# Design reflections on the cross-cultural mirror.
## Some Bulgarian Design perspectives between marketing and art at the beginning of 21st century.

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**Abstract:**

**The Bulgarian Backstage:**
*Global creative and communication standards versus local conceptual clichés;*
*Local creative disruption versus global communication clichés.*

At the beginning of 21st century, the contemporary Graphic Design is not the same hero from the previous time. Sometimes we can mark the role of Design as a strategic tool in the visual communications; sometimes it is a piece of art collection. In the same time, the level of Graphic Design status is not equal on the different regions, different countries, different companies, or different agencies. Therefore, from the global point of view we can spot practically the same functions but the different priorities. It is possible to explain the part of this situation because of different cultural, economic, or political aspects.

The Bulgarian model of the Graphic Design is:
- Not step-by-step evolution but process of jumping from the intercultural jumping-board.
- The clustered Design reflections of the cross-cultural mirror.
- Because of this mixture between creative and communication clusters on Graphic Design field, it will be establishment of new term: **Integrated Visual Communications (IVC)**. The **IVC** can incorporate the philosophy of management from **IMC**[1] - ergo the initial post-modern phase **Graphic Design vs. Marketing**?

**Keywords: Graphic Design, Bulgarian problems and perspectives**

## Bulgarian Graphic Design & Education: Looking For Own Frame

The history of design education in Bulgaria exists on the specific way. With long tradition of the fine and applied art education, we could remark various historical periods (See below by some keywords). There are the flashes of remarkable achievements and the time of silence by usage of 'Ezop's metaphor language' under the pressure of political circumstances.

1891-1937: World Art Influence, first Higher Institute of fine Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1st and 2nd World Wars
1945-1987: Political (socialism) influence; State economy; Political Myths; Portfolio a broad educational programs, National Academy of Arts

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[1] Integrated Marketing Communications

1989 – 2007: New Europe, New Bulgarian University, New World, New Design Goals, New Design Tools, New Myths,
2007 – New Marketing and Political Situation, New social and cultural needs, New Design Responsibilities, X-Cultural Design, New Horizon,

Until nowadays, we can mention many efforts of Bulgarian professional designers, educators, researchers and lecturers to define the large wide-open area of design activities and to clarify the terminology about *Graphic Design*. First, it was '**Applied Arts**' (National academy of Arts 1955), soon after that – '**Applied Graphic**' directly translation from germane term '**Gebrausgrafik**' (or '**commercial art**'- *Heller, Steven)*; following by '**Poster and Applied Arts**' and '**Graphic Art**'.[2]

Nowadays we can notice once more efforts across the World well organized about the clarification of term Graphic Design: *Visual Communication, Communication Design, Communication Arts* and so on. Russell Kennedy, Vice-President Icograda said in November 2004: 'Icograda recently opened discussion on a name change for the profession. We acknowledged that there seemed to be a move away from the term 'graphic design'. Many educational institutions around the world - including my institution, Monash University - have already made the change to visual communication. The term 'visual communication' or 'communication design' appears to be the preferred replacement to graphic design. The impact of a new name for our profession will be minimal because it is a reaction to a change, which has already occurred. The graphic design industry will continue to adjust and accommodate change as it has always done. Graphic design education will continue to respond to the changing demands of the profession while also challenging its conventions and pushing its boundaries even wider. It is not only the boundaries of the disciplines that are blurring, but also the borders between countries and cultures.' (*Encuadre, Volume 2, Number 5, October 2004*, p. 50-55).

