that the issue might go well beyond design field and be about how men and women “are socialized differently with regard to money”.

Taking myself also as an example, I agree with Lavin’s suggestions: earnings are instrumental in order to create possibilities of establishing one’s own authorial voice. I used the earnings from my job to finance a campaign and an experiment that I felt was important and could enrich me. I was interested in making a difference and in taking the chance of having, for once, total control over the message, its aesthetics and its application into tactics and media choices.

Spencer’s and Lavin’s accounts - plus the experiences drawn from Soita Mummolle - show how more or less consciously women tend to unite practical and personal issues in their actions and view them through a gender lens. Self-empowerment and the ambition to have a meaningful impact influence our ways of using skills, crafts and media.

7. Design case studies for comparison

To conclude, I will present a selection of cases that present similarities with Soita Mummolle in terms of strategy or standpoint. The cases were selected to display an effective and meaningful use of social media and guerrilla tactics.

7.1. Carrotmob: crowdsourced good-doing

PROJECT KEYWORDS: grassroots initiatives, online/offline dialectics, power of the Internet communities, social design

Is it possible to be in business and save the world at the same time? The answer is yes according to Brent Schulkin and Steve Newcomb, founders
of Virgance, a “venture fund/incubator that helps fund and build early stage mission-driven companies” (Virgance). The San Francisco based startup focuses on gathering entrepreneurs and engineers who want to make the world a better place using their talents. Perhaps Virgance’s best-known project is Carrotmob, “a type of consumer activism in which businesses compete at how socially responsible they can be, and then a network of consumers spends money to support whichever business makes the strongest offer” (Carrotmob).

A Carrotmob is the opposite of a boycott: the consumers choose to purchase from the shop that promised to adopt the most socially-responsible practices, so that to responsibility corresponds profitability. An auction is held among different shops: the winner is the one that bids the most expensive sustainable upgrade (usually related to energy efficiency, waste management and recycling and other environmentally friendly decisions). On the chosen date, a crowd of consumers, organized together through social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, gathers at the winning shop and makes a massive purchase, so the shop owner will be able to fulfill his promise thanks to these extra earnings.

The format is scalable, since it can be applied to both the local shop and the big multinational, and, thanks to the Internet, it rapidly spread from San Francisco to many American cities and different countries (over 80 campaigns were held in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brasil, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, UK).

The name Carrotmob comes from the idiom “carrot and stick”: rather than punish through boycotts, it is better to reward through purchase. The benefits will last in time and everybody wins: the shop owner and employees, the consumers and the environment.

The project depends on self-organization of new teams to spread further internationally and its main media outlet are Twitter, Facebook and their website, even though the real action then takes place offline. Thanks to the
photo and video documentation available and shareable online, Carrotmob builds itself up as an easily medializable phenomenon: among others, The New York Times, The Economist and Wired dedicated articles to the campaigns, contributing to increase its “brand awareness” within the public. Schulkin and Newcomb understood the spirit of our times, in which too many people are not necessary evil, but definitely not enough motivated to become activists the hard way. Carrotmob taps into the “slacktivism” (Wikipedia) of Internet petitions and awareness wristbands, painlessly pushing its supporters into doing a positive action in person, in the real world.

Similarly to Soita Mummolle, Carrotmob inspires citizens in making a difference by personally doing a small, good action: irrelevant by itself, it gains power when it becomes a mass behavior and contributes to change
the perception of society. A positive impact is achieved through a designer/developer attitude, and not through traditional volunteering or setting of political agendas.

7.2. Buy Nothing Day: use the media against themselves

PROJECT KEYWORDS: media detournement, online/offline dialectic

Buy Nothing Day is your special day to unshop, unspend and unwind. Relax and do nothing for the economy and for yourself - at least for a single day. It’s a reminder to stop and think about why you’re spending. It seems like a simple enough challenge to try to go one day without spending, but in many parts of the world it would be virtually impossible if you consider your monthly bills that accrue on a daily basis as part of “buying” (Buy Nothing Day).
This international protest day against consumerism, usually celebrated the Friday after Thanksgiving Day in USA and on the following day in other countries, is timed to coincide with one of the first and busiest days of the Christmas shopping season. Buy Nothing Day was founded by Vancouver based artist Ted Dave and later on supported and popularized by Adbusters magazine. The day is celebrated in more that 65 nations and the strategies used to sensitize the public on the problem of over-consumption include:

- **Credit card cut up:** volunteers are in shopping malls with scissors and a sign offering the service of freeing people from the continue extortion of the credit cards’ interest
- **Zombie walks**, in which masked people are wandering in shopping malls looking with discontent the shoppers
- **Whirl-mart:** ten people are driving their carts in long, silent, mysterious conga lines across a supermarket without buying anything. The intent is to puzzle the customers and upset the shop staff. (Adbusters)

It is also possible to download from Adbusters’ website flyers and posters for billposting in public spaces and spamming friends. The website also offers a downloadable video of the infamous “anti-advertisement” that each year Adbusters try to buy airtime for on American main TV channels. Obviously, every year the cartoon, showing a burping pig superimposed on a map of the United States, is rejected (Meikle 202, 137). Adbusters takes pride in these refusals and immediately medializes them as new content for the campaign: it is possible to listen online to the MP3 of MTV, ABC and CTV rejections.

Buy Nothing Day, conversely to Carrotmob, does not try to have a constructive approach, but aims to be a powerful demonstrative action, focusing on the tactical use and the jamming of media. It is a perfect guerrilla action, strong and quick, a “mind-bomb”: a potent statement made in a short period of time/space that disrupts settled patterns of though, placing itself in people’s conscience (Downing 2000, 159). The concept described by
Stephen Dale, in relation to Greenpeace communication strategy as such:

“... ‘mind-bombs’: influential, sometimes archetypical images that can cut through the hypnotic drone of the day-to-day babbling to reach people at a deeper emotional level.”

(Dale 1996, 134)

Also Buy Nothing Day is an initiative that extremely benefited from Internet, in terms of fame and ease of coordination between the participants. Kalle Lasn, founder of Adbusters, says that as soon as the campaign started to be publicized on their website in 1995, it took off worldwide: what was a relatively local initiative became a “global blast” (Meikle 2002, 130). The skillful use of visual communication and media circuits – achieved through re-appropriating the language and conventions of the creative professions – positions the project in an area where design thinking and activism overlap.

7.3. Improv Everywhere VS. Bill2.org: different implementations of the flash mob format

PROJECT KEYWORDS: flashmob, virality, tongue-in-cheek communication

I will now introduce and compare two different usages of the flash mob medium, one for commercial and the other for non-commercial purposes (even though for “purists” in the first case we could not talk about flash mob).

Bill2.org was a successful viral marketing campaign for Eastpak, organized in 2005 by Teen Agency in Italy. Since the company targets young people, the approach chosen reflects their habits and language: considering how youth is fond of Internet and how they prefer experiences rather than unidirectional advertising, Eastpak decided to host and sponsor a series of flash mobs.

The platform created to synchronize and advertise the actions was the website bill2.org: “Bill” is the mysterious character behind the initiative (clearly a reference to Bill Wasik, the senior editor of Harper’s Magazine
who invented the flashmob in 2003) (Wikipedia). But “Bill2” is by asso-
nance a reference also the company slogan “built to resist” (Baldasarre, 2006). A real flash mob movement was created around the concept (thanks also to the “invisibility” of the Eastpak brand, at least at first) and the events organized in Milan and other main Italian cities received incredible media attention. The most famous were a pillow fight, named Soft Fight Club, and Love In, a manifestation that anticipated the phenomenon of the “free hugs” by one year (Teen Agency). Thanks to stickers and flyers distributed in public places and the online videos of the events, the bill2.org phenomenon went quickly viral. With this campaign Eastpak practically launched the flash mob trend in Italy and managed to connect the brand with its consumers, collecting precious feedbacks and strengthening its image within the desired target.

Improv Everywhere, instead, is a New York based comedic performance art group, founded in 2001 by Charlie Todd (Wikipedia). The group “causes scenes of chaos and joy in public places” which they call “missions” 12: these are public pranks that might involve up to several hundreds of voluntary participants. Smaller missions are enacted by “senior agents”, performers that have been with Improv Everywhere already for long times.

Many videos of past missions are documented through videos on the group website: from synchronized swimming in a public park fountain to a fake U2 rooftop concert in New York hours before the real U2 were scheduled to perform; from actors repeating for an hour a five-minutes sequence of events in a Starbuck café, to invading in a mass a Best Buy store dressed exactly like the staff, or a collective no pants subway ride..

The aim of the group is to have fun and help to entertain others. In Charlie Todd’s words, Improv Everywhere

“get[s] satisfaction from coming up with an awesome idea and making it come to life. In the process we bring excitement to otherwise unexciting locales and give strangers a story they can tell for the rest of their lives” (Improv Everywhere).
Even though their modus operandi, especially in the actions with many voluntary participants, is similar to a flash mob, the group does not identify with this definition, even because Improv Everywhere was founded in 2001 (two years before the “first” flash mob). Both Improv Everywhere and Bill2.org, despite not being flash mobs by the definition, used the characteristics of this medium skillfully. Their active and lively presence on the Internet gets them fans and future participants, thanks to a video documentation that made the past performances alive and appealing. Even though they aim to two different goals, commercial success or fun, implicitly they break the daily routine and encourage free expression, which are the aims of a flash mob.

In my opinion the term “flash mob” should be intended as a medium, as we would speak about “television”, “magazine” or “performance”: the aims and the content of each instance do not affect its format (which in this case would be every temporary, ironical gathering in an urban space while performing an action not understandable by the outsiders).

7.4. **Novita sponsors guerrilla knitting in Kallio, Helsinki: companies’ new ways to speak to their potential customers**

**PROJECT KEYWORDS:** guerrilla knitting, urban intervention, sponsors

In May 2010, during the neighborhood festival *Kallio Kukkii*, in Helsinki, a collaborative piece of guerrilla knitting was created on the stairs at the address Helsinginkatu 10-12. In four meetings, the participants of the free events planned, knitted and “bombed” the location with their crochets and knittings, creating a lively artwork that colored the road for all the summer.

This event - apart from being a sign of the coming back of traditional female crafts in the contemporary wave of “New Domesticity”- is interesting for the role adopted by its sponsor, Novita, who provided the yarn. The company is the biggest Finnish producer of yarn for handicrafts, with a retail network of 2000 shops in all the country; yet its logo does not appear anywhere near the artwork, even though an entry on Novita website talks about the initiative.
The same approach was adopted in a later cooperation for a guerrilla knitting workshop with Helsinki Design Museum, held in October 2010. Helena Björk, the producer of the event for Helsinki Design Museum, says that Novita willingly cooperated when she contacted them and that the Museum is planning future collaboration with the company. The artworks this time were more individual works, placed in the yard between the Design Museum and the Museum of Architecture. She reports that also in this workshop all the participants were women, apart from a male graphic designer interested in the use of public space.

Despite being the market leader, Novita searches for an innovative communication towards its customer group, including non-traditional approaches like supporting guerrilla knitting and charity events, hosting a network of knitters blogs on its website and providing knitted gear to the metal band Moonsorrow (Novita).
7.5. **Red Cross Hope Store, Spain and Portugal:**
*a social message become tangible through a total experience*

**PROJECT KEYWORDS:** détournement, immateriality, temporariness, social

Taking strategic advantage of the Christmas season, the Red Cross cooperated with the advertisement agency Leo Burnett, first in 2008 in Portugal and then in 2009 in Spain, for an innovative concept of temporary shop: the Hope Store. Traditional fundraising was transformed in a more total experience, with hope being sold in a retail shop inside popular shopping malls in Lisbon and Madrid.

Hope was treated as an immaterial product that you cannot touch, wear and show, but that you can certainly feel: the ideal gift for a more conscious and less consumeristic Christmas. Leo Burnett Portugal states that “The promotional efforts led to hundreds lining up to buy Hope on opening night and the Store reached the mall’s top ten in sales in the first day” (Coloribus). Treating Red Cross as a part of the shopping experience during the busiest shopping season of the year proved a winning idea: hope was sold in different “sizes”, depending on the card chosen, and relating to different values and causes that Red Cross supports.

The Spanish concept was similar, but this time, instead of cards, the themes were represented with books. The shop looked like a bookstore, in which the titles of the volumes, which had all white pages, told a different story of hope: the customer was invited to make a donation to make it become reality, and in change could receive a bookmark related to the cause supported (The Inspiration Room). Leo Burnett Spain also invited influent journalists to the opening of the event, sending as press release the “dictionary of hope”, a small dictionary that contained only positive words, while all the bad ones were canceled (Leo Burnett Spain).

In both concepts the familiar idea of a shop was re-appropriated and reinvented, becoming a different medium supporting an alternative message.
of responsibility. Citizens’ participation and the skillful use of the media hype were a crucial part of the campaign, which managed to be involving and to talk with an optimistic twist about serious social issues.

