

A general beautification of the world is a kind of soft power for goodness. A common joy can be created by an effort to spread it. Soft power is not inherently positive. Designers should be aware of their power, soft or hard, good or bad.

JD: In a global context I guess we can imagine that e.g. Danish Design has enormous soft and hard (capital) power as a 'brand' - similarly Dutch, or Japanese or French 'style' have a close relationship with design in its many forms which is understood by the state as a significant global asset. But at the level of the studio or workshop, designers want to connect with, communicate with users. A part of this process will assume all kinds of things about their users, these assumptions are also therefore likely to be ideological (formed through all kinds of discursive processes including education) - for instance that the idealised user wants to consume cheap desirable products rather than low carbon high cost fair trade products; this may be another form of soft power in operation. The objects and artefacts that designers create have a range of affordances, and "good" design exercises soft power that leads the user to understand its intended use or meaning.

MC: I think the relationship between soft power and design is that through our work, designers can exercise soft power on others in order to convince them that certain actions or ideologies should be adopted while others should be dismissed, simply by portraying them as normal in our work. Now the question is, do we as designers have enough knowledge and criteria to exercise this power in a way that is positive to society? For years designers have been able to successfully convince people that they should consume so and so brands. Similarly, aren't we able to make people see that tolerance, openness and respect are values that we should all adopt, while sexism, xenophobia and racism are attitudes that should be dismissed?

TK: In terms of process I think design is often about soft power. Commercially it might be the process of working with a client, developing and responding to briefs, then collectively fine tuning and editing the works in progress. As a practitioner that might be reflection and the sometimes painful (but productive) journey that we go on with projects. In terms of education I would advocate that a soft power is a productive power, discussing and nurturing rather than bombastic and dogmatic. My understanding is that it allows the student to find their own way, their own practice, rather than being moulded into someone else's (often their tutor's).

LS: I would say that design's only current responsibility is to directly respond to and consider the immediate needs and future potential in relation to the planet, climate change and diverse peoples' immediate

conditions; not to make design to dress up any old 'new improved washing powder' type things. I think that design now has to be about function. About thinking and tracing the steps back and questioning if anything is actually needed, otherwise it is simply adding more to the pile of stuff.

HF: I think there is an inseparable relationship between what might be soft power and the designer / or design - if design is about designing for society, for the planet etc. then we have to find the most skillful ways to do this - these could be described as 'soft' ways - openness, kindness, working together... etc. Whilst I appreciate this sounds very 'idealistic' - I think it's sad that we have perhaps shied away from these 'softer' means. Almost as if we're embarrassed by them, because we're taught that 'soft' is 'weak'.

JH: DESIGN - can act differently - designers know about seduction and the tools of seduction (tickling sticks come to mind and sweeties, lollipops). Designers can find out what's needed on the ground... but they have to get down and crawl around and listen and see.

BW: I don't know. Let me think. I assume (I may be wrong) that soft power comes from an outside agency, and if a designer is dealing with soft power then it's probably in terms of selling, convincing, persuading. Maybe another way of seeing it is that by using soft power as a way of persuasion then designers are complicit in telling fibs to the world. If I can think of soft power as not in the realm of the state, then ... Soft power could be used to show (not sell) people good things, useful things, inspiring things. In the way that Shakespeare taught morals and attitude by having actors mouth seditious ideas. Or Charles Dickens taught poverty by writing it in his novels. But soft power to me always reeks of the state, of using culture and art and music and language to subjugate the rest of the world; when weapons and government agencies couldn't.

CC: Perhaps design has a capacity for beguilement, and can misdirect attention away from the important adjustments until they have already happened.

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Conway and Young.

A CUT & PASTE CONVERS- ATION SOFT POWER

TWO QUESTIONS TO:

**Designers, Design
Educators and
Design Researchers**

What do you understand the term soft power to mean?

TJ: I'd say it's the old 'the Sun and the Wind' story. So the Wind is hard power, and tries to get people to do things by force, by power, at the barrel of a gun. But the sun is more persuasive: it makes people do things because they want to, because they identify with it, aspire to be like it. I'd say soft power is culture, pop music, architecture, capitalism. Perhaps it's democracy, treating people right, Western nations leading the way in green power, etc. to show other people how it should be done. Leading by example. Or it could be a little more sinister than this: beautiful people in films and magazines, presenting your city or building or nation as wonderful and happy, and making people do something out of aspiration, because they want to be more like George Clooney or Beyonce, and less like themselves. Brad Pitt is soft power.

JG: I think soft power is conversation, interaction, grass roots activism, people changing things for themselves.

