OBJECT TEMPORAL STUDY ON USER SCALE

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Abstract

Based on the modern models of object production, and after show explanations about users' needs, the article exposes some considerations concerning the importance of crossing information between different timelines that act on the same object at the design process.

Keywords

Social responsibility, professional ethics, sustainable design.

Introduction

By a few decades, it was necessary a considerable number of utensils to make a simple hamburger sandwich. Equipped with an industrial grill, a spatula, a knife to the toppings, a spoon and proper stock of ingredients, it was possible for an adult person to do the task without any pain. There are sandwiches still going through the same process, but the difference is in the great range of ways of achieving that same simple goal: the number of products and utensils to make it even simpler and more efficient increased remarkably. It can be taken as example the offers made by television channels specialized in sales, or the ones that make commercial breaks (Figure 1). From this great expansion of options comes a growing miniaturization (products and spaces going smaller) and individualization (products for a reduced number of users, or just one, single-serving). The services once executed with utensils of simpler technology that benefited a larger number of people are today substituted by a series of new objects which subdivide tasks and make the interference of an other individual less necessary to achieve what is desired.

Figure 1: kitchen utensils. a: Lettuce chopper. b: Sponge holder. c: Egg splitter. d. Kiwi knife. e. Tea bag support. f. Salad dryer. g. Egg chopper. h. Egg boiler.
Source: www.glosh.com.br

Thus:

> "...os múltiplos objetos acham-se em geral isolados de sua função, é o homem que lhes assegura, na medida de suas necessidades, sua coexistência em um contexto funcional, sistema pouco econômico, pouco coerente...: combinação de funções parciais, por vezes indiferentes ou antagônicas. A tendência atual, aliás, não é absolutamente a de resolver tal incoerência, mas de atender às necessidades sucessivas por meio de objetos novos. Sucede assim que cada objeto, adicionado a outros, cumpre sua função própria, mas transgride o conjunto, por vezes até cumpre e transgride ao mesmo tempo a própria função." (BAUDRILLARD, 1973, p.14).

The possibility of making his own sandwich, in his own house and in his own way can be very attractive for the user, but brings forward the matter of the real necessity and utility of some objects whose role can be carried out by a simpler and more broad in use one, as the kettle roles substitutes and confines that (single role) of the egg boiler.

The excess

A number of theories try to explain the phenomena of consumerism. What makes the desire to consume and possess the new to continue endlessly?

Canclini studies the modern consumerism and notices that it builds itself up based on a developing global culture. He calls it "culture of the ephemeral", and affirms it consists of a "process of multinational construction, a flexible articulation of the parts involved, a collage of traces that any citizen, in any country, religion and ideology can have and use" (2008, p.32). Thus, even in different cultures, there is a merging which tends to grow with constant influences due to the commercial expansion that defines and moves the most diverse actions – and shows that to consume isn't limited to a region: it is part of a wide range of influences. That means the responsibility for consume incentives isn't restricted to a few, but comes from all places, always justifying commercial interests.

As one can conclude from Canclini and from the word's etymology, ephemeral is the object with a short lifespan, always substituted for a new one, to attend the most

diverse public, who feel compelled to constantly renew all its possessions. This necessity is enhanced by the great number of choices, by rapid substitutions and other facilities and marketing which are decisive, posing as stimuli to this behavior.

The satisfaction felt by a user as he acquires or uses a new object become, then, constantly a disappointment, as there is always 'newer and better' substitutes. It becomes a vice, the desire to acquire compulsively (LIPOVETSKY, 2007).

This permanent disappointment, that grows from the comparison with other situations and from the delusion with the objects, sums up with the negative environmental effect these excesses cause. The multiplication of product offers – more technological and apparently innovative utensils – inevitably means the rise in waste production, the use of natural resources and a myriad of other actions that cause environmental impact and, even with recycling policies, do not possess alternatives fully capable of standing up to this expansion.

To establish the relationship between all the factors that involve the act of consumption shows almost always an unbalanced process. While a product causes a short feeling of satisfaction to an user, it is often dangerous to the environment.