7.6 Unicef campaign “Ole Hetken Äiti”: managing guerrilla tactics for maximum virality

PROJECT KEYWORDS: guerrilla, media, virality, social issues

In 2009 Helsinki-based advertising company Taivas was briefed by Unicef about a social responsibility campaign: the goal was to raise awareness on how much Unicef is doing for orphans, evoke feelings about child welfare and to raise money. Taivas came up with the concept Ole Hetken Äiti (“Be Mom for a Moment”), a campaign that united guerrilla to traditional advertising and wanted to wake up the parental instincts in the audience.

On 10.3.2009 blue strollers were abandoned in 14 cities around Finland. From the stroller the voice of a crying baby could be heard, so the passers-by went to check if the baby was fine or called for help. The initiative wanted to stress the rights of each child to care and a good life. The reaction of the media was instantaneous, featuring the story in TV and web news, steaming up the conversation within the public opinion. Taivas estimated that the campaign triggered 10 500 new conversations on Finnish websites about the guerrilla and children’s rights. Already before the start of the traditional advertising (print, outdoor, TV and radio commercials, stickers on public transportation), Unicef had gained over 1800 new “Unicef mothers”, the donations increased sharply and it is estimated that was reached 1000% more traffic on the charity website (Taivas). The campaign grand finale was a dedicated TV show on 28.3.2009.

The campaign is exemplary in showing how powerful a guerrilla approach can be in raising awareness on social issues. Participation and first-hand experiences are crucial in involving the audience at emotional level.
Adele Enersen, concept designer and copywriter for the campaign – now on maternity leave – agreed to kindly share her insight, answering to few questions.

The traditional advertising campaigns are gone. How in your opinion is the advertisement scene moving?
Well, I don’t know if the traditional advertising campaigns are exactly gone, since advertisers still use them too, and in some of the cases it’s relevant to do so. We still use the “old media” too. But the new media solutions, guerilla marketing and innovative media usage is sometimes the best way to reach the right audience, or surprise the people when they are vulnerable for right message. Advertising has been and will be always just the way to get the right messages to the right people.

What are the challenges in communicating a social message?
The biggest challenge is that a message is not only what you say, it’s a two-way communication, and often it matters more the communication from customer to customer, instead of the brand speaking directly to the customers. So if your brand, product or message is weak or unsuitable, the message may be bad instead of good. Another challenge is to be interesting. People are not usually so interested to get more ads or messages from the brand, if there is no good catch, or even better, there is something they really want to know. You need to think like a gossip journalist. What is the image of the brand? How would it talk as a person? What would people speak about it? What makes people want to know more about it? What makes them engaged with the brand?

Working for a charity organization: “image-washing”, “just another client” or “more of these works are needed”?
It could be all of those, depends about the organization. About the UNICEF case: I personally feel that we need more of those works. It is always more rewarding to work with the brands you believe in. But it’s also good to question their messages. If you, or people generally have some doubts, the right message may come from those doubts and clear them. For me it was eye opening to know that 80% of all UNICEF workers work on field, directly with the children instead of sitting in some office and collecting money to send them. It’s not just sending money, it’s taking care, like a mother would do.
What does motivate clients to invest in guerrilla campaigning, rather than in traditional advertising?
It’s cheaper, more effective (when it’s good), it can be environmentally friendly and it can be fun. It’s in our nature to be curious. Traditional advertising can even be a burden to the public, even when it’s rather good. Consumers meet advertising so much that it’s really hard to pop out, especially when you’ve done traditional media for years.

What are the possibilities to conquer the free media space?
It is definitely a good aim, if:
a) your idea is good.
b) your way to tell about the story is good.
c) timing is right and there’s not much other news in media.
d) you make contact with media before the act, a press release is not enough.
How to change people’s minds?
Persuasive effects of social campaigns on behavior.

A fundamental aim of the Soita Mummolle campaign was to change not only people’s attitude towards the issue of seniors’ loneliness, but also their actual behavior and their actions. Every campaign’s goal, either social or commercial, is to persuade the audience to do something: to buy a product or a service, to vote a candidate or a political agenda, to follow a TV or radio programme, to make a donation to a cause, to discontinue habits harmful for the environment, to become a volunteer...
In my project I tried to lower the threshold for people to act. I asked them to personally do a small, inexpensive and easy action: to call their grandparents. Despite its simplicity, this was an action in first-person, with no intermediaries – as for example could be a donation to a charity: we give our money, we feel better persons, but we will not see the actual results of our action. My goal was to make people take action and see with their eyes the effects, with no justification in between.

During and after the campaign, I noticed some interesting reactions in my audience. Many felt the need, when they met me, to tell that they “did call”: in my perspective, this reveals somehow a sense of guilt, as children searching for approval from their teacher or parents, or a believer confessing something to the priest. As spokesperson of the campaign I was involuntarily being attributed some kind of moral authority – which I never claimed. Some acquaintances gave me an insightful account on how the message of the campaign worked on them: even though at first they felt that the intent of the campaign was sweet and caring, they admitted to have felt a bit guilty when they thought about their grandparents and remembered that their last call was long ago. The neutral simplicity of the message created an occasion for introspection, because the imperative in the copy text was addressing a second person singular. It was talking to one person at a time, to “you”. The naked message was immediately resonating within the reader, being richly layered with personal experiences and memories that made the impact powerful.

Many social campaigns try to raise a sense of guilt, pity or injustice in the audience. Sometimes they use crude realism, sometimes metaphorical and witty images. The message is always strong, urgent and immediate and should work as a mind-bomb. The problem is that these messages are not always successful. Sometimes the audience is even bothered by facing certain issues, because the approach chosen to communicate it is not the right one. The sense of guilt is not enough.

In this chapter the aim is to shed some light on the ways human beings react to external messages by adopting a certain behavior: how visual communication persuade us and interacts with our emotions.
1. The Tipping Point theory

In his book *The Tipping Point – How Small Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000) Malcolm Gladwell explains in a surprising, well-documented and vivid way how a message, a behavior or a trend can become epidemic. A tipping point is “the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point” (12) in which sociological changes – from fashion statements to health-related issues - take a sharp rise or fall. This theory is in my opinion a relevant, fresh filter to look at phenomena such as guerrilla, social movements and non-traditional communication. The same belief that things of relatively modest entity can have a big impact is particularly pertinent to my thesis.

In his exposition Gladwell shows how the rules of virality are quite counter-intuitive: his thesis is that for a behavior to reach its tipping point and give birth to a very quick, contagious change, actually surprisingly small interventions are needed. It is a matter of focused efforts, of “power of intelligent action” (259): we are influenced by the smallest details, in irrational ways, and we tend to trust to all those actors able to break through the isolation and immunity that the obsessive repetition of traditional communication brought upon us (275:277). The three “agents of change” that make a phenomenon tip and create an epidemic are the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor and the Power of Context.

1.1. The Law of the Few

The Law of the Few deals with the quality of the carrier of the message. According to Gladwell and with reference to previously existing theories cited by the author, an epidemic is caused by very few people who possess special social gifts: these persons matter more than others in the process, and they will tend to be the “tiny percentage of people [who] do the majority of the work” (19). In simple words, if you want your message to spread like wildfire you have to get first to these persons.

These special ones are called Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen. They all have different gifts and they are involved in different critical moments of the epidemic spreading, because they are the ones able to translate the
new, “extraneous” habits of the “innovators” into something that also the mainstream can understand and appropriate (203).

**Connectors** are the “social glue” (70), those who know a lot of people and belong to many, different worlds at the same time, creating a link that otherwise would not exist (50): they are those who bring together these different world, understanding and enjoying what sociologists call “the weak tie, a friendly yet casual social connection” (46). While normal people do not wish to maintain a meaningful contact with all our acquaintances, because it is very energy consuming, Connectors love by nature to nurture these bonds, seeing value in them. They intrinsically show “curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy” (49). Word of mouth phenomena are not linear, e.g. me telling a friend about something, but they happen when somebody tells something to a Connector, who amplifies the information to his/her vast social network.

**Mavens** are the “information brokers, sharing and trading what they know” (69). They love to accumulate knowledge about a certain topic, about which they are particularly passionate, and they are those to whom friends recur to when needing a sound advice about that very topic. “A Maven is someone who wants to solve other people’s problems, generally by solving his own” (66), so they are usually loved and not envied by their friends, because they selflessly tend to help you in their area of expertise. Their role in word of mouth epidemics is being a “data bank” of trustworthy information (70), which they are skillful in communicating: most of the people tend to always follow their empathic advice, because they naturally give authority and credibility to the message (69).

**Salesmen** instead are those with “the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing” (70). They are persuaders with natural energy, enthusiasm, charm, likeability and the power of positive thinking, and also some indefinable trait that make people want to agree with them (73). Gladwell, referring to previous researches on
non-verbal cues and microrhythms (synchronization in gestures and conversation rhythm, invisible to the naked eye), argues that Salesmen have the talent to make you “dance” to their body language: this have emotional influence, and emotions are highly contagious (84). They are perceived as “unambiguous” because everything is “written on their face” (87). In word of mouth epidemics Salesmen have the power to infect other people’s behavior, emotions and convictions with their natural charisma (86).

1.2. The Stickiness Factor
The second rule involved in the tipping point of epidemics is related to the quality of the content itself. While the Law of the Few looks at the talent of the messenger, the Stickiness Factor is about how much a message is memorable and pushes someone to act (92). Gladwell argues that there are simple ways to make a message sticky, so that it would trigger action, for example include in the message personal or practical factors: it is not the content itself, but how it is packaged what influences stickiness (132). There is no ready recipes to make a message irresistible, so Gladwell underlines the importance of testing one’s own intuitions about the properties of the message, paying especially “careful attention to the structure and the format of your material” to enhance stickiness (110).

1.3. The Power of Context
The third factor that is able to create an epidemic tendency is the context in which the action takes place. Human behavior is strongly influenced by the environment, both physical and intended as a community. Small changes in the environment have powerful repercussions on human perception and the consequent way the subjects will behave.

Gladwell mentions the so-called “broken windows theory”, which claims that:
“If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the streets on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes” (141).

These small details are what create the context for more serious crimes to happen in those neighborhoods, almost as “permission” was given for the situation to escalate. This seems to be true also in other contexts and for positive behaviors: an intervention on certain details of the environment will be likely to trigger or progressively eliminate certain related behaviors.

The other kind of context is the group in which an individual belongs. Within a community people are “susceptible to peer pressure and social norms and other kinds of influence that can play a critical role in sweeping us up in the beginnings of an epidemic” (171). Communities nurture beliefs and create the context where to put them into action (173). According to Gladwell, humans are particularly mutually influenced in groups that are of 150 at maximum. A higher figure would mean not knowing all the other individuals as well: the energy needed to keep up with the information about not only our relation to each of them, but also between them, would be too burdensome (179). Humans operate better within their empathy circle, where is possible to share experiences and intimacy, building trust. Groups of this kind serve as “incubators for epidemic, contagious messages” which can gain an extraordinary momentum within this peculiar context (182).

1.4. The “three agents of change” and Soita Mummolle

During Soita Mummolle campaign I unconsciously tried to put into action some of the principles of the Tipping Point, in order to maximize the impact of my action. Back then, I was not familiar yet with Gladwell’s theory, so I haven’t developed a precise plan aimed to translate these rules into practice. Still, it is possible to observe some similarities.
Firstly, I tried to act both as a Connector and a Salesman. I needed to expand my social network, to find fruitful cooperation, help and advice for the project. I needed to develop weak ties towards the different worlds connected to my topic, Simply put, I needed to speak with the Mavens of those worlds: I dealt the sponsorship with a phone provider which could in exchange get benefits from the specificity of the campaign (*Call your grandparents*); I obtained “human resources” from a parish interested in providing meaningful yet fun activities to its youths; I obtained crochets from crocheters and sought advice about social media and advertisement from professionals in those sectors. On the other hand I also had the need to persuade the public to give attention to the campaign’s message: my Salesman alter-ego is the one who convinced people to donate their support pictures and the one who wrote press releases to the Mavens of mass communication, journalists and bloggers, that got interested and amplified the range of the campaign.

Then I tried to make the message sticky: through the repetition of a precise format at precise intervals in time, I created a narrative well-known by the public. They knew what I was doing and they could recognize it when they saw it happening. By the last and second last street actions I performed, many teenagers approached me, saying that they wanted to be photographed: they knew about the message of the campaign and they knew what the format was without explanations.