I think it is a very positive sign that the designers become *pro-active* especially on this stage of misty terminology. If it does not – the Graphic Design will be rest only as an important but specific (limited) part of Global Communications. It will be a real risk the Graphic Design may to loose and lose its natural and specific system of values creation and interpretation, to change its human and artistic resources. Until the end of 20th century the focus of communication levels was: **(corporate) identity, (corporate) design, and (corporate) image**. Admittedly, from marketing (IMC) point of view. I remember lots client in this period who insisted from ad agencies for new image, a little change of design and all of that without well-built identity.[3]
In Bulgarian 'mode d'emploi', it means generally that all art directions (incl. Design process and achievements) are under IMC model of evaluation forms. So, from the initial brief till the production the system of evaluation is focused on communication integration – very often via advertising control systems of evaluation. The rest are sporadic artistic manifestations (depending of Client) mainly on the field of poster design (stage, cinema or sport). From another side, we can mark off some depletion into the system of integrated marketing communications (IMC) and the beginning of creating the new conceptual points of view – *the disruption*. The disruption of the marketing point of view changes 'a method, a way of thinking, and a state of mind'. Jean-Mari Dru: 'The foundation of Disruption is a three-step reasoning process: Convention, Disruption and Vision' (*Dru, Jean-Marie, Disruptions*).

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[2] *Now the National Academy of Arts, Sofia, proposes following degree-level in the professional field of higher design education: Department of fine Arts: Graphic Art, Book and Print Graphics and Poster (B.A., M.A.); Department of Applied Arts: Space Design and Industrial Design (B.A., M.A.)*
*The New Bulgarian University (NBU) at the present offers: Basic Program* '**Visual Arts**'*, Bachelor Program* '**Graphic Design**'*,* '**Artistic Design**'*; Master* '**Graphic and Spatial Design**' *and* '**Computer Technologies in Book and Poster Design**' *and Doctoral Program* '**Computer System and Technologies in Graphic Design**'*. It is very significant to mention the System of quality and evaluation at NBU by credits.*

[3] *The Author was happy to work in this period as an Art Director, Creative Director or Creative Strategic Planner at some local international Ad offices like McCANN Erickson Sofia, Euro RSCG Sofia New Europe, GGK Sofia, and Graffiti/BBDO.*

The contemporary Graphic Designer works in team and he has to using the new strategic tools *not only* on the conceptual level but also during the all process of communications. The designer takes a part *not only* to visualize creative and communication idea but also to analyze the '**semantic fields**' (*Kaftandjief, Christo, Harmony in Advertising Communications*) into communication process in advance and establish a new perspectives way of thinking. Ergo the Design could be one of the more efficient creative strategic tools in disruption's model.

If we consider the relations *global – local* on the small communication stage like Bulgarian we can find the next opposite positions:

**Global creative standards versus local conceptual clichés;**
**Local creative 'disruption' versus global communication clichés.**

*All of these circumstances actually are significant and they make seriously influence on the Bulgarian design situation and reflect on the present and on the future of education**. What will be the guideline(s) the next 5-10 years for Bulgarian Graphic Design education? Does the Bulgarian Graphic Design must follow the victors or will find his proper way of development? Finally, is it important and why?*

