Behaviours Design

The Design focus transition from products to experiences.

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International DMI Education Conference
Design Thinking: New Challenges for Designers, Managers and Organizations
14-15 April 2008, ESSEC Business School, Cergy-Pointoise, France

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The consumption context

Nowadays, the design activity is placed in a social and economic context characterized by two trends: the productive growth of Est Countries – where work and technologies are available at low cost (Rampini, 2006) – and the social and cultural resumption of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – where the pure aesthetics value of products is the most recognizable expression of the social status (Morace, 2005).

Turbulence and complexity, uncertainty and evolution, are factors of the new paradigm of post-modernity. Nowadays, the market that must be occupy is with "zero sum": the purchases are not for lack but for sostitution. (G. Fabris, 2003).

These competitive balances are associated to a constant increase of demand of new products. While, in the '80s and in the '90s, the productive answer at this demand was based on a technological development and an increase of quantity, in this new century the emphasis is on the search of new products for new needs, overcoming the concept of "macrostories" in favour of "microstories", stories where the individual identity is more crucial of the plural identity (J. F. Lyotard, 1979).

The nowadays consumer is in a constant evolution because he's within in a big flow of change – social, technological and economic change – that involves any aspects of our life. It's difficult to describe this consumer: he's autonomous, selective, eclectic and mature.

Therefore the consumption is changed, is became a message and "social language" (V. Codeluppi, 1992) to communicate our personalities and moods.

And it's changing the meaning of market too: it isn't anymore a place of goods exchange but a place of social exchange; now it's more important the immaterial aspect of consumption where the irrational choices are crucial in order to drive towards the pleasure of possession to obtain wellbeing and enjoyment. It's born the "homo aesheticus" (M. Maffesoli, 1985)

In a world full of objects, the consumer hasn't anymore needs but he dreams, he desires something new, more unforeseeable, more exciting. During the purchase the consumer is driven by the emotions as result to any external stimulus.

At the same time, the mind and the sight are not anymore the senses of choice: the new consumption "talks to the heart" (G. Fabris, 2003) with all human senses. The relationship between man and object became a total action that passes through, at the same time, all five human senses.

The consumption is driven by a logic of play, of expression, of well-being and of secular instinct. The consumption is desire and not need, is impulse and not necessity, is aesthethics and not ethics is game and not rationality (G. Siri, 2001). Or better, the new consumption is the ethics of aesthethics where the new values are: the importance of lightness and the flexibility; the "polysemic communication" (V. Codeluppi, 1992) and the concept of life as "work of art"

Extraordinary objects

Therefore, the "era" when production can create the markets is finished. It's not anymore a question of "telling and selling", not more top-down inputs but botton-up stimulus: and the companies must learn to answer at the market requests. However, the competitive answer is going towards an iper-production process where the purchases happen for substitution of goods and not for their addition (G. Fabris, 2003).

And if in the past, the rule was the creation of safe products for all and the improvement the material quality, today instead, the rule is the creation of extraordinary objects to attract the "right" people. This is a sort of silente revolution that implies a paradigmatic transfer from the mass-production to the mass-customization: not more production but specific niches of production. (R. McKenna, 2007)

In this way a new idea of consumption is born, described in the marketing theory of "Purple Cow" (S. Godin, 2004), according to which the companies must produce only extraordinary objects.

But if in one hand the approach of "Purple Cow" guarantees visibility in a world of banal mass-products to avoid any homologation process; in the other hand, it forget the quality value of the objects and adds always new functional and aesthetical extras, with the risk to transform, in the collective imagining, these objects in gadgets.

This is an anxiety of extraordinary that pushes designers and companies towards the development of complex objects, often full of technological devices and distant from the actual needs of consumers, from the real human experiences that are result of the daily actions, of the human biology, of the social culture.
A hyper-choice that distorts the Baudrillard's notion of hyper-goods (1987) and produce a banalization of experiences, also because of the spectacular exploiting of new digital technologies: we are living the passage, described by Karl Popper (1984), from the certain, tidy and predictable "world of watches" to the irregular, changeable, unforeseeable "world of clouds".