Last but not least, the Context (and how to change it) was the final aim of my campaign. I wanted to raise awareness and inspire people to do more for seniors, starting from the small action of calling their elderly relatives. This meant that I tried to exploit the “fixing broken windows” effect. Unfortunately, I do not have data to confirm or deny the effect of this strategy, but at least it was clear from the response of both public and media that the message found a fertile soil in their consciousness.
2. Persuasion in the time of Facebook: MIP, or Mass Interpersonal Persuasion

One important factor to consider about Soita Mummolle campaign, as already seen in the first chapter of this thesis, was the intensive use of social media tools. In particular, Facebook was the public’s favourite channel to get acquainted with the campaign message and with the scheduled participative events, such as street actions and the final flashmob.

Stanford University’s researcher BJ Fogg, founder and director of the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab, concentrated his work on creating “insight into how computing products—from websites to mobile phone software—can be designed to change people’s beliefs and behaviors” (Stanford Persuasive Tech Lab, 2011). He concocted an interesting theory about what he calls mass interpersonal persuasion (or MIP), a “phenomenon [that] brings together the power of interpersonal persuasion with the reach of mass media” (Fogg, 2008). Fogg argues that Facebook is a particularly powerful persuasive tool, because it allows individual and small groups to change attitudes and behaviors of a vast multitude, spreading their persuasion friend by friend up to a massive scale. Facebook is also the first example of media platform able to create MIP in which MIP’s six fundamental components are finally present all at the same time, marking a developmental path into mainstream for this form of persuasion creation tool available for free to everybody. The six components are:

1) **Persuasive Experience**: the experience is created with the specific purpose of making a change in people’s behavior. Facebook is successful in this because requests and invitations to join a page, a group, a cause or an application come from a trusted friend. The automated texts used for this purpose use “strategies of pregiving, reciprocity, direct request, cooperation, altruism” (Fogg, 2008).

2) **Automated Structure**: digital technology supports and automates the persuasive experience, making simple its production, sharing and fruition phases.
3) **Social Distribution:** the persuasive experience is distributed through one’s social channels, gaining credibility as it passes from one friend to another.

4) **Rapid Cycle:** the cycle time to get others involved in the persuasive experience is short and relies on enthusiasm and momentum. Momentum, especially, is what persuades many people, who may otherwise not get involved, to join the “movement”.

5) **Huge Social Graph:** a network gains more value at the increase of the numbers of nodes it connects. Social networks allow millions of people to be interconnected to one another.

6) **Measured Impact:** users and creators can observe the effects of the persuasive experience. Measurable data are conveniently provided by the Facebook platform itself. Feedback increases the creators’ motivation and helps them while testing and comparing the efficacy of different approaches.

We can see how Fogg’s and Gladwell’s theories show different aspects of the same story, told from slightly dissimilar points of view, a general one and one very specifically oriented towards the digital world. They both indicate a model for successful epidemic communication, able to influence not only people’s perception, but also their behaviors. Virality and MIP share common points especially when thinking about social distribution and persuasive experience (Fogg, 2008).

Fogg’s MIP model easily describes what happened to *Soita Mummolle’s* message on Facebook. The campaign was created to change attitudes and behaviors, and the automated platform offered by Facebook provided continuity and coherency in the persuasive experience. The persuasion was shared and passed along from friend to friend, rapidly growing and creating a numerous fan community (at least for Finland’s usual figures). The growth and the ways of interacting with the page and other users was monitored by the embedded page engine, providing me an easy way to
check numbers and feedbacks, in order to adjust my strategy over time (for instance, the monitoring helped in planning when to start a Facebook Advertising campaign, or how often update the page so that it would not give the impression of spamming to the users)

3. Persuasion in social campaigns

We have seen two different theoretical contributions to the explanation of viral communication, both in the online and the offline world. I would like now to focus on the specific context of social campaigns, trying to shed light on how they proactively affect the public’s perception and behaviors, emotions and rational reactions. To discover what persuasive agents are used in social campaigns and which ones are most successful in having an impact on the audience, I interviewed two experts on this subject: Mirkka Parkkinen, who worked for a long time as communication psychologist at Sek & Grey advertisement agency, and Laura Hakoköngäs, organizer of the Common Responsibility Campaign for the Finnish Lutheran Church and previous activity leader of the Greenpeace’s Finnish division.

Many social campaigns try to raise a sense of guilt or pity in the audience. What do you think is the role of guilt in triggering people’s response towards a campaign?

MP: Guilt is a very problematic feeling, and people usually want to get rid of it as soon as possible. That is why they are easily using different kinds of defence mechanisms if the message evokes guilt. The risk is that the actual message is covered by these defence mechanisms too.

LH: I’ve personally always said half-jokingly that a little guilt never hurts – i.e. that people do respond to issues if they feel they have not done what they could do. However, this works best in awareness raising, not so much in fundraising where you want to evoke more positive feelings as well. Pity or compassion is certainly a very strong element in making people notice your cause.
But is guilt enough to change a person’s mind? What are the other feelings that is important to evoke with a social campaign? Could people’s reaction be more participatory if positive feelings are evoked?

MP: People always like more flowers than twigs. When getting some kind of satisfaction as a reward, people are ready to change their minds. When you are acting according to your values, you can get quite a lot satisfaction.

LH: See above. In my mind the most effective chain of thought in social campaigning is “This is simply wrong. But we can all work together to change/improve the situation. Here’s how you can help."

What are the most persuasive elements of a campaign? What does really affect people’s behaviors?

MP: If the campaign has some elements that are in line with the values of the audience, it can be very persuasive.

LH: People these days want to make a difference, even a small one, with personal choices as consumers or on-the-couch activists. I think if you appeal to their sense of justice/injustice and what they can do you have some chance of being successful. Usually you also need to explain how this is relevant to your audience and convey a sense of urgency ie answer the question “Why should I care and / or do anything about this particular issue at this particular time?”

What makes a message contagious, “sticky” and worthy to be spread by word-of-mouth? Does peer interest in the campaign add credibility to it? On the other hand, how important is the role of the mass media in this?

MP: Knowing the real values of your target group is the key to the credibility. You as the sender of the message should be like one of the peers. And if your peer asks you something, you are willing to listen and to act.
LH: Peer interest is definitely an important element of crafting a message that sticks. But this all depends a little bit on what it is you are trying to achieve – whether you want to shock or raise awareness, or whether you want people to donate to a cause. Soliciting donations requires a softer approach and creating the feeling that you can actually make a difference by giving money.

*Some campaigns just raise awareness about an issue, but few manage to encourage real actions from the citizens. According to your experience, what strategies are successful in inspiring new behaviors or first-person actions (e.g. make a donation, discontinue harmful habits, become a volunteer)?*

LH: If you make donating money as easy as you possibly can, you increase your chances of success manifold. Changes in consumer behavior, on the other hand, often seem to require being told also how your current behavior / consumerism harms your health, the environment etc. There seem to be two relatively new trends now: a) people also want to participate in making changes by doing something themselves i.e. being activists (as long as this doesn’t require too much effort) and b) they want to donate to causes that they have personally “valified” ie made sure their help really reaches the target group or cause.

*What advantages do you think a guerrilla approach could have compared to traditional advertising in involving actively the audience?*

MP: A guerrilla approach is something that is your “own” – own way of talking, own way of thinking... It is on your side instead of being on the mass media side. In a way: it knows you and your way of living.

LH: A guerrilla approach to me is the advertising trend of the future. Its advantage is that the means / medium as such causes a phenomenon, i.e. you get points from being innovative, funny, etc in your approach.
What is your opinion about the use of social media and internet platforms in social campaigns? Does it increase the participation of the audience and the virality of the message or is it just a form of "slacktivism"?

MP: When you can act or interact it is always much more effective than being only a passive target. If you can be in some way creative when participating, so even better.

LH: This is an interesting question and I don’t think there is as yet a definitive answer. Certainly social media has radically increased people’s sense of being active and I think campaigning organizations such as Greenpeace or Amnesty have used social media very successfully in creating international pressure and involving grass roots activists in their causes. But there is also a lot of “fluffy” campaigning going on that does not necessarily lead to anything other than a feel-good effect for those who use their mouse to “do” things.

How innovative, participatory designs help public awareness messages? How important is for a cause/charity/association to be in contact with its target group through event-like experiences/campaigns?

MP: People like to have real experiences. Always when you experience something it leaves a mark in your memory. If the experience is associated with your real values, the mark in your memory can last long – it can even change your life!

LH: Crowdsourcing is certainly an interesting way of involving your audiences in your campaigns. It is very important to know your audience and inviting them to participate in or co-create your campaigns is very appealing.
4. Conclusions

Persuasion is the result of many different factors combined together. It might seem a complex thing to achieve, but as Gladwell proposes, actually small, focused interventions can be the key to tailor a message to be highly persuasive and viral.

An element that clearly emerged is the importance of peers. Persuasion is a social phenomenon and it doesn’t happen in isolation: the right type of persons are needed to persuade others. In the context of a social campaign, for example, it is important that the key persons involved are able to replicate the charisma and strategies adopted by connectors, mavens and salesmen, in order to make the message spread like wildfire.

In addition, such message needs to be crafted in a way that enhances memorability and curiosity, creating a story that the public finds worthy to follow and talk about. The clarity and the mild repetitiveness of the format adopted can help in this, along with the inclusion of the right elements that resonate at a personal with the desired target.

Talking about the tone of voice and the style of persuasion, many times a carrot pays off more than a stick in getting people to do what they are expected to: positive feelings of self empowerment and satisfaction can push individuals to go the extra mile in reconsidering their attitudes and behaviors. Guilt, instead, brings in the risk to activate defense mechanisms against the message, even if it can be a powerful stimulus in small doses.

People are ready to change their mind if such change brings satisfaction as reward: nowadays people want to make a difference, so if one manages to explain them how and why their behavior can have an impact, there are good chances to persuade them. Participation is they key, and to achieve it one must take into consideration what values are appealing to the audience, and align to them.

Communicating a message also depends on the channels available. Some channels are particularly fitted (in terms of audience reached or format)
for messages with certain characteristics and their combination amplifies the efficacy of the communication. Facebook and social media provide a good habitat for memes and viral messages, as the MIP theory shows, because they unite the characteristics of person-to-person word of mouth with the reach of mass media. These elements, combined with the fact that they are basically free platforms, provide good tools even for a single person to create and spread a viral message that can affect the attitudes of a large multitude.

One aspect to consider is that often the audience wants to participate as long as it doesn't require too much energy. Concept designers should put a particular effort in crafting campaigns that unite small efforts on the public's side to concrete results, otherwise the initiative won't lead to anything but to a temporary feel-good satisfaction for the participants. Especially when using social media and online platforms, the danger of “slacktivism” and empty campaigning is just behind the corner: one remedy is to always keep in mind that the ultimate goal is not to create a cool campaign, but a good campaign. Elements of fun, creativity and “coolness” are just instrumental to obtain a socially relevant impact.
soita mummolle päivä 11.8.2010
kamppi, helsinki 16:00-17:00
In the previous chapter I discussed about how the behavior of the audience can be affected by social campaigns. But what about our own behaviors, as graphic designers? How can we be credible and coherent with the social messages we send out? It is true that in our profession we do not have many occasions to design in order to specifically address burning issues. More often, we use our skills to promote commercial offers and empty values. The almost alchemic power of visual communication is too often used to refine mud into gold. Graphic design is flexible, dynamic and it is how we behave and think that informs completely different solu-
tions: its transformative power should be used in order to positively affect the world around us. We can give ourselves an answer on how to make socially responsible communication be successful, but a social campaign cannot remain an isolated relief in our everyday activity. We can do much more than this.

If, hypothetically, us designers would be targeted by a social campaign called “do the right thing in your field”, what should we do? What are the different choices of behavior that a graphic designer can adopt?

In this chapter I will concisely review the positions on ethics in graphic design from different authors, to summarize what are the questions and the perspectives in contemporary debate. Different stances and behaviors are allowed in the profession, and it is not my intention to be judgmental, because there are inevitable contradictions in every situation. It is very difficult to be always “squeaky clean”, to say it in designer Sophie Thomas’ words (Cranmer and Zappaterra 2003, 19). My interest is to identify a set of criteria that the graphic designer should be aware of, when making and evaluating his/her own decisions about work, ethics and life. I grouped these issues around eight key points: context, aesthetics, self-awareness, clientele, viability, professionalism, target and impact. Each criterion reminds us of important and undeniable issues in our professions and might help us self-evaluating our actions (or at least, to be aware of the implications of our work).

When asked about what did being responsible meant for him, designer Shawn Wolfe gave a simple, but illuminating answer:

“I suppose at root it simply means being accountable. Basic personal accountability. All people, ideally, are accountable for the burden they place on their environment, their impact on their surroundings, their influence on those closest to them as well as those they affect indirectly. Not to suggest that anyone’s morally bound or obligated to live in any particular way, only that they should be accountable for whatever effects their life choices
have on others. And maybe both things mean roughly the same thing. They certainly go hand in hand. But I think from accountability comes responsibility. I’m accountable for everything I say and do. In principle anyhow. Ideally. So I try to speak, act, work, and live responsibly, motivated to be aware of the facts of my existence. It’s true for a designer just as it’s true of anyone from any walk on life.” (Heller and Vienne 48, 2003)

This is why I believe that it is relevant to be aware of our own behavior, and not only to know how to successfully design a socially oriented work that will influence others’ behavior.