**Quo vadis Bulgarian education of graphic design?**
*See below on of the near future model of Bulgarian Graphic design Education 2009 - 2012(St. Serezliev, DETM Conference, India, 2005)*
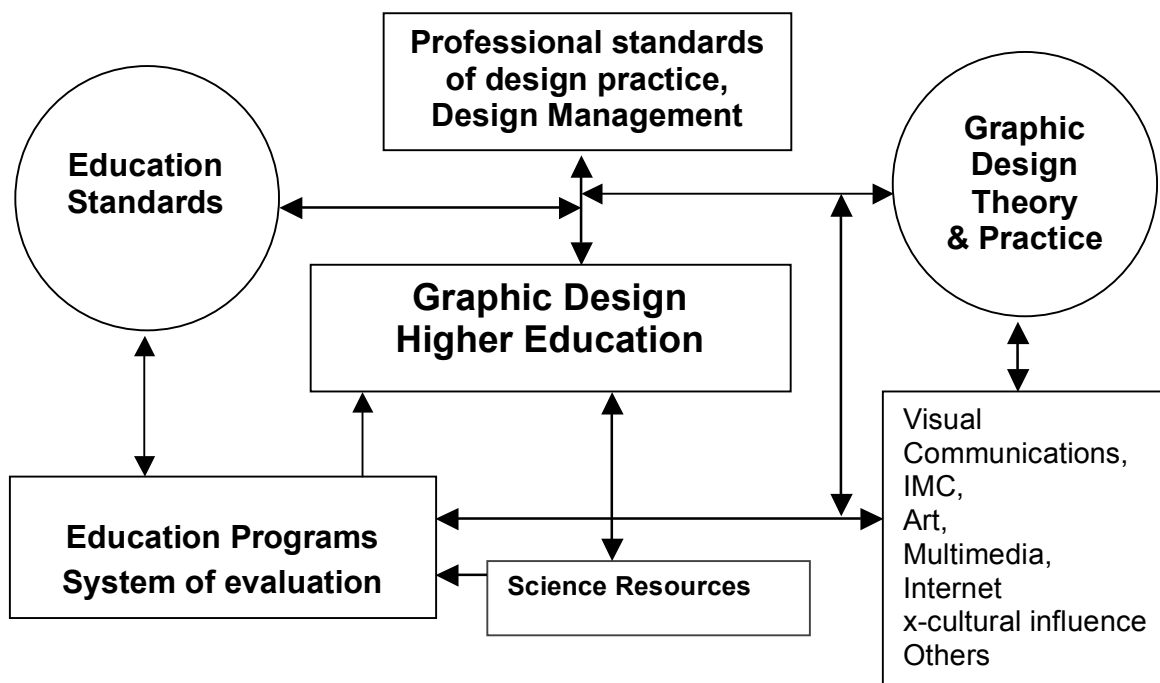


Till nowadays the education of Graphic Design is dedicated to serve in general the goals of business and marketing communications (actually via advertising and visual communications).  Milton Glaser said in the 90[-ies]: '*The design process has now been integrated a client's into control system, so that instead of going outside for people who had more understanding about how to communicate effectively, they now make their determinations from a marketing point of view and then, more often that not, go outside to implement those ideas… Clients now have a much greater preconception of what they want. The briefings are very different. The determinations of what is appropriate are very often those of a marketing department as opposed to the somewhat casual and random solutions that occurred when people didn't know better.*' (Glaser, Milton, Eye Magazine).

We can make a comment about the links between **cultural diversities** and Graphic Design evaluation. For example, 'the cultural diversities *reflect on the visual structure of messages* into visual communications; the economic diversities *reflect priority on the control (evaluation) systems of design* and integrated communications in general. When we are looking for meaning and influence of intercultural differences into communications we have to consider of relations between both of links above' (Stefan Serezliev, DETM Conference, NID India, 2005).

The Bulgarian education of Graphic design now is between the 'Two Myths about Design Education': 'Myth #1: That school should avoid their own 'look' and provide a broad education and Myth #2: That practicing designers are the best design educators'. (*Salchow, Gordon, MK Graphic Design*). In Bulgarian practice *'a broad education'* means *'to cover all professional area' after school graduating.* Myth #2 linked with understanding of Client's way of thinking and guiding the 'real world'. It is logically that Gordon Salchow concludes:  'By the way, I have never met an intelligent design educator who is not also a fine (if slow because of his deliberateness) designer and unwilling to abandon practice. My stance, then, is that good designers are not always good teachers but good teachers are always good designers. This is because extended intimacy with higher education rigorously clarifies and nourishes individual professional insight.' (*G. Salchow, MK Graphic Design*).

