

THE DESIGN AS DIFFERENTIATING ELEMENT OR AS CONSUMPTION APPEAL: CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE DESIGN IN THE CURRENT SOCIETY

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In the last times the use of the word design became very explored by the media, mainly in the publicity, demonstrating the force that the design aggregates as image value, but rarely it is spoken about its contents. It is not simply to give good appearance to banal products, but investing in new proposals, that motivate changes of behavior and provide better life quality to the users.

Possibly the ignorance of the importance of the design in the context of the companies has provoked that exhibition excess, generating misunderstandings and distortions, as the use of the design as mark, such as: Hair Design instead of hairdresser, Flower Design instead of flower seller, or Design Tour for tourism agency, only to mention some examples.

Since 200 years ago, the products of automated industrial production have molded the material culture, influenced the economy of the world and have affected the quality of the environment and of the daily life. From consumption goods and package to transport systems and production equipment, the products of the industrial design include an extraordinary variety of functions, techniques, attitudes, ideas and values, and also are a way through which we experience and understand the world that surrounds us, and it cannot totally be understood out of the social, economical, political, cultural and technological contexts that took to the conception and the accomplishment.

Defined in a more global sense as conception and planning of all the products made by the man, the design can be seen fundamentally as an instrument to improve the life quality. The interests of the businesses to create competitive products led to the evolution and diversity of design.

As a communication manner among people, design offers a peculiar vision of the designer's character, ideas and convictions about what is important in the relation between the object (solution of the design), the consumer, and the process of the design and the society. The intention is not to promote any uniform theory about design or ideology, but to detach the plural nature of design and the idea that the design can be seen as a debate among different opinions on subjects, such as the role of the technology and the industrial process, the primacy of the usefulness, simplicity and cost, on the luxury and the exclusiveness, and the role of the functionality, aesthetics, ornament and symbolism in practical objects for the common use.

This way, the products, styles, theories and philosophies of design became more and more diversified. This due mainly to increase complexity of the process of design. More and more, in the design for the industrial production, the relationship among conception, planning and production is fragmented and complicated by series of interlinked activities involving different individuals, such as the authors of the models, the market researchers, specialists of materials, engineers and production technicians. The products of design that results from this process are not individual, but individual teams' results, each one with its ideas and attitudes about how the things should be done. The plurality is also due to the alterations of consumption patterns, of taste, alterations in inventors' commercial and moral imperatives, the designers, manufacturers, technological progress and variations of national tendencies of design.

When enhancing the diversified nature of the design, it is aimed to demonstrating that the attitudes, ideas and values communicated by the designers and manufacturers are not absolute, but conditional and floating. The solutions of design, even for the most objective of the problems, is inherently ephemeral, such as the designers' and manufacturers' concerns and needs and the changes in the society. Perhaps the most significant reason for the diversity in design, however, is the widespread faith that, despite the authority and success of solutions in private design, there is always a way to make things better.

When contemplating the history of the industrial design, mainly its successes, it is verified that the industrial design intends to simplify the technology and to offer it in accessible forms to the largest number of people when possible. Another subject to highlight is the phenomenal dimension of the responsibility that the manufacture companies had in the evolution of the history of the industrial design. Without the will of taking the necessary and, for several times, huge risks to make investments, demanded in the development of new products, there would be very little industrial design. The manufacture innovators' companies commercially motivated and, at the same time, with social concerns, are frequently ignored heroes of our material culture.

With the implacable globalization of the free market economy, the design became also truly a global phenomenon. Around the industrialized world, all kinds of manufacturers recognize and implement the design as an essential way to reach a new international public and to acquire competitive advantage more and more. More than ever, the products of design give a form to a material culture world and they influence the quality of our environment and our daily. The importance of design cannot be underestimated for these reasons. Design not only embraces an extraordinary range of functions, techniques, attitudes, ideas and values, all of them influencing our experience and perception of the world that surrounds us, as well as the choices that we make today about the future direction of the design will have a significant and possibly durable effect on the quality of our lives and in the atmosphere in the future years.

Design in fact plays expressive economical part, however the public has enormous difficulty in understanding the activity and its benefits, such as the social role: generator of employments, education, professional and social qualification. Most of the noticed benefits are superficial, linked to the beauty and the commercial communication. The perception of the benefits of the products is joined to the owner brands. The "market" has vices, and it can only evaluate the direct economical benefit: to each invested dollar, the amount of dollars in return. In other words, if that understanding about the function of the design is so elementary and there are such apparent benefits, why, still today, is it so difficult to justify the role of the design as an activity that can generate tangible benefits?

On the other hand, as well as a pleasure of the design exists, there is a design for the pleasure. However, the designers' formation privileges the merchandizing demands about the invention and it inhibits the inner demand for the self-expression. In other words, the spread specialization in most of the teaching programs, in some way, inhibits the inventiveness. However, being the design a social activity, generating of collective goods, it demands a wider and humanist formation, conscious of the environmental impact.