1. Context

What is decided by the system, what can we decide?

How much control do we actually have in our lives? Advanced capitalism narcotizes us by repeating the mantra of our powerful freedom of choice. We experience our craving as a lack and a right for more (Oosterling, 2007). Actually, we are just free to buy and consume what we can find in shops. Actually, our freedom is limited to a very small realm. Another example: in the same context of hyper-consumerism, not to communicate is not an option (Ypma, 2006), because there is an increased demand for identity and “uniqueness” (this also being born from the artificially induced sense of “lack”) or at least so it is perceived. We have no choice but getting branded – both people and companies - and the fact that our identity will look perhaps unique is, again, a very small permitted freedom.

Designers are ambivalently accomplices and critics of this system. We create new needs and new stuff, new messages and new persuasions. We are also aware of this system more than the average consumer. That is why we would like to conquer for ourselves a cleaner position, and use our skills for meaningful purposes.
Erik Spiekermann suggests that there is at least one thing that we can decide and in which nobody has the power of object, and it is the way we work, our own process. “How we deal with our employees, our suppliers, our clients, our peers, and even our competitors” is a field of action that nobody can steal from us. Making a difference begins “in the immediate reality” (Berman 2009, ix): this, for example, was one of the key points in Soita Mummolle’s case, in which both my audience and myself were called to do something about situations that were under our control.

Still, it is complicated to clearly state what our options outside the walls of our studio really are, because conventions in media, technology, culture and money are so inextricably united to create our everyday environment. Henk Oosterling depicts our *Dasein* - being-in-the-world – as having reached *radical mediocrity*: a mediocrity that permeates our roots (*radix* in latin). This happens because we cannot imagine anymore how to live without being seamlessly integrated with those media-commodities, which are, as McLuhan would say, *massaging us*. The only way to escape is to make this totalitarian experience fail, by starting to concentrate on the *inter*, on the relational aspects between humans. Design seems to be a key actor in starting to focus on “how does it works between us”. So, almost paradoxically, a solution to reach freedom from the control of a hyper-designed living experience is the process of design itself, newly applied to society and its networks at large: *Dasein as Design* (Oosterling, 2007).

What both Spiekermann and Oosterling seem to point out, even though talking about different contexts from different viewpoints, is that much of the difference and the impact we can make lays in the relational side of things: actions and interactions are what matters in the end.

2. Aesthetics

*Good bad design or bad good design?*

Lucienne Roberts (2006) asks us to consider a simple conundrum, whether is it possible to be a bad good designer or a good bad designer and, if the
answer is “yes”, then what is preferable. This provocation points out an
everlasting tension between ethics and aesthetics in the graphic design
world: we know that graphic design is a social activity, because it has a
conversational nature, but too often the appearance of the works is the
only thing that matters. Steven Heller bitterly points out that

> “if surface is the criterion – and juried design competi-
tions prove that it is – then ethical practice is minimized
when judging much of the profession’s most celebrated
designs. The mantra ‘if it looks good it is good’ is fairly
common” (Cranmer and Zappaterra 2003, 11).

A good message in itself, unfortunately, is not enough: sadly many exam-
pies of work with ethical aims have a dull and unappealing implementa-
tion, so they do not reach their scope. Aesthetics are important in the
contemporary world of communication. Even non-profits need to become
more professional in their image and more strategic in their communica-
tion, because in advanced capitalism “the cultural role of the brands is to
respond to the spirit of the times” (Heller and Vienne 74, 2003): we are too
accustomed to identify our needs and ambitions with a brand, so even no-
ble causes should be presented through the “branding” convention. In this
sense, Soita Mummolle both agreed and mocked this convention, adopt-
ing its own logo and identity, which, though, was made with the simplest,
most neutral style.

Even though some could be dejected by how the surface of things is
so relevant nowadays, designers should aim as much as possible to
create “good-good design”, good in its content and good in its form.
According to philosopher Anthony Grayling a strong connection ex-
ists between ethics and aesthetics: ethics is about the general quality
of life, while aesthetics is about the quality of our overall experiences.
If beauty is what is striking, moving, something that makes an impact
and a difference, then the answer is yes, designers should aim to make
a more beautiful world, in this sense (Roberts 2006, 38:29).
3. Self-awareness

*What are our skills for?*

Often designers tried to answer to the question of what are their skills ultimately to be used for. Milton Glaser for example elaborated a list of twelve “DON’Ts” which address a wide variety of contentious issues, but one urgent question remains – and Heller points it out: what should we actually do, apart from staying away from the dangers hereby listed? (Cranmer and Zappaterra 2003, 12)

Ken Garland tried to give a more propositional direction to the debate, listing not only the dangers, but also the safe and agreeable zones. Together with over 400 other practitioners, he released in 1964 the First Things First manifesto, highlighting a social and humanistic foundation of graphic design. The manifesto remarks how design became uncritically enslaved to the economical powers and how much is needed that graphic designers take action to make the profession more meaningful and set a new starting point in its priorities.

*We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, photographers and students who have been brought up in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable means of using our talents. We have been bombarded with publications devoted to this belief, applauding the work of those who have flogged their skill and imagination to sell such things as: cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer, striped toothpaste, aftershave lotion, before shave lotion, slimming diets, fattening diets, deodorants, fizzy water, cigarettes, roll-ons, pull-ons and slip-ons.*

*By far the greatest effort of those working in the advertising industry are wasted on these trivial purposes, which contribute little or nothing to our national prosperity.*
In common with an increasing number of the general public, we have reached a saturation point at which the high pitched scream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise. We think that there are other things more worth using our skill and experience on. There are signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogues, instructional manuals, industrial photography, educational aids, films, television features, scientific and industrial publications and all the other media through which we promote our trade, our education, our culture and our greater awareness of the world.

We do not advocate the abolition of high-pressure consumer advertising: this is not feasible. Nor do we want to take any of the fun out of life. But we are proposing a reversal of priorities in favour of the more useful and more lasting forms of communication. We hope that our society will tire of gimmick merchants, status salesmen and hidden persuaders, and that the prior call on our skills will be for worthwhile purposes. With this in mind we propose to share our experience and opinions, and to make them available to colleagues, students and others who may be interested. (Garland 1964)

In 2000 a new version of the manifesto was published on Adbusters, the First Things First 2000 manifesto, so as to bitterly remark that in over thirty years the situation did not change in the direction Garland hoped, but perhaps it even worsened. Graphic design becomes more and more incorporated by advertisement in its daily routine. Many schools educate the students in this perspective, presenting it as the only modus operandi and not as one of the alternatives.

Tibor Kalman (Heller 1998, 191:196) claims that what made him start worrying about the condition of the profession is the gap between the tremendous potential of designers’ skills and tools, and what they are now used for
- i.e. to make things to look different from what they really are. He talks about wasted opportunities: designers have the possibility to do revolutionary things, but they do not get it and continue to concentrate on the form rather than on the content. We design “bad, stupid, but professional graphics” and we do not recognize that “if something is useless, it does not mean that it won’t sell”: this happens because we mistakenly take design for a message, for the goal itself, while it is just a medium, a language. Better to turn towards vernacular graphics, beautiful and meaningful in their imperfection, rather than continuing to design impeccably stylish “garbage”. The two FTF manifestos and Kalman’s thoughts inspired me in the decision of undertaking the Soita Mummolle project. I did not wish to implement something aesthetically beautiful, but I wanted to take a chance of doing something that had a deep meaning for me and could, at least in some measure, bring benefits to society.

The graphic designer’s quest for how to use his/her own skills goes along a continuum between high hopes for an impact on society and personal rules of thumb. Stefan Sagmeister’s “Things I Learned in my Life” (2008) is a list of twenty maxims (later become the theme for a book and an exhibition) that the designer elaborated during his “experimental year” in 2000. Some are wisely pragmatic, some philosophically reflective and all showcase the recurrent doubts of the designer as professional and human being. The most interesting, in my opinion, are the following, because, despite being strictly personal maxims, they are linked with recurrently asked questions:

1) **Helping other people helps me.**

2) **Having guts always works out for me.**

3) **Thinking that life will be better in the future is stupid. I have to live now.**

4) **Organizing a charity group is surprisingly easy.**

5) **Being not truthful always works against me.**
10) Money does not make me happy.

13) Trying to look good limits my life.

16) Complaining is silly. Either act or forget.

20) Everybody who is honest is interesting.

Numbers 5 and 20 strictly relate to – and expands within the personal dimension - a fundamental ethical principle of graphic design, which is to tell the truth and send out messages that are not deceiving; professional guidelines, such as those issued by AIGA, underline truthfulness as one of the basic duties of the designer towards the public.

Number 13 recalls Kalman’s opinion on how aesthetics without meaning can become a trap and a waste of potential, and reopens the “good bad design” question.

Numbers 2, 3 and 16 seem to allude to how design can be a call for action, a tool to proactively improve the environment around us. It underlines the necessity of concrete actions on our behalf, and not only witty visual commentaries. This consequently links to points 1, 4 and 10, which clarify how the stake in graphic design is not only commercial: our undeniable relation with the public and our control of a powerful language makes us political and social actors. With design thinking we can help others and solve problems addressing real needs.

4. Clientele

Are we educating our clients?

Having the possibility of working for ethical and responsible clients is not easy. Should we make sure to bring our own ethics within the project trying to influence the client’s attitude? As Pat Khan (Roberts 2006, 186)
points out, it is challenging to behave more sustainably, for example, for a client that has not asked for it: is it right to ask to graphic designers to be “advocates, negotiators or persuaders”? Do we need to become something that maybe we are not?

On the other hand, the experience of thomas.matthews studio seems to confute this opinion (Cranmer and Zappaterra 2003, 19): the duo of designers always remained true to their ethical principles and accordingly tried to persuade their clients of what they believed was right. Instead of dooming the studio to commercial disaster, this integrity paid off and created a competitive difference: their reputation attracted those clients that appreciated responsibility in business. In Sophie Thomas’ opinion clients can be persuaded and even turned down, if considered morally dubious.

The only safe way seems to “find clients who want what it is you want to do”, says Sheila Levrant De Bretteville, who is convinced that designers have to make a choice on how to contribute best to society: graphic design is a social activity by nature, so one should pursue his/her most “desirable engagements” (Roberts 2006, 138).

Chris Riley, in his “defense of advertisement”, announces, perhaps optimistically, that designers will have more and more possibilities to be conscientious and sustainable within the commercial world: modern brands rely on the values demanded by consumers in order to get their attention, so

“Sustainability is intrinsic to the identity question. In a culture that has rejected exploitation, has confronted inequity, and is striving for a utopian ideal of life, liberty, and happiness, sustainability has huge cultural value. Within the semantics of the word is the resolution of a paradox: It is about keeping what we love, not losing it. This means everything.” (Heller and Vienne 2003, 76)

In order to respect our personal ethical priorities the choice of the network of people with whom we are working with becomes vital. The limit point
is that to find an appropriate client we might have to become our own clients sometimes. And this does not mean to dedicate some office hours to entries for socially or environmentally conscious competitions or do pro bono work for famous charities (which, of course, often are investments to gain a better reputation and more commissions). A successful example of self-employing that lead to an effective form of social entrepreneurship are Worldstudio Inc. and its related non-profit Worldstudio Foundation. Mark Randall and David Sterling, the founders, finance the non-profit (and their living) through the studio, and the Foundation gives them an opportunity to be self-employed for meaningful projects, to publish the magazine Sphere and organize different programmes of mentorship and scholarship encouraging creative social responsibility in high schools (Heller and Vienne 2003, 54:59; Worldstudio Inc).

Another opportunity is given by the chance of self-initiating projects. What you earn cannot be measured only with money, but also in terms of personal satisfactions and enrichment. In Soita Mummolle, I did not earn anything: on the contrary, I used part of my savings to make it possible. Nonetheless, I feel richer. I "bought for myself", for once in my life, the opportunity of being free and commit to something I strongly believed in, without limitations. What I earned is a clearer understanding of what I want to do with the design skills I learnt. I can now inject this vision in my future commercial and research project, getting more control over their implementation and providing an input about the wished results.

5. Viability

To take or not to take the gig?

