

## **Material Design for “Am I Doing It Right?” Book as Identity Search Media for Young Designers in Modern Era**

**Calvin Christian**

[cchristian@student.ciputra.ac.id](mailto:cchristian@student.ciputra.ac.id)

Visual Communication Design, School of Creative Industry  
Universitas Ciputra Surabaya

### **ABSTRACT**

The content making of the "Am I Doing It Right?" book as a medium for searching the identity of young designers in the modern era is an initiative of the writer to participate indirectly in the mental development and mindset of young designers in Indonesia. In this modern era, designers often get less favorable views from society, many feel that the role of a designer is trivial. Departing from this problem, the authors have researched literature reviews that discussed the history of the designer profession, the true purpose of it, the role they held in society, the view of the social community towards the profession of designer, and ways of addressing the profession as a designer. Literature reviews will be carried out on at least fifteen scientific papers and books that discuss topics related to designer identity in the world.

*Keywords: Identity, Designer, Role, Profession*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the journal (Grant & Fox, 1992), stated that designers not only produce functional goods or images, but also create and recreate cultural meaning through their products and images. Similar statement is also said by Jessica Helfand in her book called Design: The Invention of Desire. Designers, basically messengers for every visible object, are the makers, doers, and future sowers (Helfand, 2016).

However, in reality, these designers are only considered as “accessories” to a product or commercial tools of a brand. In fact, a designer’s role far surpassed those all, a heartbreaking fact which was not realized by so many designers and still willingly accepted what was being branded toward them.

When being asked “Why do you want to be a designer?” or “why did you choose design faculty?”, the most common answer heard by the author was because it’s particularly easy for designers to find jobs and earn money. This belief appeared due to visual communication design’s curriculum being presented to be the same as polytechnic faculty, which focused on skills rather than academical aspects (Wibowo, 2009), so the design’s graduates nowadays possess a mindset that they are mere tools and their main function is to “work”. Not as beautiful as imagined, those easily earned jobs usually become a double-edged sword: armed with skills with no other knowledge, can be a problem for newly born designers and alibis for those who want to hire them for cheap.

It is crucial for young designers in this era to understand their origins and roles in society. Similar to the other professions, designers also have vital roles in social growth, economy, and cultures. It is also important to understand that it’s a plus to have good value in society, a designer must also give a good value through their ideas and works. Like Javanese proverb, Life is Lit. As both human and part of the society, a designer must be able to contribute good values and also merits for others, to understand both the responsibilities and profession’s position in the world and society is important, by then someone can be addressed as a good successful designer. This idea is usually forgotten from curriculum design in visual communication design learning methods in Indonesia, like refilling vehicles fuel that cannot be ridden, big aptitude without proper thinking is vain.

Therefore, in this journal, the author would like to fully discuss the identity of the designer's profession and its development. Young designers’ conditions in the modern era, which is full of bountiful resources and easy access for it, and ended with how to deal with current situations to remain existing and valuable. At the end of the discussion, the author will also mention writing material from “Am I Doing It

Right?” book as the solution of existing issues, theory assessment, book writing technique as well as intellectual argument deliveries will be discussed in clearer illustration regarding the material and the deliveries. Effectivity and convenience are the crucial points that the author would like to achieve in writing the book later on so it can be a guide and reference for young designers in their study or work.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Data collecting process as well as journal material writing will be done by research study method or reference assessment related to the topic from this journal. The amount of literature material that will be assessed is at least 15 (fifteen) materials, consisting of article collections from Desain Grafis Indonesia (DGI) and other international theses.

The first step for this method is ideation to find the topic that will be discussed through literature study. Drafting the outline content becomes an important step because it will be a guide for the author in arranging comprehensive journal discussion. After drafting the outline content, the next step is finding literature material related to the topic, in this case, the background related to the design industry and designer profession. Certainly, after collecting enough literature data, the author will do a progressive reading towards collected literature and during the reading, the author will write as well compiling some important note as the basic argument and exposition toward topics related to history, experts' opinions, design research, and visual communication design. The achieved notes will be evaluated and categorized into sub-topic discussion and later on, will be implemented into the journal. During journal writing, addition in literature data will also be done shall it be necessary for additional reference to strengthen the arguments and journal exposition.

## **DISCUSSION**

There are three main discussion elements that the author would like to discuss; true meaning of design, how it entered Indonesia, and the development as

well as designers' current conditions who are afflicted by convenient access and rapid industrial growth. Before the discussion ends, the author would like to assess important points in dealing with the designer profession: mindset, role, responsibilities, and mandatory ethics as the key holders of civilization.