In parallel, to project is not to impose an authorial and authoritarian solution, but to divide with the speaker the responsibility of the change and to give a spontaneous contribution, those sensitizes and conquer through the social and aesthetic way.

If the principal objective of design is to turn the people's life better, the practice of design should answer the technical, functional and cultural needs and create innovative solutions that communicate meaning and emotion and that transcend its forms, structures and production ideally. Independently of this aim in common, the answers to the subject: "What is your vision about the future of the design?" are notably varied.

The increasing availability of new synthetic materials is broadly identified as one of the motivation-key forces of the appearance of new products. But while most designers foresee that "the integration of high technology materials and processes will enlarge and become more accessible", others have demonstrate the concern that the synthetic ones can, sometimes, be difficult to work with and they are not always developed to resist the consuming of the time.

The new technologies - computers, communications and industrial processes - have, in the last years, helped a lot in research and implement of design, and it is foreseen that they will originate more and more miniaturized, multi-functional and better acting products. These types of technologies are contributing to improve the design process, from the initial concept to the work prototype. When accelerating the design process, not only these technologies reduce the manufacturers' initial costs, but provide to designers a great experimentation freedom.

It is expected the technologies of information to be incorporated in product design in such a way that it will come eventually to be considered as any other material type - such as the glass or the plastic -, with which it is possible to develop innovative and better acting solutions. However, in opposition to this vision of a new splendid world of penetrating advanced technology, some designers promote the use of more natural processes that not only have a minimum impact in the natural environment, but also reject the unstable demand for larger variety and volume of products.

In response to the average technological complexity, the simplification became clearly an objective-key of design. There are few doubts that the designers' future task will be conceiving intelligible products and that can be used in an intuitive way. In the same way, not only the simplification in the structural form will provide the way through which designers will be able to obtain the maximum starting from the minimum, but it will also help in the accomplishment of forms that have an inherent emotional purity. The simplification in design will reduce the white noise of the contemporary life and it will provide one of the best ways of enhancing the quality of the products and, for that, their durability.

The psychological aspects of design are also widely mentioned with an unprecedented importance. There is a widespread consent that the products should be beyond the form and function considerations if they intend to become more and more "desire objects" in a competitive market. To get this, the products need to establish pleasant emotional connections with the users through the pleasure of the manipulation and/or the beauty of their form. The emotivity is considered by many of the designers not only as a powerful and essential form of facilitating better and more significant connections among the products and the users, but an effective way of differentiating the solutions from their competitors. We live in a symbolic world of signs, and this reality is also one of the pillars of sustentation of the design. In a global society, it is not just the object that is acquired, but also the speech of the object.

The tendency for the individual or universal solution, from all the themes that emerge, includes the consequences of the future course of the design potentially. While some designers promote the individualism in design as a channel for the personal creative expression or to satisfy the

consumer's demand for individualistic products, others plead universal solutions, that are usually healthier in environmental terms and which emphasis about the largest aesthetic and functional durability offers a better value in financial terms.

The individualism in design can be seen as a reaction against the uniformity of the mass production and, in last case, the growing homogenization of the global culture. However, with the objective of providing larger expressive content, the individualistic solutions of design lead many times to higher costs and accelerated stylistic obsolescence. Since this, it's not surprising that, as an approach to design, the individualism has continued up to now in the kingdoms of the only-piece products and of the production in lots, instead of making serious incursions for the industrial production in large scale. Although the discussion of the individualism against the universality have begun in the beginning of the practice of modern design, it stays a fundamental paradox: while the nature of the universal design solutions can per times be alienated, the individualistic design solutions continue to be an attribute of a wealthy elite. However, the new technologies have become more and more accessible providing the necessary ways so that, perhaps, finally these two fields are reconciled. The future of design will, like this, be able to be based on the creation of universal solutions that can be efficiently adapted to respond to the individualistic demands.

The designers' debate about the adaptation of the individualistic solutions against the universal ones perhaps can be explained by the relative absence of hypotheses on a unified theory or a new philosophical base of design. While many discuss the attraction that it could have in satisfying the needs of a larger individualism in design, few comment the future viability of such approach, with its implications related to the growing production of residues. However, some designers adopt a global vision of the average and long-term concerns. Actually, there is an increasing need that the designers see each other as responsible for product solutions and that develop them inside of a comprehension of the environmental impact of each aspect of their production, use and eventual elimination – from the cradle to the grave.

The product design begins to manifest compatible answers with its role, appealing to the promotion of the development sustained by the utilization of raw material with certified origin, whose production involves the local professional qualification and positive environmental and social impact.

The current tendencies of design illustrate the concern in reverting damages caused to the planet by the industrialization in mass in the centuries XIX and XX, through a more responsible approach of the durability of the products, in other words, more efficient products in relation to the consumption of energy, with ecological concerns and recycled goods, with low cost, economy of materials and rationalization of the components.

But also there is a pressure regarding the demand of linking the consumer in a more significant way to more and more complex products technologically. For this purpose, it seems that an approach to a design more considered and centered in the man, could provide the best ways to satisfy the functional and psychological needs.