According to Evert Ypma, the existing infrastructure that support and subsidize young talents in the design world is too limited, and thus prevents real innovations in design: the easiest model to get integrated into the world and find one’s own role is a purely economical one. Ypma says:
“Lack of support makes it difficult for the newcomers to set up a studio without being completely dependent on paying clients. While it may sound indulgent, the ability to invest time and resources in the development of design discourses is essential for a designer’s development. Nowadays, by having to start out as entrepreneurs, designers are immediately forced into a purely economical activity, rather, than benefitting from a period of developing a well-thought design position that could later form the backbone of their design practice and designership.” (Ypma, 2006)

This sheds light on the burning issue of the design profession, take or not to take the gig? On one side it is clear that we cannot work for free, and our dignity as professionals should be recognized also, banally, with a fair remuneration; but on the other hand, we are well aware that graphic design is always a social and political activity, and thus is relevant to build personal values, standpoints and perspectives to seek our direction. The issue of time and how we divide it between different types of works and clients becomes one of the trickiest: I need time and sufficient money to do what I really want, so how to say no to a client when I need that money?

The answer to the question remains, in my opinion, very personal. We should consider designers as whole persons, so it is very difficult to judge if taking or not a work for a certain client is after all a good thing. It is more fruitful to build the awareness - through education and debate - that personal objectives and projects are a very much needed dimension of the profession: if this awareness is strong, each designer will find the best moment to say yes or no to different needs in his/her life.

The risk of alienating clients and remuneration is always behind the corner, and one should understand the hardships in the “quest for your own voice”. But designers should be aware that saying no to gigs and clients is also both a privilege and a right; and, in any case, it is the highest achievement that one should aim to, when building his/her way
to “designership”. It takes luck, but also clarity in one’s own actions to achieve this balance between paid/unpaid, meaningful/pay-the-bill and personal/commissioned works. The best situation possible is to develop the ability to attract clients with visions and agendas similar to yours, as in the cases, for instance, of Thomas Matthews (Cranmer & Zappaterra 19, 2003), Sheila Levrant De Bretteville (Lavin 114, 2002; Roberts 137, 2006) or James Victore (Victore, 2010).

6. Professionalism

Am I a fair competitor? Do I serve my clients well?

Being professional requires to adhere to principles of integrity and to observe deontological codes. It requires us to be respectful and fair towards the clients, the colleagues, the audience and also society and environment at large. AIGA for example set its own standards of professional practice, dividing the articles in seven chapters: the designer’s responsibility to clients, the designer’s responsibility to other designers, fees, publicity, authorship, the designer’s responsibility to the public, the designer’s responsibility to society and the environment (AIGA 2010). But is it enough to look at ethics from a point of view merely internal to the profession? Is it enough to have there only ten articles talking about our professionalism in relation to how we act towards the public, the society and the environment?

Professionalism, argues Katherine McCoy (Heller and Vienne 2003, p. 4), implies the ability to put aside personal reactions and deliver the service to the client in an impartial and consistent way. Terms describing being professional, such as “impartial”, “dispassionate” and “disinterested” become negative in a world that is “crying for compassion, interest, concern, commitment, and involvement”. This is the result of the ethics of twentieth-century modernism, which contributed to educate designers as arbitrators rather than as advocates, “including the paradigms of universal form, abstraction, self-referentialism, value-free design, rationality and objectivity” in their education. McCoy suggests that all designs should have
content, even in pedagogical exercises, so as to avoid “a lesson in passivity” for the future professionals (Heller and Vienne 7, 2003).
Mark Randall, founder of Worldstudio Foundation, points out that the very nature of graphic design give designers the role of commentators: their “commentary is visual, it is sexy and it can grace the pages of industry publication” (Cranmer and Zappaterra 24, 2003), but it does not bring any true change, because that can be achieved only though real actions. Professionalism is an important condition to respect, but it does not help us to answer to more urgent questions.

Also Milton Glaser, in his essay “Ten Things I Have Learnt” dedicates a point to the issue of being professional, giving to it the revealing title “Professionalism is not enough”:

“Early in my career I wanted to be professional, that was my complete aspiration in my early life because professionals seemed to know everything - not to mention they got paid for it. Later I discovered after working for a while that professionalism itself was a limitation. After all, what professionalism means in most cases is diminishing risks. So if you want to get your car fixed you go to a mechanic who knows how to deal with transmission problems in the same way each time. I suppose if you needed brain surgery you wouldn’t want the doctor to fool around and invent a new way of connecting your nerve endings. Please do it in the way that has worked in the past.

Unfortunately in our field, in the so-called creative - I hate that word because it is misused so often. I also hate the fact that it is used as a noun. Can you imagine calling someone a creative? Anyway, when you are doing something in a recurring way to diminish risk or doing it in the same way as you have done it before, it is clear why professionalism is not enough. After all, what is required in our field, more than anything else, is the continuous transgression. Professionalism does not allow for that because transgression has to encompass the possibility of failure and if you are professional...
your instinct is not to fail, it is to repeat success. So professionalism as a lifetime aspiration is a limited goal.” (Glaser 2001)

AIGA’s standards are just setting the direction, giving basic practical indications, but we need to add something else to the commonly understood notion of professionalism: we should not only keep under control for whom, with whom and how we work, but we should be able to maintain our personal richness while we are doing it.

7. Target
Do I design for designers or for “real people”?

Bruce Mau managed to crystallize in a nutshell what designers should constantly be aware of, and repeat as a mantra against the temptations of empty styling: “Massive Change is not about the world of design; it’s about the design of the world” (Mau 2004). Too often we end up designing for the designer’s eye: we concern about awards, exhibitions and peer respect. We want to be cool. But, going back to Mau and having a look at his Incomplete Manifesto for Growth (Mau 1998), we can find more food for thoughts. I would like to highlight these five points:

14. Don’t be cool.
Cool is conservative fear dressed in black. Free yourself from limits of this sort.

The space between people working together is filled with conflict, friction, strife, exhilaration, delight, and vast creative potential.

26. Don’t enter awards competitions.
Just don’t. It’s not good for you.
41. Laugh.
People visiting the studio often comment on how much we laugh. Since I’ve become aware of this, I use it as a barometer of how comfortably we are expressing ourselves.

43. Power to the people.
Play can only happen when people feel they have control over their lives. We can’t be free agents if we’re not free.

If we think about the stereotype of what a designer would be, we find a completely opposite character compared to what Mau suggests: we would be in front of a cool, individualistic, (wannabe) award-winner professional, who takes him/herself very seriously and thinks about the target/final user as a necessary evil that imposes limits. The problem is that stereotypes are not born out of the blue: they might not be true, but still influence heavily perceptions and behaviors. We are always tempted to attain to “the role of the designer”, and do things that designers should do (like competing): because we want to be cool. But Steven Heller warns us, “the trendier the trend, the less the need over time” (Heller 33, 2010).

Real world might not be cool and trendy, but has real needs and issues waiting to be addressed. Having to deal with poverty, inequality, diseases and many other aspects of the real world might not be very appealing to some, because it requires to get one’s hands dirty, very dirty, and deep in the matter. It is not possible anymore to find shelter in the ivory tower of some poster biennale, in this “world crying for compassion”. Evert Ypma indicates the way, welcoming a “grand reality check”, in the sense of injecting real narratives into representations (thus getting rid of empty branding). The field of action is shaped around “communities, issues, places, persons or other things from our own life”: design is what builds communication links between people. This helps managing diverse voices into the decision-making processes in society and business (Ypma, 2010c).

In Soita Mummolle, for example, the audience was seen not only as a target, but as a co-creator: without their input and their willingness to
participate in the different actions and flash mobs, the project would have simply not been possible. The visual content was the result of the audience desire to participate: by becoming “endorsers” of the message at the final flash mob and by modeling for the photos, they were both the targeted audience and the co-creators of the message, that they helped being spread further to other individuals.

Without rejecting the aesthetic dimension, our efforts as designers should always search the other as necessary counterpart for dialogue. To achieve this agenda, we designers and visual communicators need to become pragmatic, extroverted, projective, and solve real problems.

8. Impact

Are the purpose and the implementation of my design poignant?

How much good work do I need to do, in order to leave a positive mark in the world? The question of rationalizing our efforts on what has impact and makes sense is actually relevant, if we want to more easily find the motivation to pursue nobler objectives. Nothing is more frustrating than seeing no results or investing lots of energies and passion in something that will not make a difference in the end. Remembering to have fun is a fundamental ingredient in achieving any sort of new development. Making mistakes and learning from them can also help us finding in what kind of works we are able to give our best. So, the question of the impact cannot be answered straightaway; we need to try and learn, one step at a time, and follow our experiences, intuition and also heart in deciding what to do.

David Berman, in his Do Good Plead, asks designers to “spend at least ten percent of professional time helping repair the world” (Berman 153, 2009). Ten percent is actually a reasonable amount: supposing an hypothetical 40-hours working week (which ends up being anyway longer, for many designers), he suggests to dedicate 4 hours per week to participate in a project with organizations or companies that are clearly aiming at something good.
He points out that the real impact in this tithe does not reside in the individual action only, which is admirable anyway, but especially in the power of the mass: if all 12 millions designers in the world would commit to this plead, it would mean “close 8 million hours a week of designing a more just, more sustainable, more caring civilization”.

This example shows how the quest for impact is twofold, both personal and collective. Our actions and processes, as Spiekermann noted, are important to start with, they are under our control: there is no such thing as too a small decision. Berman adds a plural dimension to it, underlining the importance of creating a shift in the perception of the design world that could be achieved also through peer pressure. We need to do, but also persuade others and build up our standards.

Concrete impact is the most difficult thing to evaluate. A campaign can be brilliant, but lack of the necessary scale to really influence society. The evaluation of Soita Mummolle, as already noted in chapter 1, is difficult in this sense: there was not a way to measure how many persons did actually call their grandparents. Anyway, it is possible to see, through indirect indicators, that its message has not gone unnoticed. Two supporting examples are a flyer appeared in the School of Art and Design building in Autumn 2010 and a campaign against seniors’ loneliness organized by HelsinkiMissio in winter 2010/2011. The flyer is an ironic take on the Soita Mummolle sign, made by a student who was searching for an apartment: it said “soita kodittomalle— mind the homeless”, and, despite the different font, the layout was the same of the signs used for the campaign. HelsinkiMissio’s campaign instead refers to the fact that children are not calling their parents very often. In the two posters released an old woman and an old man are holding a “missing” sign with the photo of their son or daughter: on the bottom of the sign there is the phone number of the elderly person, to be called in case somebody finds the “missing child”.

These two artworks in a way continue Soita Mummolle’s narrative, indirectly referring to it as a precedent known by their intended audience:
Ajattaa mihin tuntuu, kun omi lapsi kadottaa?
Tähdän tuntumme, sillä tutustut luhanen vaumeeseen, vastustat sen ja heidän, jotka ovat valinnut. Niin, kuinka, entä mitä tuntuu? 
Miesten, jokaisen velvonlauseen on rauhalla sillä, että omat vastuullamme on oikein. Koko ilman appo.
soita
mummolle
*mind the seniors

http://soitamummolle.wordpress.com

SOITA
KODITTO MALLE
*MIND THE HOMELESS

KODITONOPISKELJA@GM
the first from the point of view of style, the second from the metaphorical and symbolical area in which its message is contextualized. Thus, impact can also be seen in indirect ways: a campaign can be contagious with its visual style, its language or its metaphors, that become in this way part of the collective vernacular dimension understood by the public.

9. Conclusions

*From a shift in our behaviors to a shift in the design as-a-discipline’s behaviors*

Berman and, in the second chapter, Gladwell pointed out how a small action can trigger a massive change. The intervention on some detail, or the fact that everybody starts doing the same, can help to scale up drastically virtuous behaviors. So the next question, after investigating how our audience and us should behave, is “how design as-a-discipline should behave?” The whole discipline dimension is vital, because a common understanding of what design is meant for would give legitimacy to individual and localized efforts of committed designers. In this case, I am not focusing anymore on visual communication only, but on everything that can be called design, from service, to fashion to graphic design.

The design milieu influences our goals and identities when we ask ourselves what we should be doing with our skills. Our peers’ judgment and beliefs can put us under pressure. The eight criteria about graphic design’s profession I identified—along with many other perspectives that can be used to analyze the condition of the design professions, are not crystalized concepts out of time, but they evolved and will continue to do so.