BW: Soft power – I reckon it's using power without making it blatant. In government terms it's by using cultural influence, or it can be the seemingly benign lure of capitalism that gently, quietly, invades a country or an area. It bugs me that culture / art can be used as a means of power, but that's what I think happens.

WE: Adaptable attitude
Malleable message
General swaying
Subtle saying
Polite persuasion
Quiet questioning

WD: My understanding of 'soft power' is the idea that a subject or entity has control over another via invisible, subtle or indistinct characteristics. This relationship could be described by any number of scales; from habitual ties in a relationship between two people, to a situation of self-censorship between a people and the state, to the coercion of a public by means of violent ideals, basically anything keeping an other from some form or possibility of emancipation.

LS: I find the use of the word soft in any art / design / power references quite irritating as it will immediately be semi-disregarded I think. However I also dislike the idea that anything has to have some aggressive / patriarchal reference for it to be valid or listened to but I am not clear on what soft power means and haven't come across it until now to be honest. If it's more to do with diy grassroots local etc. I think it's a bit distracting.

JH: Appealing seduction persuasion - offer an attractive world Paradox - it's still manipulating opinion. Values? Whose values? Those aren't mine. Who said they were?

Platform for free speech - roll up,,, stand on here....have a say.... shout it out. Is it a soap box, who's the audience?

Here you are....being given a way of making your voice heard.... you have to speak through this tannoy (we like those)....its a special tannoy that distorts your voice to how we want it to sound for our purposes,,,then we'll use your voice for another purpose that you never intended but we have decided it can be put to other use.

Open for business (welcome inn sign) a welcoming inn sign on a dark wet night. Hard words....dynamic...purposeful....reassuring... powerful. POW written in a soft way. Conduit (medium..... channelling) or tool?

MC: I had honestly never come across the term 'soft power', but it seems to me that it could mean power that is exercised in a way that is not so evident, or in a way that is small and almost insignificant when done individually, but big and impactful when done collectively. E.g. One single person probably doesn't have enough power to convince others to start recycling, but through collective action, many people could exercise soft power to convince others to do the same – not necessarily by campaigning, but simply by making recycling look like the normal thing.

TK: I understand soft power to mean a conversation, a range of positions or at least openness to them, showing rather than telling. Nuance, subtlety, flexibility, but an understanding of what you are saying and where you are coming from.

HF: I think soft power is about being able to have influence via means which are not forceful, weighty and restrictive. I actually find the term 'soft power' a little strange and uncomfortable. It's hard to explain why – it's as if there is something manipulative about it – this must be because I see the word 'power' as negative. Maybe I'm not so certain about the word 'soft' too. We have many ways, human ways, which are kind and skillful - by which we can have influence, make change – so this to me is 'soft power'.

JD: I think soft power is usually understood as ideology enacted in the products of creative and cultural industries. In a global context we might imagine that 'Friends', for instance, was a site of enormous 'soft power' in reproducing particular forms of identity in the post cold war 90s. In a harder sense the CIA funding

abstract expressionism in the 50's is a limited case which we might understand as the origin of soft power. Soft power might also be understood as resistance in cultural work - from 'Free Nelson Mandela', dance music to the use of hashtags as critical dialogue assets. Cultural products are not ideologically neutral, and are frequently produced by people educated in art schools.

What do you think is the relationship between soft power and design? Or the relationship between soft power and the designer?

WD: Designers are locked into a relationship spanning the public, a media, a trend and so on. Designers have the agency to abide by certain power relationships and also break out of them. The reason designers are in the world is to make proposals as to alternative or unique ways of seeing and living.

JG: The relationship between soft power and design is multifaceted and diverse but here are some examples - things that give an insight into an under-represented point of view, things that inspire resistance or simply open up conversations, parody, humour, interventions into hard power. Examples include the fence at Greenham Common, the insurgent rebel clown army, Nan Goldin, Billie Holiday, tents, lock-on tubes.

Oh, and how could I forget, Dada

TJ: The relationship between soft power and design? Again it's mixed. If you're being generous, you'd maybe say Wikipedia, or firefox, or open source stuff. Perhaps the ability of an idea or a slogan to change the world. Be Reasonable: Demand The Impossible, perhaps, or 'I have a dream'. But the other side is the power of Facebook to make people take photos of themselves in a way that would have been unthinkable fifteen years ago; Apple to make everyone feel like their gadgets are obsolete; fashion editors to make girls buy jeans with pre-ripped knees. The worst example would of course be Cool Britannia: the explicit use of culture and design to make a nation seem 'with it'.

WE: Everyone who makes things has a power, that can be soft or hard and can be acted on explicitly or with subtlety. The power comes from making something that someone else sees. It is not an exclusive power but this power can be stronger with people who have a predisposition to visual communication.