The Bulgarian perspectives into higher graphic design education for now are based on the four elephants:

> art traditions and practice (the first Bulgarian high school of art -1891)
> fast moving marketing situation (open and free market after socialism)
> x-cultural design influence
> process of establishment of the  professionals design standards and terms


## The Bulgarian Graphic Design under Advertising Discourse

### What is the stage of Graphic Design in Bulgaria?

**Recognition:**  good statement, art and creative traditions.
**Achievements:**  expositions, local and international awards, two annual advertising festivals (Graphic Design and visual communication sections), international biennale of stage poster
**Professional fees:**   not professional standards yet; agency fee, negotiation fee, agency for professional fees and copyright.
**Professional developments:** fast-moving higher education, developing of press and print Medias, Graphic Design into new Medias and new communication platform.
**Difficulties:** Client's press, Marketing press, unclear professional fee, ambiguous role of the Graphic Design as a conceptual tool and speculations of it.
**Problems:** 'interruption' of the graphic design process by non-professional computer freelancers, conceptual problems, design piece up, chaotic aggressive advertising visual ambience.
**Challenges:** open market (competitions), big Clients ('Big Brothers') and marketing and communication challenges, new social and cultural needs, more socialized challenges. (*Serezliev, Stefan, Icograda Design Week, Istanbul, 2004).*

We can also mention the Client's extension of creative evaluation into advertising and communication agencies - via Client Service Department (by the Agency Brief and Control System) into the core of Creative Department where the creative people are Art directors, Graphic Designers, and Illustrators, etc. It is true that the contemporary Graphic Designer usually works in team and he has to know the all principles of hard team working at the communication structures. In the same time, he must to keeping his own creative potential, capacity and art competency. The last ten years in Bulgarian professional space it was generated various contradictions on the base of communication versus art priorities.[4]

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[4] *Why the problems are so important and significant? Firs of all: if the graphic Design is in use only like tool for visual interpretation but not also as a conceptual method of thinking  - the process of communication will be generally with the same face every time. Mostly all the systems of Creative Briefs at communication structures are based on the same principle. So how to get an insight inspiration?*

The first steps onto this area of pressing on the Graphic Design process are the different types of control systems in advertising and communication structures concerning **Creative strategic planning** in general and Art direction. like configurations of Client and Creative Brief, Design Brief, different workflow diagram, organization of creative teams, checklists, and evaluation systems (*BSB Dorland, London).* We can imagine how the professional situation like this can influence and manipulate the principles of Higher education of Art and design.

*I think the **idolizing** of control systems like above provoke the myths in education of graphic design by the emphasizing of conceptual and technical criteria from marketing point of view.*

**Bulgarian Audience: global values and local preferences**
What is the situation on the Bulgarian field of Design and which are the expectations of Bulgarian audience? You can see some figures below (GfK research 'Five most liked elements per country, 2001). In Europe Omnibus is available in Bulgaria and others 31 countries. There is simple question to illustrate the differences in audience preferences: what is liked in advertising: '*When thinking about TV commercials in general, what are the elements you like most?*'

In Bulgaria as a small young but fast moving underdeveloped market, we have to distinguish first: advertising images influence onto **local visual stereotype** and second: creative interpretation of the **global Graphic Design principles.** The same time the audience preferences reflect on client control system as a Design or Creative Brief, various checklist for creative artworks, pre- or post-evaluation campaign etc. In the same time, there is a worldwide tendency that 'all designers have a responsibility to investigate the unique characteristics of their audience, including ones that reflect cultural differences.' (*AIGA, Cross-cultural Design Manifesto*).  In another hand we have to analyze the complex influences of the global brands on the local Bulgarian audience (or on the small markets in generally) via transmitting of hard and strong systems of values. There are usually strategic emotional and psychological values based on the long-term of action.