Referring to, and re-interpreting, Evert Ypma’s position of the designer in his essay *Design Beyond Design* (2006), it is possible to see, for instance, how the eight criteria would differ if analyzed in relation to distinct types of visual designer that appeared over time: the graphic designer (modernist, reference period from 30’s-50’s onwards; approach based on aesthetics/functionality), the brand designer (postmodernist, reference period
from 80’s onwards; influenced by advertising, hedonism and yuppies,
approach to design as an economic activity) and the concept designer/
researcher that can be also be called concept designer (post-capitalist;
reference period is hopefully starting now and maturing onwards; approach
to design as problem-solving for a more just society). In the scheme at
page 104-105 is it possible to observe the differences among these types
of designers, according to the eight criteria I identified and to other as-
pects that Ypma suggests. Soita Mummolle, for instance, is a project that
belongs already to the newest category of concept design/design research.
If we apply the framework to this case, we can summarize its position in
relation to the eight criteria I analyzed in this chapter:

- **Context:** social-cultural processes, common good, design reference

- **Aesthetics:** visual experiment, visual style is secondary, social-political-
cultural debate

- **Self-awareness:** context-based intervention, the “habitat” of the project
is society, the designer is a transformer and a strategy developer

- **Clientele:** none, the “client” is society

- **Viability:** low-budget, self financed, attention to the triple bottom line

- **Professionalism:** use of design professional skills, but in an interrogative,
questioning way; content creation, responsibility

- **Target:** human being, public

- **Impact:** actions, social binding and coherency within different clusters of society

To summarize even better the evolution of the designer’s character, Ypma
(2010a) also traced a synthetic yet vivid scheme of how the “main question in
design”, the one that gives an answer/direction to all the other criteria, evolved:
In 1900, in response to the popular demand of goods and the desire to provide mass-produced quality, the question was “How does it work?”

In 1950, according to the Modernist ideology, the question became “How is it structured?”

In 1980, after the narrative turn of art in the 70’s and the beginning of postmodernism, the question was “What does it mean, or what is it supposed to mean?”

In 2020, in response to the needs of a globalized world and in reaction to a dispossessing use of identities by brands, the question will become “How does it function between us?”

Ypma does not mention the question that characterizes our days, but it is clear that we are already in the process of making the 2020 goal reality. The direction of design is changing and the voices advocating a more just, sustainable, human-centered design are becoming more and more numerous every year. As an example of this tendency, is enough to think about Ypma himself, or David Berman, Ezio Manzini, Bruce Mau and many others to realize that a shift in design is not an utopia: a growing part of designers are working already now to make it possible. Also outside our field is possible to feel the change in the mood of society: it is enough to think about the popularity of TED talks or how many protesters asking for a sustainable world showed up at Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in 2009.
### 1) CONTEXT

**What Context?**
- Graphical/art reference
- Aesthetic traditions
- Conventions/dogmas
- Designer as artist

### 2) AESTHETICS

**Effects to Visual Culture**
- Non-differentiation
- Visual experiment
- No real innovation, citing
- Vivid visual culture
- Visual styles

**Location/Habitat**
- Atelier

**Perception on the field**
- Aesthetic activity
- Information structuring
- Service oriented
- Supplier
- Applicator of styles (Stylist)

### 3) SELF-AWARENESS

**Legitimacy**
- Aesthetic and stylistic argumentation
- Formalities (e.g., perception, clarity, colour theory...)
- Design prizes
- Lectures/books
- Teaching/discourse

### 4) CLIENTELE

**Strategy/Focus**
- The designer is misunderstood, feels prohibited

### 5) VIABILITY

**Strategy/Focus**
- Increased reputation with peers or profitability

### 6) PROFESSIONALISM

**Strategy/Focus**
- Aesthetical
- Graphic design as an art
- Free creative process
- Ordering informations
- Hermetic thinking
- Setting up rules
- Reduction to pure visual differentiation
- Prescribed stylistic answers, not necessarily related to the content

### 7) TARGET

**Target**
- Consumer
- Target groups
- User
- Specific, exclusive

### 8) IMPACT

**Effects to society**
- Verticalization (different target groups)
- Disconnection (from the other groups)
| **BRAND DESIGNER**  
| “Postmodernist”  
| 80’s onwards | **CONCEPT DESIGNER/RESEARCHER**  
| “Post-capitalist”  
| Now onwards |
| --- | --- |
| • Anglo-saxon based corporate identity, brand, marketing and business discourse  
• Corporate identity and brand web portals | • Analysis, interdisciplinary theories  
• Literature  
• Content  
• Observation  
• Blogs, network platforms |
| • Market/ commercial reference  
• Turnover figures  
• Test panles  
• Looking to competition | • Social-cultural processes  
• Markets/ science/ common good  
• Interdisciplinarity  
• Design reference |
| • Non-differentiation  
• Corporate “babbling” | • Differentiation  
• Visual experiment  
• Vivid visual culture  
• Social-political-cultural debate  
• Serving marketing and culture  
• Visual style is secondary |
| • Agency | • Hybrid (society) |
| • Economic and managerial activity  
• Decisions based on mktg/communication strategy  
• Service oriented  
• Transformer  
• Applicator of models (Modelist) | • Strategic / social-economical-cultural activity  
• Context-based intervention  
• Researcher and negotiator  
• Broker of information and relationships  
• Transformer and strategy developer (Strategist) |
| • Marked oriented argumentation  
• Models / brand cycle  
• Measurements of clients’ brand value  
• Agency ranking  
• Awards  
• Lectures/books  
• Teaching/discourse | • Questions & answers towards the context, the society  
• Fundamental approach towards commission  
• Lectures/books  
• Teaching/discourse |
| • The designer is servile, unquestioning | • The designer is questioning, the aim is co-creation |
| • Profitability or increased reputation with clients | • Triple bottom line |
| • Functional  
• Design decision based on brand-, corporate identity- and economic means  
• Brand and market expectation based  
• Feasibility  
• Hermetic thinking  
• Giving standard answers  
• Recipes | • Interrogative/critical  
• Questions & answers with context and society, personal observation as reference  
• Researching specific and general interests  
• Flexibility  
• Metaphorical and conceptional thinking  
• Strategy of inclusion  
• Creating analogies and content  
• Parallel use of different strategies |
| • Consumer  
• User  
• Target groups  
• Specific, exclusive | • Human beings / users / public  
• Target groups  
• Consumers  
• Specific, inclusive |
| • Verticalization (different target groups)  
• Disconnection (from the other groups) | • Verticalization (different target groups)  
and horizontalization (social bindings and coherency within the whole society)  
• Connection by content |
soita
mummolle
*mind the seniors

http://soita
Towards Critical Action Graphic Design
Making people think, enabling people to do.

Design offers a different way of reading the visual environment, navigating culture, and understanding the systems that shape our world. Designers know all about the manufacture of desire and dissatisfaction, selling images and ideas. Design education puts these tools in the hands of students and creates openings for greater self-expression. This is not just expression of emotion and style, but self-expression in a fuller, richer sense – as an expression of values and of one’s own power. Taken to the public sphere, design skills become transformative.

John Emerson, 2008
1. Introduction

During this almost year-long project, started with an empirical experience then crystallized into words, question and thoughts, my research scope naturally evolved. If at the beginning, with Soita Mummolle campaign, I wanted to try in first person how to create an effective campaign model for low-budget situations, then my interest shifted more towards the behaviors that such campaign would have been able or not to trigger. I understood that an action is nothing without the reaction of the audience; design has to be understood as a relation between the different actors of the process. Thus, in my research I dedicated two chapters to behavior, in relation to the audience and also to graphic designers. In this last chapter, the final step will be to conclude this analysis. So now that we know how to influence the audience in the name of common good and we know what we designer should do for such common good, how graphic design as a discipline should behave? What should be the standpoint that gives direction to this profession? What is the role of visual communication in improving the world?

While developing this research, investigating how to create a successful social campaign became a limitative goal, and a boundary. Campaigns come and go: are we really satisfied with being simply temporary persuader? I think I knew what I was searching for, but the questions at stake became much deeper.

Thus, if we substitute the term “campaign” with “action” in the thesis question, so that it becomes

“What conditions must be reached to create an effective social action?”

what implications does this have on the way we intend the nature and the scope of design?

“Action” can be defined as behavior, conduct, initiative, enterprise, but also as the bringing about of an alteration by force or natural agency and an act of will (Merriam Webster). So we have to do with a willing act, or behav-
ior aimed to change the surroundings. In my opinion, all design should be about action in this sense, especially if we accept the transformative nature of the discipline. Even graphic design can find place under this vast umbrella: change has to be presented, pitched, motivated, guided and explained, and communication is a vital pillar in sustaining awareness, actions and policies. With Soita Mummolle, I went a step forward, acting in first person and not only designing. I came to the conclusion that “world-changing” design is always something hybrid, “impure” and multidisciplinary: designed elements interact and melt with the real world, supporting people to take charge and adopt creative solutions bottom-top. It creates systems, strategies, ways of doing and living, new thoughts and beliefs.

In this last chapter I will try to define how graphic design can overcome its limits, becoming a “critical” and “action-oriented” discipline, finally disenfranchising itself from being identified mainly with advertising: Critical Action Graphic Design. I believe that to create “an effective social action”, design interventions (not only visual ones) should be able to raise questions, support people’s creativity in finding solutions, trace the interactions between individuals and sustain their motivation and actions during the process of change.

To sketch a portrait and a definition of Critical Action Graphic Design, I refer to three concepts in particular, which are the theoretical inputs to such interpretation. Each concept seem to answer to a defining question – where, how and what is Critical Action Graphic Design?

- **Social Design (where?)** defines the area of intervention of such type of design, its scope and basic ideals. It is the first step to understand where a shift in design should aim and what can become a daily working matter for the design world.

- **Critical Design (how?)** is useful to understand the role of design when it aims to make people reflect, think and investigate different issues. Critical design is about imagining different future better worlds and testing them out in a tangible way in the present. While social design can be ideal, critical design already calls for action, at least on a critical level.
Relational Design (what?) is the last step of this process, and it is the goal towards which all design should aim. Relational design wants to get rid of the passivity of the theoretical design discourse and asks us to start doing. It redefines the scope of design as we know it from something functional/commercial into something human-centered: its area of intervention is the in-between, so its question is “how does things function between us humans?”.

The three concepts I presented are valid to describe design in general, not only the graphic design field. Nonetheless, in this context, I will employ them to define Critical Action Graphic Design as a practice that:

- **Addresses social, cultural and human-centered issues, and acts for the betterment of the society.**

- **Asks “carefully crafted questions” about basic human needs, provoke and challenges assumptions and offers glimpses of possible alternative futures; it relies on humor, détournements and unfamiliarity to raise questions and reactions in the audience.**

- **Accepts design as a political action and the designer as a committed agent with responsibilities towards society.**

- **Uses mainly tools and skills belonging to graphic design (visualization, communication, storytelling, medialization), but it hybridize it with different types of creative interventions (both professional and amateurish), so that the final result could be anything in between a product, a service, a campaign, a space, a game, a piece of art, a performance, a prank...**

- **Relies indifferently both on professional design skills and DIY production, high-culture and pop vernacular language, permitted and rebellious behaviors, authorial and crowdsourced contributions for the realization of the ideas**

- **Has an open and collaborative spirit.**
This definition of “Critical Action Graphic Design” could be useful to locate our specific discipline within a larger context, a wider new idea of a more clever, more empathic, more user-centered design, which I hope becomes truer day by day. The role of those practicing a form of critical action design is the one of the cultural hijacker: somebody who willingly tries, through intellectual critique and actions, to give a new direction and a new destination to the design practice and to society at large.

2. Social Design

Satu Miettinen edited in 2007 a publication for University of Art and Design Helsinki which had an inspiring title: “Design Your Action”. The book was a collection of essays and case studies, giving a glimpse on how “action” can take different forms in the field of social design: from design education, to ethical thinking, to practical cases aiming to solve a problem hands-on. The book also introduces the concept of social design, whose definition helps us understanding the scope of a design that aims for a triple bottom line success.

The World Design research group, located at University of Art and Design Helsinki, created and then entered in Wikipedia a definition for social design (Miettinen 2007, 13). Social design presents itself as a multifaceted field, because it can be defined both within the design field (shaping products, services and messages with an eye on the human, social factor) and outside of it, intended as a wider activity of creation of the human reality (shaping the social world). A differentiation seems to be possible because it already exists between professional Design (with capital D) and the everyday “arrangement of the material world” that can also be called design (with lower case d) (Bello 2008, 33)

The four interpretations of social design are in relation to responsibility, strategic thinking, designing systems and the social world. They are defined as such (all quotations come from the Wikipedia definition):
Responsibility: “within the design world social design is sometimes defined as a design process that contributes to improving human wellbeing and livelihood [...] designers and creative professionals have a responsibility and are able to cause real change in the world through good design”.

In this sense, social design searches for a triple bottom-line of impact (people, planet, profit) and it is an activity living in the economic and professional world: charity, volunteering, donations have an impact on human livelihood, but are excluded from social design’s scope.

Strategic Thinking: “Creating policies and implementing them on civil level. The two poles: tradition and the market economy can, in one of the models for social design, be placed in interaction, rather than in competition, with each other”.

In this definition, social design is a process that helps developing human capabilities that will be able to create and support development and wellbeing. Strategies for both local and global policies are created and implemented; such policies will aim to promote economic development, instruction, health, inclusion and culture.