### **The Truth of Design in Time**

Identity is a non-foreign word in the ears of the designers despite their own specific specialties. Design is a common word in various contexts: design (from English), graphic design, fashion design, interior design, technical design, architecture design, industrial design, product design, corporate design, and design method (Walker, 1989). In one of the chapters in *Design History and History of Design*, Walker explained the concept of the word "design". The word "design" raised some incredible ambiguities in the industrial world. Design has a lot of meanings and correlations with its practice; it can refer to the process, the result, produced goods, or the overall shape of the product. In the renaissance era, design came from the word *disegno* which literally translated as drawing. From this word, renaissance artists during that era (such as Giorgio Vasari), made it as the root of every visual art, and later on appeared other terms mostly referred to as art and design. During that era, design was not considered as a specific practice just yet, because *disegno* was a part of an artist's creative activity in the making of their creation be it painting, sculpture, and many others.

The understanding of design as a profession was just introduced in the 18 and 19 centuries, during the industrial revolutions in Great Britain and America. A statement came from Margolin, that historically speaking, a designer's duty is much simpler nowadays, designer's responsibilities are much easier to explain (Margolin, 2007). That statement was stated by Margolin due to his flashback result in the 19th century where design had no social consequence yet compared to present time (Margolin, 2007). Understanding toward the design profession became thicker and specifically known in the 20th century.

When World War I broke, it opened a new gate toward technology. Mass production became the motor for troops participating in that war. Many new inventions were created such as automatic firearms, armored vehicles, armored helmets, fighter jets, and many more. Though vaguely, during this era, design had an important role in the road of victory and world's defense as well as the parties who participated in the war. Walker also explained in his book that understanding towards design is a marriage between art and industry appeared in 1930 and commonly known as: “Design is industrial design” during that time. That understanding was also used by Stephen Bayley (Art and Industry, London: Boilerhouse Project, 1982) in defining design's origin with the appearance of industrialization and mass production method (Walker, 1989). Year 1950 and 1960 became the peak where the design term is known more maturely. Consumer revolution in post war era, design industrialization, art and design's education expansion, modern culture's spread and youngsters; all those things were delivered differently to highlight on skills in design and to emphasize the importance of appearance or style in everything (Dinlot, 1984).

On this day, designers are operating as someone in charge of the market's desire and need for a product. Therefore, a premise appeared among historians such as Hazel Conway, who stated designers are mere tools or slaves to capitalism, and they are also required to create and maintain product's value in the market (Walker, 1989). Even though it's true, it doesn't mean it's a designer's true identity in the present time.

Victor Margolin's writing stated that design's history in the 20th century showed that a designer is different from an architect (and any other technical professions), and doesn't work with a set of principles or rules that limit their scope of work (Margolin, 1995).

To second this opinion, Margolin took an example from Raymond Loewy, the most influential designer who had done a great service in shaping the 20th century by starting as an illustrator. Other examples from post-war designers such as Franco Albini, Mario Bellini, Richard Rogers, and many others who had discovered and

invented projects unthinkable by the previous generations. Quoting from Margolin once more, considering the sustainable innovation process which widens our understanding towards a designer's role, which is sensible to widen our understanding as much as possible to be the base of the study (Margolin, 1995). The same understanding was also stated by Victor Papanek in *Design for the Real World Human Ecology and Social Change* chapter 7, in 1982, which until today, still being used as a guideline by professional design industry thinker such Mike Monteiro, that will be discussed later in the next sub-chapters.

### **Modern Era's Condition (Industry 4.0)**

The 21st century began with the explosion of growth in technology due to the digital technology revolution, the development was never felt but very impactful in modern world's consumerism behaviors. In *Designing Reality*, three authors would like to give enlightenment to the readers over the sources and the cause for today's increasing consumerism.

Traced back to 1965, when the law of Moore was invented, about the estimation of microprocessor growth acceleration as big as two times in every two years; and then infamously known as the power behind a better, faster, and cheaper technology. Intel, a computer processing hardware manufacturing company applied this law as a guideline in product development. The Gershenfeld brothers stated that maintaining Moore's law has become an important thing not just for Intel but also the society, who enthusiastically accepted better, faster and cheaper applications (Gershenfeld et al, 2017). Similarities between Moore's law and social theory regarding social construction phenomenon, explained that environment growth in the society was the result of human repetitive behaviors, in this case a competitive environment (between companies, industries or societies) was the result of social construction.