Alternatives

"...growing material wealth and levels of population satisfaction are increasingly uncoupled. Could the pursuit of sustainable lifestyle also lead to more quality and more satisfaction?"1 (JÉGOU, MANZINI, p.25)

Facing this panorama there are already small initiatives which put into perspective the imperatives of economy. Aware of it, some collectives and services appear with broad proposals, where the services that come out of collective action substitute perfectly some of the most costly acquisitions – the ones that represent the old twisted solution: more comfort and facilities equals more consumption and less social quality.

Some examples of this kind of initiative are the + BC Cycling Association and the Time Bank (Creative Communities, p.76 and p.96), both based on exchange of services, information and knowledge, as well as a focus on the well-being of all areas they relate to. This kind of systemic thinking does not make sense when among specific, unidimensional data only – the segmented analysis, however broad, makes detecting connections a task for the memory or the experience. It is of great value, then, for all aspects concerning a process to be considered – only this way it is possible to have a glimpse of its totality and from it draw ideas that can cause benefits in all observed series.

Timelines

Even if abundant and of quality, data become a series of meaningless information if kept and accessed randomly, unless the user already has memories of the experiences related to these information. For that reason, the tools to interpreting collected data are as important as data itself – these tools organize users with what is intelligible at the moment, influencing even the collect of other material. Timelines are a visualization tool that has as a constant the X-axis as a temporal quantities meter of easy understanding because of the human natural sense of sequentiality (before/after), while other axis refer to the themes to be analyzed.

Simple timelines show the temporal evolution of one characteristic at a time. But the mere combination of various characteristics in a single line of fixed scale begins to reveal inter-relationships that can help the formulation of solid hypothesis. Even more, as they share the universal notion of continuity, are at the same time robust and flexible (data input is easier while data interpretation is consistent) and suggest an obligatory future, however distant and uncertain (YAKURA, 2002).

Diverse temporal scales can be attached to a guiding timeline. In a classical example, geological eras are subdivided, and in a given period of these subdivisions life became possible. This particular moment can be seen in a larger scale to be better detailed, until a tiny event in the end of this century has so large a impact that sends one back to the geological subdivisions – something like plastic deterioration or the return of a certain chemical to its original cycle. In this sense, time works as an elastic and multi-connectible platform, accepting all types of data and detailing or generalizing it as the researcher sees fit.

Figure 2: "The future of food".
Source: http://www.wired.com

The above graphic points out the temporal evolution of production and demand of food genders in a global scale. At the point where the patterns of the lines stops being equivalent (demand surpasses production), the author expands the time scale and generates indicators of pertinent information about the issue – he then studies new ways of surviving in a dramatically different future, as it's shown on the timeline.

Conclusion

"Pode ser que essa tomada de consciência da efemeridade de toda criação contribua para que futuramente se crie de maneira mais responsável, o que resultaria numa cultura em que os objetos de uso significariam cada vez menos obstáculos e cada vez mais veículos de comunicação entre os homens." (FLÜSSER, 198)

In the case of product development can be determined timelines under different points that, on different scales, provide very specific characteristics to the analysis.

To consider the possible materials to be utilized, the industrial process, distribution, design, who is the specific consumer, and other determining actions during the product process, is already extraordinary. To integrate new viewpoints to be observed would imply not only on a better use and exploration of materials – or whatever other environmental aspect – but also in the designer responsibility as a consume motivator and as a cultural agent. His formal capacity would then complement that of identifying and producing good relationships among people and objects, in the professional effort to reach individual, social and environmental well-being (MANZINI, 2008).

The responsibility given to the designer for his forming liberty happens not only during creation, but in all process of usage and disposal, and not only referring to what implies in the object itself, but mainly to what relates to the user. The object that uses this analysis tool, considering all the detectable aspects, results in a project always more complete and efficient, given that the most common errors, hypothesis and objectives can be elaborated forehand.

Simultaneous timelines with crossed data are important tools to the projection of the relevance of a moment in the user's life – the moment he uses the object – as well as the optimization of activities and designs that result in the same. The designer does not lose the dimension, however short, of this crucial moment: designer, project, industry connect through it, as they do not justify all by themselves, but look forward to the moment of usage. Nevertheless, at the moment the long-term analysis is made a routine, the designer is capable of better measuring the impacts caused by the benefit of an object/service he opts to design, making his responsibility as a designer more than one vague idea, but a reality of the project, through this tool.

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