Designing Systems: “It is argued that no single area of design is, by itself, sufficient to drive sustainable social development. What is needed is a system of design, one that encompasses all of the areas of design, towards an open system with multiple, self-adjusting and complementary actors that aim for a vision of a loosely defined common set of goals”.

The aim is to design systems that join elements of communication, attention to the environment and product development. This aspect of social design is complementary and consecutive to the strategic thinking aspect: after having prepared an appropriate design milieu, it is time for interdisciplinary projects, aiming to a concrete implementation of a certain sets of values, to be started.
Social World: “The term social design is also increasingly used to describe design of the social world. This definition implicates a perception of a man-made reality, which consequently can only be changed by man, and is changed by man all the time. In this view social design is inescapable, it is there whether people are aware of it or not.”

This definition, being the largest, encompasses all the previous definitions and leaves room also for new, bottom-top practices that were not described by such definitions.

Social design creates a milieu for interaction, in which the working methods are at their best cooperative, networked, creative and open. Creativity is not anymore a talent or a prerogative of designers, but every citizen is entitled to imagine and design their own new worlds, and create innovations (Bello 2007, 19).

According to these definitions, the area of intervention of Critical Action Graphic Design is vast and rich of opportunities to make positive impact: conception and communication of new products and services, information design and education (such as The Little Book of Global Shocking Facts by Barnbrook Design, 2010), inclusive design (e.g. elderly or disabled persons, The Helen Hamlyn Research Centre 2005, 8, 14, 16, 86), awareness and social responsibility campaigns (e.g. Soita Mummolle or cases in Cranmer & Zappaterra 2003, 30:41, 76:87), storytelling of different identities and cultures (Ypma, 2010b), facilitation of the communication between different actors (e.g. the citizen and the laws, Berman 2009, 118-119), facilitation of the citizens’ creative processes (such as workshop leading, co-design processes, tutoring...).

3. Critical Design

Critical design is a concept defined and popularized by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, especially in relation to electronic consumer objects. In my opinion, the definition should not be restricted to this category only, because it can easily be applied also to different areas of interest of design.
Since such conceptual framework is helpful in developing alternative approaches and goals for a creative process, I believe it is useful to interpret it in the widest sense possible.

Critical design can be defined as a genre and a *modus operandi* of design. Its role is complementary to – and as difficult as – the one of commercial design that solves problems and gives answers: critical design “asks carefully crafted questions and makes us think” (Dunne & Raby 2001, 58).

When such designs, which are unfamiliar, surprising, challenging and provocative “are introduced into everyday life as a "virus", subverting it, people can participate in the story, exploring the boundaries between what is and what might be” (Dunne 2008, 67). Thus, critical design is not about visualizing a better world, but it aims to develop a desire for such world in the viewers; it is also an empowering practice, because the public is called to co-create narratives, purposes and behaviors around the design, rather than passively consuming its pre-defined meaning (Dunne 2008).

The role of the designer becomes authorial: s/he presents experiences rather than merely represent them. The fact that the artworks are functioning as questions towards the public makes designers “providers of behavioral opportunities” (Dunne 2008, 69), because the real interest of such design is to provoke reaction and thoughts in the viewer.

Rick Poynor (2001) argues that these are not favorable times for being critical in the design field, because there are too few outlets and public intellectuals talking about it. In many cases the critical process of “not taking things for granted, being skeptical, questioning what’s there, exposing limitations, taking issue, advancing a contrary view, puncturing myths” is transformed in a merely complacent and lazy “consumer journalism” on the mainstream media. Poynor adds: “In the early 1990s, most of the best writing on graphic design came from designers. A few emerging designer-critics were very productive and visible for a while, but I suspect that the point came when they had to choose: writing or designing? Understandably, they chose design”. Designers are divided between thinking and doing:
the practice of critical design could help rejoin this fracture, giving designers an opportunity of creating and criticizing at the same time. This would allow remaining true and committed both to the profession and to the society.

Critical design is non-commercial, questioning, conceptual, pop and practical, because its questions/alternatives are always proposed to the public through concrete designs. Such designs communicate their message and find their context through the common language of product and communication design. Advertising, visual communication and products are pervading our everyday lives, creating a familiar background of popular culture that gives all the means to interpret these new, challenging, critical designs.

Critical design can help to investigate and promote what is socially desirable, and also gives us a key to get accustomed and reflect about what is alternative, different, unfamiliar: this is particularly important in a progressively more globalized world, where understanding differences and making them converge in agreeable and just deliberations must be a goal for a more human-centered development.

In the definition of “Critical Action Graphic Design”, critical design describes the how to, pushing for intellectually challenging interventions, located in the real world: its role is to question and to be concretely implemented. It is important to never let the audience misunderstand critical design for art, since “art is far too removed from the world of mass consumption […] even though it is of course part of consumerist culture” (Dunne & Raby 2001, 58). Art is consumed and affects the audience in contextual ways (certain place, certain time), but rarely is perceived as a viable suggestion for an alternative way of living, that we can accept and apply into our lives. For instance, if Soita Mummolle would have been carried out in the same, identical manner, but presented as a performance or as collaborative art or social art, rather than as a social campaign, it would have never gained the same statute of reality in the audience’s mind.

Critical design welcomes an artistic, poetic language, but it remains the expressive tool of choice rather than the core of the whole process.
Another example of critical design applied through visual communication is the project *Haluan Nähdä Muutakin* (I Want to See Also Something Else) by Elissa Eriksson: also in this case an artistic approach is used, but the implementation and the medium chosen belong fully to the context of commercial design, which is being hijacked towards an alternative possible future scenario of use. Eriksson’s idea was to collectively rent media space from JCDecaux at bust stops in Helsinki, in order “to conquer a little part of the commercial outdoor media back to the people” (Haluan Nähdä Muutakin). She proposed the initiative to the public through a Facebook group, collecting several thousands supporters: 2149 of them paid about 3€ so that the price of renting 21 bus stop could be conveniently split. Each paying participant also wrote a sentence, to be used in the posters, about the “something else” s/he would like to see in media space instead of advertising.

Both *Soita Mummolle* and *Haluan Nähdä Muutakin* are critical design interventions in the field of graphic design, investigating models of campaigns
alternative to the ones produced in advertisement agencies. They let the audience participate, finding legitimation not through economic power, but through the number itself of people interested in the message and willing to endorse it in first person. The design behind the campaigns defines the behavior of the participants and hopes in their positive reactions, using it as a message to involve an even wider audience to think about the proposed issue (lonely seniors, public space that is not really public).

3. Relational Design

What is the design practice becoming? If society is the field of intervention and being critical and challenging is the modality, what kind of interests and interventions design will propose?

Blauvelt (2008a) argues that the focus of modern design evolved in three phases, each one having a different main interest: form, content and, nowadays, context. Relational design is interested in the context, in the effects of design beyond the discrete artwork, in how the user is affected by the designed experience. Such type of design is concerned with the process, rather than with the result, and considers the user as co-creator of the meaning and the experience provided.

The differences between production and consumption fade, in a democratization of creativity; the rise of the creative consumer (such as the hacker, the DIY-er, the “prosumer”, the crowdsourcer) goes hand in hand with a re-contextualization of the designer, who becomes an “enabler” of the flowing of such creativity. The world of design starts to design the world and aims to become a facilitating platform for every citizen, a “design to produce designs” (Blauvelt, 2008b).

The advent of the knowledge society pushes towards the inclusion of previously web-based concepts (user-generated content, crowdsourcing, social networks,…) into the basic processes of reality sense-making: interactivity, participation, customization become values of the human experience, more and more taken for granted, as they have always been there. Many small groups of citizens self organ-
ize themselves into creative communities that try to generate bottom-top answers to
the need of a more sustainable and socially integrated living (Marzini & Jégou, 2008),
sharing knowledge, resources, ideas and solutions. On the other hand, such possibility
of being virtually in contact with anyone, in a globalized world where distances seem
smaller, also causes the opposite effect: great difficulties in relating with the “other”,
fear, clash of identities and priorities (Ypma, 2007). For Ypma, relational design focuses
on such in-betweens and its form-giving action helps humans to manage meaning-
fully the change, to “write and read human culture”. Design embodies the wishes for
those future and present changes, and that is the reason why

“We need to work together towards a renewing of the grammar
of our social and economic interaction, the social imaginary
about citizenship and cultural identity. We need to invest in
different and sustainable ways of harvesting the resources and
qualities of earth” (Ypma, 2007)

Within the relational design field, the designer and his/her professional out-
come serve as a catalyst. It helps to express the unexpressed between people
and works towards the inclusion of different perspectives in the creation of
the “new”, be it material or immaterial, global or local commercial or critical.
Design can be seen as a milieu where processes of cultural and material pro-
duction happen; such dimension, defined as goodscapes by Paula Bello (2005
and 2008), is not stand-alone, but is influenced and actively influences the
other landscapes of human culture: ideology, technology, media, finance, eth-
nography/identity (Bello 2008, 103). This underlines once again how design/
design thinking has a pervasive role in creating supportive infrastructures for
all the different practices of society (Bello, 2007): together with this comes the
possibility and the responsibility of imprinting a concrete direction towards
socially and politically desirable situations. Since relational design welcomes
open processes and negotiated outcomes, designers and citizens should not
fear to try out experiments in social design and propagandize even more such
propositional and critical attitude.

Critical Action Graphic Design is relational: it refuses of a single pre-defined
meaning, while it contemplates an open work-in-progress attitude and
concrete action, while being aware of the different networked landscapes that intersect with design. The actions of the designer are seen as political, never detached from the whole, complex context of society.

*Soita Mummolle* can be defined as a small experiment in relational design. Apart from operating a critique on society, it also proposed an open, participative process. As a “relational designer”, I provided the format of the initiative, outlined the processes and the creative, generative structure of the message, but I left blank many “slots” for the content: they were to be filled by the participating citizens and by the mass media, that in this way co-created the public phenomenon and the narrative dimension of the campaign. The project was standing at the intersection of design and other cultural landscapes, principally *mediascape*, *technoscape* and *ethnoscape*: without the deep understanding of such landscapes the whole project would not have been possible.

### 4 Conclusions

Critical Action Graphic Design draws energy, inspiration and meaning from the selected contemporary design approaches hereby presented. It is an attempt to find a shape for such renewed tendencies and pulsions toward a more sustainable, equal world: a new wave of intellectuals and doers is rising, and it is tired of accepting old economical and social paradigms that pushed our planet along a disastrous path. It is time to start experimenting new ways of creating, living and feeling together. *Acting out of the box* rather than merely thinking outside of it.

Given that they do take seriously their profession, designers cannot claim anymore not to be interested in politics, sustainability, human rights or any other hot topic: it simply makes no sense to stubbornly ignore that the world is a closed, interconnected system, where every decision matters and influences the whole balance. It means to voluntarily renounce to the tremendous power that comes with the ability of giving a form to the world, and settle for the limited, fickle role of decorator. Design (and the world) call for brave, poignant actions: our pragmatic discipline enable us to be intellectuals who
can also take the roles of problem-solvers, activists, advocates, researchers, developers and inventors. We have the privilege of having a wide array of different media in our “communication weaponry”, and not only written and spoken word.

The definition of Critical Action Graphic Design is a work-in-progress, as it does not look backwards in the attempt of analyzing a completely developed phenomenon. It tries to live and evolve within the contemporary zeitgeist itself, and its goal is not to be already a right definition, but to inspire and support the right decisions and actions. More than a definition, it is a plan and a wish for doers and critics who are not afraid to get their hands dirty when called to “design the world”.

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Conclusions

A big change in the direction of our profession, and design in general, is happening: Ypma’s forecast for the year 2020, “design is about how things functions between us”, seems to give a formulation to all those projects focusing on human beings and their coexistence, rights, wellbeing and environment. Aesthetic quality is becoming the means, and not anymore the ultimate goal, for many designers. Communicating creatively and emotionally with the audience seems to be an effective way to stimulate people to deal more easily with complex issues.

Designers need to get ready to help repairing the world: how should we act differently? Behavior is fundamental. Not only the behavior of our audience, but also ours – and this is a more long-term project to take care of. The graphic designer’s work in the social field has not to be limited anymore to give instructions or raise awareness, but it can contribute in a multidisciplinary context, where concrete actions are the ultimate objective.

Soita Mummolle, as a case study, is an example of the importance of cultivating a do-it-yourself attitude, using professional design skills outside of the commercial arena. Nowadays technology
is cheaper and easier to access, while the potential audience can be the whole world: there are many possibilities for implementing new ideas and share information. Mixing design and technology knowledge with a lo-fi, vernacular approach provides the benefit of immediacy and urgency in communicating important messages. It also helps to avoid the trap of “designing only for the design world”, rather than for everybody. As we saw in the additional case studies, also big advertising agencies are renouncing to traditional communication methods, and relying more and more on guerrilla, events/experiences and audience involvement. These tactics become meaningful and inspiring especially when the message is not a commercial one, but advocates for social or environmental causes.