The proposed elements on the GfK research are various – from digital computer images via animals, flowers, urban set or local settings until humour and good looking people.[5]
It is very interesting the audience preferences across three countries: Bulgaria, Poland and UK:
  A.  Bulgaria: 1. **Music** 28%; 2. Beauty: 25%; 3. Demo: 24%; 4. **Humour**: 24%
  B.  Poland: 1. **Humour** 54%; 2. Music: 31%; 3. Demo: 27%; 4. **Animals**: 19%
  C.  UK: 1. **Humour** 63%; 2. Music: 32%; 3. Animals: 29%; 4. **Children**: 17%

*Preferences (GfK):*
  *Preferences become more important in developed advertising environment (erg. visual communication S.S.)*
  *Emotional involvement effects perception of product attributes (erg. visual 'semantic fields' S.S.)*
  *Likes and Dislikes influence the commercials' persuasion score stronger if the commercial involves 'mood' or emotional appeal*

You can imagine the Bulgarian visual ambiance in general, the tendencies of design evaluation, and the way of conceptual and practical criteria. However, I have a simple question: Normally (global) brands are planned for global audience – but what is happening when the local audience's preferences are different? On of the possible answer is the famous **Cognitive Dissonance and Visual Conflicts**…

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[5] *At the moment (August 2005) in Sofia (the capital of BG 1 000,000 habitants) there is about 35 local and national radio stations.*

## Design Reflections on the Cross-Cultural Mirror

**Bulgarian outlooks: real or mythological**
Concerning Bulgarian outlook it is highly valued for the future activities on the professional field of Graphic Design and higher education to *determinate and adapt the terms, second: to establish the standards of practice.* If it not – the professional practice and educational programs will go on the 'lost way' because of day-up to day changes of the culture and economic needs. At the beginning of 2007 (Bulgaria joint EU), I think the role and influence of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) will be increase on the Bulgarian economic, culture and communication market. The Bulgarian way could be replicate the same conceptual level of relations between *Graphic Design* and *IMC* **(2007-2015)** as was similar *Applied Graphic (Gebrauhsgraphik)* and *Marketing (***1960-1980)**.

It is easy to understand why the future of Bulgarian Graphic Design and Education is associated with sharp terminology and establishment of standards: *that a question of the conceptual level of domination into communication business and culture.* The new 'disruption' of IMC will try to acquire the conceptual mechanism of design – that mechanism can update itself independently *(Serezliev, Stefan, Media World).* How designer does to reply of that intervention?  Why not like David Carson: 'But here they are, those mannerisms, those tricks and tics that could be appropriated stylistically. Yours to pick'n'mix.
Changing type sizes and fonts
Unusual or custom fonts
Richly cluttered pages
Stripped-down pages
Mistakes
No grid
Big Ideas' (*Blackwell, Lewis. The End of print: The Grafic Design of David Carson.)*

There were many examples of local art reactions of Bulgarian Art Directors ad Graphic Designers into communication campaigns. The problem with adequate post-evaluation system provoked some consumer's mood of ambivalence concerning brand values and brand positioning. It was using from IMC's adepts for critics about the professional competencies of designers into communication process. Of course, design is not equal to art. The main problem of discussions was the threats of replacing of communication's focus and destructions of the brand re-positioning. But to rest every time on the same model of communication with the same wide-ranging system of values can damage seriously the visual ambience and to create the emotional, rational and boring ambiguity for long time. Bulgarian communication space is on the process of determinate itself by intercultural fractal jumping. This fractal model is organizing itself periodically by the subordination between the global brand's waves versus local visual and semantic stereotypes. This situation under influence of global IMC and postmodern visual communication induces conflict doubts about sustainability of Bulgarian outlooks – between reality and mythology.

That why on the Bulgarian design reflections on x-cultural mirror will be possible to observe the initial process of art and strategic **clusterization**. It is not only into system of visual communications but also into educational system.
Two potential groups of clusters are possible:

    A.  *Group of Art Principles*
    B.  *Group of Strategic Communication Principles*

Those both groups will establish two generic directions of professional Graphic Design process (respectively of higher education) in Bulgaria, why not in the Worldwide. The first one is as an **aesthetic and artistic reaction** in opposite of the marketing pressure – the 'Pure Independent Design'. The management needs will be cover by '*Management of Design'* with proper control

systems. Ergo how to limit (to control) the Client's activities into creative process and to develop the functionality of Design on the communication level. We can spot the possible problems on the coordination point, which are generated yet. *For example, in Bulgaria there are most of Design (Creative) Briefs with different priorities and specific forms of evaluation criteria. Sometimes the Briefs are oral (by the phone) that gives possibilities of trouble speculations after (for ex. the principle of Client's approval 'Likes and Dislikes'). From educational point of view (to be close to practice), it means to focus onto creative inspirations just by Design Brief and post-interpretation via art and computer skills. In other words, the students must be involved into circle 'Problem-solving' – a mechanism of the advertising algorithm. Neville Brody said: 'What college teaches you is design as problem-solving, in the sense of design needing to please rather than to invent. You are taught to solve a problem, which is to take the short-cut of satisfying expectations, and this is note the same as meeting your public halfway. Design is no different from art, or chairs for that matter. As a means of communication, it cannot remain neutral.' (Wozencroft, Jon, The Graphic Language of Neville Brody).*

The both of two groups of art and strategic communication principles[6] constitute the *convention between reality and mythology* of the Bulgarian communication space. That why we notice the principle of x-cultural jumping. Without of evolutional accumulation of original practical precedents but within regular constitution of intercultural achievements directly on the communication surface. Where is the new role of Graphic Design in this case? I think it is on the communication strategic polyvalence of Design as a new conceptual tool – the new and permanent needs of 'disruption' – cultural, economic or whatever communication or art phenomenon.
Douglas Holt said "…Here we see a common property of iconic brands. Since these brands derive their value from how well their myth responds to tensions in the national culture, when there are tumultuous cultural shifts, the brand's myth loses steam. I call these shifts cultural disruptions. When disruptions hit, iconic brands must reinvent their myth, or they fade in relevance…" (Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons, P.32)*

## Conclusion.
### X-cultural Universe or Intercultural Diversities?
For the moment, the Bulgarian Designers are in face up to challenges of globalization via x-cultural design. It means they have to re-thinking directly about new perspectives under new global standards, hard professional challenges and actual social needs. In the same time, Bulgarian designers must to keep walking on their own way of their own experience by the light of post-modern outlooks. They also have to face facts of new relations: Graphic Design and (vs.) IMC on the social spotlight. The cultural diversities are not the borders – simply the new perspectives.

> *Bulgarian Designers must to rise to the challenges of its new enhanced social and professional responsibilities*
> *In the same time to find and care for the balance between global and local communication priorities*
> *The fist result of combine between creative and communications clusters on the Graphic Design field will be establishment of new term and methods: **Integrated Visual Communications (IVC)**. The IVC can incorporate the mechanism of management from Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) (ergo the initial post-modern phase **Graphic Design vs. Marketing**).*
> *The initial post-modern phase 'Graphic Design vs. Marketing will be based of global clusterization of x-cultural model of communications and local visual stereotypes.*

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[6] Normally it has to combine the both tendencies above into one strategy and one philosophy of educational program. On the other hand, the main problem is not how many different courses are in one program but which are the references with the Bulgarian and international theory and practice. It is very easy to arrange one contemporary abroad structure of education but the real problems will come later in the practice but 'Do you consider design education in your country to be up-to-date? Yes, absolutely 11%; In some segments 19%; **Not at all 70%** (Icograda *eNews* 20/02).

*Bulgarian design reflections on the x-cultural mirror have a real and mythological mixture. These reflections will define the future of professional practice and new tendencies of higher education of Design.*

*The 'pure' Art Graphic Design will be as an independent part of IVC on the cultural and intercultural level. The educational programs of it could determinate and develop the creative inspiration as a conceptual tools and art skill. They keep contacting other Arts and Art practice.*

*IVC will assimilate most of the areas of Design Management (under newest standards of ISO) via more conceptual possibilities and organization potential.*

*In 5-10-15 years, the process of educational clusterization will replace the communication focal point because of new segmentation of society.*

*The 'small' Bulgarian model of educational and professional clusterization could be utilize on an analytical level as a 'Case Study'.*

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