Until this day, both companies and industries are competing to gain profit as much as they can with whatever methods to please the consumers. In an era run by digitalization, some institutions (government, education, safety, etc.) received

pressures to keep on changing and rapidly develop (Gershenfeld et al, 2017). This created new issues since these institutions couldn't keep up with the rapid technology growth (Gershenfeld et al, 2017). These statements proven to be true and happened, for example digital growth happened since 2007 when the late Steve Jobs introduced the first iPhone to the world. Ever since then, each development in technologies can be counted into every 12 months. However it took more than ten 10 years (from 2007) for educational institutions to adjust to such development, the given learning modulus as well as the materials still applying the 20th century's concept. As a supporting argument, Hastartjo Budhi Wibowo harshly criticized the 21st century's visual communication design's learning module for being glued to the old 1997's curriculum (in which the curriculum only emphasized the student's skills). For design communication visual institutions, producing alumni based on quantity over quality is much more important (Wibowo, 2009). To fulfil the digital industry's needs for visual designers in the 21st century along with the emergence of today's youngsters who aim to be creative workers, design communication visual institutions stop at nothing in pressuring its students to graduate as conceptual professional bachelors within the time span of 8 semesters only (Wibowo, 2009).

Mike Monteiro through *Ruined by Design*, also channeled his disappointments toward the design institutions upbringing results which produced designers who are oblivious to their profession's ethics, roles, and purpose. Nowadays' generations of designers spend their careers learning how to work quickly. Meanwhile, there is one thing about speed, outstanding production speed tends to blur the purpose (Monteiro, 2019). That statement pointed to a designer's lack of attention in deciding the purpose of one's creation and the impact that creation may bring. Similar ideas also expressed by Jessica Helfland about today's designers. Trained designers are too focused on the shape's beauty, utilizing their talents in service and products which both serve and satisfy the customers, but really hard to imagine such contributions in global scale so we need design's students to learn foreign languages or to study things aside of designs, and even to understand basic humanities (Helfland, 2016).

Young designers these days are also lacking in basic understandings on how to run a business, how to identify issues, how to measure the impact of their creation, and how to deal with criticisms (Monteiro, 2019). These three statements are the real evidence of what not only happened towards designers in Indonesia but also all around the world. Then, aside from outstanding graphic design skills, what more that the designers should know about?

### **Facing Design Profession**

Design as an invention method is an exclusive creation. It can't be found, accounted for, mapped, or accessed by anyone outside of the design's practice (Neubauer, et al, 2020). In modern society, designers have become the makers of daily lives' meanings (Grant & Fox, 1992). Every effort in dividing design and turning it into separate objects clashed with the fact that design is a life's matrix base (Papanek, 1986). Today's design only satisfies mortal desires, while human's true needs are often neglected (Papanek, 1986). As designers, we have the ethical responsibilities toward the entire ecosystem which we designed (Monteiro, 2019). Designers must develop their own personal ethical codes to assist them in evaluating whether their designs are either supporting or disabling the consumers (Grant & Fox, 1992).

Design can also become a representative of concern for human's experience. This turned design into a human-centered method where the ways in finding it are offered as a way to direct the innovations in acceptable manners for the society (Neubauer, et al, 2020). In this process, approach through empathy pushes the process (creative) by ensuring us to always remember that we design for real people (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Through empathy we (designers) can build a bridge to knowledge, to see different worlds from others' perspectives, understand the world through their experiences, and feel the world through their emotions (Brown, 2019). Empathy is a mental habit which moves us to overcome thoughts; human as a lab-rat or standard deviation (Brown, 2019) because, to be focused onto humans is the core of our innovation process (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Design's perspective which



centered on humans implied that interactions between someone (or many people) and technologies formed the base of how an object design should be presented (Giaccardi & Redstorm, 2020).