Graphic design is always a social and political action, because operates inside the powerful machine of media and communication, while its production appears in the public space. This asymmetry of knowledge between the professionals and the audiences makes us responsible for the messages we collaborate to send out. The fact of having our hands on the “weapons of persuasion” becomes a question on how we intend to use this privilege.

Designers have also a second responsibility, apart from being authorial and acting in first person: they should nurture and spread design thinking to support a cultural climate able to incubate experiments and progressive resolution of problems. Many citizens are progressively less and less keen on accepting lack of personality/personalization and unilateral narratives in many aspects of life, and the strong powers are starting to take this trend into account: from product/service customization, passing from users-as-producers, arriving to real co-creation processes. Creativity and problem-solving, the main assets of the design world, can be taught and disseminated into society, so that individuals are empowered to create their own ideal world day by day. Once again, the goal is to put likely, more human and just alternatives into action.

The goal of this thesis was to become an experiment in good citizenship from the designer’s point of view, working on awareness, attitudes and behaviors. I am confident that design skills can do a lot for society: design-
ers are natural facilitators in solving wicked problems, because, similarly to their public, they are not experts of the issue itself, but might have resources to do something about it. The fresh point of view of the outsider, united to a creative intellectual toolkit that can be used to analyze and solve different types of issues, give to designers a privileged position in designing and helping to design the world of tomorrow.
References


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Web references

Adbusters (2008), About Adbusters, viewed 11 January 2011 < http://www.adbusters.org/about/adbusters >


Further reading


Appendices
Appendix 1

Questionnaire and results of the web survey “Communication with senior relatives”

The survey, which was made up of thirteen questions with multiple choice answers, was distributed through e-mail in April 2010. The results are presented both in their general form and according the 3 most numerous age groups (18-24, 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54). The panel included 319 persons.

QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

1. Your age:
a) Up to 17 1%
b) 18-24 21%
c) 25-34 43%
d) 35-44 19%
e) 45-54 11%
f) Over 55 2%

2. Your sex:
a) Female 77%
b) Male 23%

(Answer questions from 3 to 8 ONLY if your parents are older than 60!)

3. How often do you call your parents?
a) More than once a week 42% 38% 45% 36% 40%
b) Once a week 26% 43% 18% 25% 40%
c) More than once a month 21% 14% 25% 29% 8%
d) Once a month 5% 0% 7% 5% 6%
e) Less than once a month 3% 5% 5% 4% 3%
f) Once a year 0% 0% 0% 0% 3%
g) Less than once a year 0% 0% 0% 1% 0%
4. How often do you visit your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>all</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Every week</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Every second week</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Every month</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) A couple of times per year</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Once a year</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Less than once a year</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Where do your parents live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) In the same city/urban area where I live</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Within 50 Km away from where I live</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) 50-200 Km away from where I live</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) 200-500 Km away from where I live</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) More than 500 Km away from where I live</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) They live in another country</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How do you usually communicate with your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Principally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOIP/Videocall</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant messengers</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcard</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The results in the table are only general, because the results are quite compact despite the age group)
7. How often do your parents call you?
   a) More than once a week
      - All: 34%
      - 18-24: 48%
      - 25-34: 41%
      - 35-44: 29%
      - 45-54: 21%
   b) Once a week
      - All: 30%
      - 18-24: 33%
      - 25-34: 30%
      - 35-44: 26%
      - 45-54: 32%
   c) More than once a month
      - All: 24%
      - 18-24: 14%
      - 25-34: 21%
      - 35-44: 34%
      - 45-54: 25%
   d) Once a month
      - All: 5%
      - 18-24: 5%
      - 25-34: 6%
      - 35-44: 4%
      - 45-54: 6%
   e) Less than once a month
      - All: 5%
      - 18-24: 0%
      - 25-34: 2%
      - 35-44: 7%
      - 45-54: 16%
   f) Once a year
      - All: 0%
      - 18-24: 0%
      - 25-34: 0%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%
   g) Less than once a year
      - All: 0%
      - 18-24: 0%
      - 25-34: 0%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%

8. How often do you call your grandparents?
   a) More than once a week
      - All: 2%
      - 18-24: 0%
      - 25-34: 3%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%
   b) Once a week
      - All: 11%
      - 18-24: 16%
      - 25-34: 9%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%
   c) More than once a month
      - All: 1%
      - 18-24: 27%
      - 25-34: 16%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%
   d) Once a month
      - All: 10%
      - 18-24: 11%
      - 25-34: 11%
      - 35-44: 7%
      - 45-54: 33%
   e) Less than once a month
      - All: 27%
      - 18-24: 29%
      - 25-34: 28%
      - 35-44: 19%
      - 45-54: 0%
   f) Once a year
      - All: 13%
      - 18-24: 7%
      - 25-34: 11%
      - 35-44: 49%
      - 45-54: 35%
   g) Less than once a year
      - All: 18%
      - 18-24: 10%
      - 25-34: 22%
      - 35-44: 25%
      - 45-54: 32%

9. How often do you visit your grandparents?
   a) Every week
      - All: 6%
      - 18-24: 11%
      - 25-34: 4%
      - 35-44: 6%
      - 45-54: 0%
   b) Every second week
      - All: 5%
      - 18-24: 4%
      - 25-34: 7%
      - 35-44: 0%
      - 45-54: 0%
   c) Every month
      - All: 26%
      - 18-24: 37%
      - 25-34: 27%
      - 35-44: 12%
      - 45-54: 32%
   d) A couple of times per year
      - All: 46%
      - 18-24: 42%
      - 25-34: 45%
      - 35-44: 49%
      - 45-54: 0%
   e) Once a year
      - All: 6%
      - 18-24: 4%
      - 25-34: 7%
      - 35-44: 14%
      - 45-54: 33%
   f) Less than once a year
      - All: 7%
      - 18-24: 2%
      - 25-34: 11%
      - 35-44: 19%
      - 45-54: 35%

10. Where do your grandparents live?
   a) In the same city/urban area where I live
      - All: 19%
      - 18-24: 16%
      - 25-34: 22%
      - 35-44: 11%
      - 45-54: 33%
   b) Within 50 Km away from where I live
      - All: 12%
      - 18-24: 13%
      - 25-34: 11%
      - 35-44: 22%
      - 45-54: 0%
   c) 50-200 Km away from where I live
      - All: 29%
      - 18-24: 32%
      - 25-34: 33%
      - 35-44: 22%
      - 45-54: 34%
d) 200-500 Km away from where I live  
 25% 27% 27% 33% 33%
e) More than 500 Km away from where I live  
 9% 8% 12% 6% 0%
f) They live in another country  
 3% 4% 1% 6% 0%

11. How do you usually communicate with your grandparents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Principally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOIP/Videocall (e.g. Skype)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant messengers (e.g. Gmail Chat, Microsoft Messenger)</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcard</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The results in the table are only general, because the results are quite compact despite the age group)

12. How often do your grandparents call you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Principally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) More than once a week</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0% 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Once a week</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) More than once a month</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0% 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Once a month</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Less than once a month</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Once a year</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>31% 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Less than once a year</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>51% 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2
Press Releases

The two press releases included in this appendix are the English and Finnish versions released to inform the media about Soita Mummolle Päivä

For immediate release

11.08.2010 is Soitā Mummolē Pāivā: when is the last time you called your grandparents?

31% of the interviewed Finns admitted to call their grandparents once or less than once per year.* This is why 11.8.2010 is declared to be the Soita Mummolle Päivā. Everybody is invited to join the Soita Mummolle Flash-mob in Kampintori, between 16.00 and 17.00, to call publicly and for free their elderly relatives. Of course seniors are welcome too, to call their children and grandchildren.

Soita Mummolle Päivä is the grand final of Soita Mummolle, a social campaign aiming to sensitize people about the issue of seniors’ loneliness. It caused surprise and smiles as well as stirring thoughts around Helsinki during the whole summer. Soita Mummolle started off as a one-woman-battle, but it gathered momentum and attracted more and more support from the public concerned about the state of senior citizens lives in Finland today.

During Soita Mummolle Päivä, everybody can come in front of Kamppi shopping centre between 16.00-17.00 and there call their elderly relatives, while seniors can call their children and grandchildren. The event is public in order to give a demonstration of commitment and care towards our seniors. The calls are totally free, provided through sponsored mobile phones that is possible to borrow from the Soita Mummolle volunteers. Those who cannot join the flash-mob are invited to call anyway their grandparents and post the message “olen soittanut!” on the Facebook page of the campaign (www.facebook.com/soitamummolle)
Started in April 2010, the campaign developed using the “communication weapons” of guerrilla marketing, social media and street actions. The idea is to tackle the issue of an aging and often lonely population with a soft approach, perhaps naive: being challenged by the message “call your grandma”, people are invited to act in first person, to do a good action so simple that they don’t have any reason not to do it.

Soita Mummolle is the one-(wo)man social and research effort of Italian graphic designer and researcher Stefania Passera. Passera is an MA student of Graphic Design at the Aalto University School of Art and Design. She also works as a Research Assistant in Decode Research Group at the University.

“My project has no funding nor big companies behind, but the feedback from the public has been amazing so far. I want to prove that the motivated action of a single citizen can change the status quo and spread ideas good for the society”, says Stefania Passera on her project. “As a designer, I am concerned about the social impact of my profession: perhaps to design ethically we have to stop creating more stuff and banalities, and concentrate instead on significant messages. The fact that so many seniors are lonely saddens me, because everybody could do something about it, starting from near, from his/her own family. Since my work deals with communication, I decided to use its tools to affect people’s awareness and behavior. I believe big changes start at a personal level.”

Surprise, interaction, fun, smiles and puzzlement will be searched with the Helsinki’s public. The communication tools used by marketers will be subverted in order to “sell” a message which is free and is good for all. Join Soita Mummolle Päivä!

Soita Mummolle Päivä is organized with the kind support of Sonera and Agricola Church.

* According to the results of Stefania Passera’s survey “Yhteydenpito seniorisukulaissten kanssa”, which had an interviewee panel of 330 persons.
11.8.2010 on Soita Mummolle Päivä: milloin soitit isovanhemmillesi viimeksi?

31% Suomalaisista tunnusti soittaneensa isovanhemmilleen kerran tai vähemmän vuodessa.* Tämän vuoksi 11.8 on julistettu Soita Mummolle Päiväksi. Kaikki ovat tervetulleita Soita Mummolle -flashmobiin kauppakeskus Kampin eteen 16.00-17.00 välisenä aikana julkisesti ja ilmaiseksi soittamaan isovanhemmilleen. Isovanhemmat ovat myös tervetulleita soittamaan lapsilleen ja lastenlapsilleen.


Soita Mummolle -kampanja on italialaisen graafisen suunnittelijan, tutkija Stefania Passeran käsialaa. Passera on maisteriopiskelija Aalto-yliopiston...

“Projektillani ei ole rahoitusta tai isoja yrityksiä tukena, mutta silti tämä sosiaalinen liike kasvaa jatkuvasti. Haluan todistaa, että yksilön motivoitunut toiminta voi muuttaa yhteiskunnassa vallitsevaa tilaa ja levittää yhteiskunnalle hyvää sanomaa”, Stefania Passera sanoo projektistaan.


Yllättäystä, vuorovaikutusta, hauskuutta, hymyjää sekä hämmentystä etsitään Helsinkiläisten kanssa. Soita Mummolle Päivän sanoma on ilmainen ja hyvä kaikkien kannalta. Liity mukaan!

Soita Mummolle Päivä järjestetään Soneran ja Agricolan kirkon tuella.

* (Stefania Passeran tekemän nettikyselyn perusteella "Yhteydenpito seniorisukulaisten kanssa", joka koostui 330 henkilön palautteesta)
Appendix 3

Knit Guerrilla photo documentation

The following photos document the Knit Guerrilla which took place on 4.09.2010 on Helsinki trams and metro trains.
Appendix 4

Street Actions photo documentation
Soita Mummolle Street Actions took place in Helsinki centre between May and August 2010, on every second Wednesday. The best pictures taken during the seven street actions are here collected in printed format, while the rest is available both at http://www.facebook.com/SoitaMummolle and http://www.flickr.com/photos/soitamummolle/sets/

The photos were at the heart of the street actions, because the person could become an endorser of the campaign by posing with the sign. After being posted on the internet, the photos also created a link between the online and offline dimensions of the campaign: the online community could browse the pictures and see how many people already participated “in the real world”, while the portraited persons could go online to download their photo and end up, eventually, reading more about the campaign.

Taking a photo or making a phone call are small actions, but hopefully such small actions helped the audience to stop and think about a big issue.