As the designers clearly carry out a paper-key in the determination of the nature of the manufactured products, there are few doubts that they influence the expectations and habits of the consumers' purchase exceptionally. Consequently, there is a crescent moral imperative for them to trace a new and better orientation for design, namely one that concentrates on the development

of real need, human and sustained solutions. When embracing the materials and advanced technologies, and determining at the same time to provide simplified design solutions with an easier emotional connection with the consumer, the designers should get to create the types of ethical and important products that will be necessary in the future.

The quality of our global material culture is being determined by the actions and choices that we make now, and for that it should be correct that each individual - creator, manufacturer and consumer - understands the need of a culture based on the responsibility and shares the collective objective of providing a better tomorrow.

In Brazil that image began to change with the recognition by the Brazilian Government of the importance of design as a social, economical and cultural factor of development, with the creation of the Brazilian Program of Design in November of 1995, coordinated by the Ministry of the Industry of the Trade and of the Tourism - MICT. The Program is justified because the action of design in the technological evolution scenery and in the process of globalization of the economies comes as a strategy of fundamental importance, joining value and creating identity to the products, services and companies. It is the creative element and decisive differential for the competitiveness of the companies in the internal and external markets; it concludes the document of the program.

This work is justified by the extremely fruitful moment that crosses the national design, when a larger approach is observed with the industry, with projects that prioritize the constructive simplicity, with smaller costs of production and consequently more accessible prices to a larger number of users; and the inherent aspects to the administration of the design and/or enterprising design, where only Brazilian companies started very recently to have a department of own design, which respects the regionalism of national design, instead of the predominance of modified copies of the models offered by the international market.

Analyzing Brazilian publications on design since 2000, a significant contingent of qualitative researches is observed, appropriate methodologies to the production processes as form of diffusing this production, and in a competitive way, in national and/or international markets.

In parallel, in terms of contests, more specifically in the furniture area, it is noticed an increasing popularization of the national design, the research of new products and an approach with the industrial technologies. And still, objects that, although they exalt constructive and formal simplicity, they make the real difference for the comfort and the consumer's well-being, with varied materials, production quality, national inclusion between the selected ones, and professionals' outstanding presence in the contest.

On the other hand the conceptual innovation in the contests for students is in the compensation of the industry, allowing to the student the experience of the "factory ground", making possible the improvement of the knowledge and the thinking of an appropriate product in relation to the chosen raw material. However, we can observe, concerning design and utility, the design teaching and professional performance cross-different moments.

In international terms, the Brazilian design has had record award, result of the professionals' efforts and companies who had started to invest in the administration of the design.

If that understanding of the function of the design is so elementary and there are such apparent benefits, why still today is it so difficult to justify the role of design as transforming activity and generating of tangible benefits? We live in a world of signs and symbology, and this reality is also one of the pillars of maintenance of the design. In a globalize society it is not just acquired the object, but the speech of the object.

The objective of this research is to verify to what point extent the academic formation answers to the yearnings of the society and of the productive section.

In this sense, and in the quality of example, the objective of the discipline of Project of Furniture of the Industrial Design course, qualification in Project of Product, of FAAC UNESP, (under my responsibility since 1998) is to introduce the student to the space, formal and aesthetic problems of the furniture project, relating the industrial design with the industrial production. In other words, understanding the interdependence of professional performance among the creation process, (project) and the execution process (industry).

For that, and yet, so that they can develop processes that allow to create and to renew repertoires through a critical vision of the reality, the students develop furniture projects, in such way that they exercise their creativity and space vision, developing the methodology related to the drawing of the object, parallel to theoretical classes.

However, this methodology still prioritizes eminently a functionalistic vision, where the users are just seen only as human beings whose practical needs need to be satisfied, alienating them of social and cultural subjects and eventually of economical questions that permeate the imaginary of the universe of the daily objects.

Why to teach to the students that they should consider the target public's social, cultural and economical way if in the end the choice feels through the formal appeal and the joined value? To what point the resultant forms are the addition of the expectations of the target public or just the materialization of the dream/desire of the designer? These are some questions to be answered.

The adopted methodology is the perceptive approach. The perceptive approach is related basically to the relationship between the Mankind and its environment, and like this, this is mainly qualitative. The procedures concern on asking, hearing and observing. The first involves the application of questionnaires, to try to identify the terms of the interrelation between the people and the universe of daily objects, trying to understand the users' perception in relation to the same ones. Hearing concerns the no-directing and half-open interviews, that will be accomplished to evaluate the perceptions in spontaneity level, in other words, of those subjects that would not be a priori inserted in the accomplishment of the research and of the questionnaires. Finally observing appears in the analysis and evaluation of the collected information.

These procedures are related to an including posture before the object, trying to integrate the different dimensions of these experiences in the dynamics between man, environment his environmental perceptions. And, exactly for these reasons it is the most appropriate methodology for the study, in function of the complexity of the analyzed subjects.