Modern world has been pushed by never-ending pursuit over knowledge and economy advance, a failed system because of its products, organizations, practices in its spirit only paying attention to updated technology that can be created and what can it gain, with little to none attention toward its impact on human, society, or nature (Stegall, 2006). In this condition, designers must be able to single out which value that they want to defend (Shedroff, 2009). Must be noted that design is important due to “why” and not “what”, because of the feels instead of achievements. Design is important because so are humans (Helfland, 2006). A designer possesses the ability to connect with the consumers to an emotional level, in which emotion is a strong point for the consumer to connect with the products, services, events, brands, and organizations (Shedroff, 2009). Therefore, a designer should understand their responsibilities in society and the impact they may bring to the world.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the written discussion, there is some newly discovered knowledge over a designer’s identity and world’s perspective on that profession. It is proven that designers nowadays are still glued to the identity given by the modern industrialization era (20th century). According to the world’s design observers’ literature reference, only a small number of designers truly understand their profession and roles in society. The majority of young designers still bear the mindset that skills and performance in design are more important in satisfying the clients; institutions; and companies; which made this thinking being harshly criticized by Mike Monteiro in his book, *Ruined by Design*. However, it happened not without a cause, institutions who provided the design learning programs took a huge part in shaping today’s young designers. Monteiro and Wibowo shared similar concerns over design institutions in the world still hanging onto school of art’s concept as their curriculum’s base and that is irrelevant to be applied in the current modern era.

Since the digital revolution, people's understandings over design methods and arts have drastically changed compared to the previous era and this is what must be emphasized in current design learning.

From the literature assessment, the author managed to gain some important points that can be put into material planning for "Am I Doing It Right?" book. Historical and identity assessments still necessary to be delivered as the profession's true discovery as well as education over designer's role and their impact will be inserted into the material; as a response to Monteiro's concern over designer graduates who simply work without relevant academical knowledge related to their profession, awareness toward profession's ethics, and forming personal ethics and empathy are vital for designers in undergoing their profession.

In the end, the author would like to state that in this research, there are still many things that can be explored deeper over design; identity, roles, and its impacts in the world. Important to remember that this research is only done based on reference assessment of old thinkers' literature collections, there's a chance for further research using vaster methods, more relevant to current situations so that deeper knowledge over present time's designer's identity can be achieved. The end of this journal will be closed by author's wish in the making of this journal, it can bring some benefits to society and as the beginning of further research for today's design profession and industries.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, T. (2019). *Change by Design, Revised and Updated: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (Revised, Updated ed.). Harper Business.
- Dilnot, C. (1984). The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities. *Design Issues*, 1(2), 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1511495>
- Gershenfeld, N., Gershenfeld, A., & Cutcher-Gershenfeld, J. (2017). *Designing Reality: How to Survive and Thrive in the Third Digital Revolution*. Basic Books.

- Giaccardi, E., & Redström, J. (2020). Technology and More-Than-Human Design. *Design Issues*, 36(4), 33–44. [https://doi.org/10.1162/desi\\_a\\_00612](https://doi.org/10.1162/desi_a_00612)
- GRANT, J., & FOX, F. (1992). Understanding the Role of the Designer in Society. *Journal of Art & Design Education*, 11(1), 77–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.1992.tb00689.x>
- Helfand, J. (2016). *Design: The Invention of Desire*. Yale University Press.
- Kelley, T., & Kelley, D. (2013). *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All* (Illustrated ed.). Currency.
- Margolin, V. (1995). Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods. *Design Issues*, 11(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1511610>
- Margolin, V. (2007). Design, the Future and the Human Spirit. *Design Issues*, 23(3), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.1162/desi.2007.23.3.4>
- Monteiro, M. (2019). *Ruined by Design: How Designers Destroyed the World, and What We Can Do to Fix It*. Independently published.
- Neubauer, R., Bohemia, E., & Harman, K. (2020). Rethinking Design: From the Methodology of Innovation to the Object of Design. *Design Issues*, 36(2), 18–27. [https://doi.org/10.1162/desi\\_a\\_00587](https://doi.org/10.1162/desi_a_00587)
- Papanek, V. (2005). *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (2nd Revised ed.). Academy Chicago Publishers.
- Shedroff, N. (2009). *Design Is The Problem: The Future of Design Must Be Sustainable* (1st ed.). Rosenfeld Media.
- Stegall, N. (2006). Designing for Sustainability: A Philosophy for Ecologically Intentional Design. *Design Issues*, 22(2), 56–63. <https://doi.org/10.1162/desi.2006.22.2.56>
- Walker, J. A. (1990). *Design History and the History of Design* (New Ed). Pluto Press.
- Wibowo, H. (2009, December 11). *Mengkritik Pendidikan DKV di Indonesia*. Desain Grafis Indonesia. <https://dgi.or.id/in-depth/critique/mengkritik-pendidikan-dkv-di-indonesia.html>