Interaction object/subject

As a result of this, in contemporary societies, objects have lost the importance of their technical and functional performances; they become messages, concepts and meanings. This modifies the design action and imposes companies to move from productive leadership to cultural leadership: the request is of products and brands able to gain a social meaning.
Besides, the relationship between design, production and consumption, in the nowadays social-productive context, isn't anymore a simple problem-solving action, but a comparison between specific cultural models: between the rational culture of production and the emotional culture of society. And the design is shaping itself as a culture of devising.
And a double need is growing up: a social need to lighten the relationship between man/object/technology; a productive need to reach a lasting innovation that informs whole DNA of the company value, from the research&development, to the production and to the services (Di Bari, 2003 - Porter 1987).
A new design activity must be based on this DNA with own focus on the definition of the material and visual society equipment (Manzini, 1990).
If it's possible to recognize the Design role as a translator between the consumption instances and the production instances (B. Munari, 1972), in the present context it's fundamental the connection to the paradigm that considers the consumer as subject in the DNA of company value (J. Thackara, 2005).
The logic is to move from the creation of a product simply for sell and use towards the creation of a relationship between product and consumer that overcomes the novelty effect and pushes on the pleasure of possession and on the emotional needs (D. Norman, 2004).
The aim is to define new products for new consumption contexts able to improve the interaction and the perception of the semantic and functional product values. This can transform the relationship between production and consumption in a search of new aesthetics/ethics (Branzi 1999).
The designer expresses himself through a generative and creative action, passing from a known present to a possible future. In Latin etymology, the translation of word "design" (designare) means to establish and it's directly linked to the word "project" (projectus) that means to throw ahead.
Therefore, everywhere we recognize a "projection" from an idea to a concrete action that defined it, there's a design activity.
This implies that design isn't anymore a codified activity, but it's a complex activity. Design is an amalgam of knowledge and skills, whose real essence is not only in the material sphere but also in the immaterial one.
In this way it's possible obtain two levels of results: a competitive result as a conscious competitiveness driven by the Design ability to translate technical opportunities of companies in new useful and aesthetic/ethics performances for consumers; a methodological result as a revolution of the concept of innovation that overcome both the non-sustainable concept of hyper-tech and the anachronistic concept of low-tech towards a new idea of technological transfer as a slow-tech vision.

Behaviours Design

In the production and spreading processes of products, a new design ways must take shape and pushing towards an innovation of the aesthetics, the languages and the contents.
The creative action becomes diffuse, and we can call it "Behaviours Design". Its aim isn't the objective quality of products but a subjective quality perceived not only by present society but, above all, by the

future one. A passage from object creation to subject creation able to construct the meaning of human behavior.
This different definition of competitiveness and innovation is about a construction of new "consumption strategies" where new aesthetical / ethical products, easily assimilated by the society, can change its behaviours.
This different concept of consumption, considers the context where design takes action informed by a fuzzy logic. The fuzzy logic refuses the classical idea of logic according to which, every concept can only be in two conditions, true or false.
When we consider a thing, for example an apple, we can recognise all its characteristics; but, after we interac with it, when we eat a part of an apple, can we still consider it in the same way or it changed? And when we had finished to eat the apple, is it still an apple?
All things, during the interaction with us, change their identity. We can identify everything with an exact label – a chair, a phone, a pencil, a car, a shirt; an exact label in relation to the function of things – a chair to sit, a phone to call, a pencil to draw, a car to move, a shirt to wear – but these labels do not express the emotional meaning that we assign to the things.
Indeed, the most important transformation in the Design Thought, after the post-modern period, was to assign new natures to things. The relationship between people and things, between actions subjects and actions objects, wasn't anymore a question of use or of possession, a question of context or of natural characteristics. Design was able to divide the (artificial) world in a world of ordinary things and a world of extraordinary things.
Of course, the ordinary things are useful, equal to themselves, neutral and without "opinion". While the extraordinary things are interesting, "beautiful", able to change the context and even to change the people that interact with them.
This cognitive perspective of social and cultural contemporary context imposes a re-definition of design approach.
Theoretical research in the design discipline, in the last 50 years, has tried to understand its specific action field. In 1958 G. Dorfles said that "Industrial Design is a particular category of development focused on the mass production with industrialized methods and systems that link the technical aspect to the aesthetics aspect".
According to T. Maldonado's definition (1961) the Design activity is "the coordination, integration and articulation of all factors about the consumption and the production". E. Frateili (1969) organizes these factors in three different and overlapped spheres. The morphological sphere, as a perceptive phenomena, the technic-scientific sphere, about the connection between the mind capabilities and the technical tools, the social sphere, about the economic, psychological, ergonomic factors.
The evolution of the technical-scientific sphere has pushed toward a sort of paradox where the creative capability (morphological sphere) can be reaching high levels and an incomplete control of technical system has broken down the deterministic design methods.
This change of perspective is well defined by E. Manzini's words "the system of objects became a second nature that is complex like the first one […] the designer lives, now, a condition of feeble demiurge able to create at the local scale but not able to control the global scale" (1990)
The practical activity and theoretical activity of design must be focused on its hard-core, the development of material objects, but at the same time they must live on a flexible and changeable "protective belt" made of social, economic and technical matters.
To manage both the hard-core and the protective belt in a synergic way it's necessary to build a research method that starts from the interaction between objects and subjects defining the new latent conditions where is possible to recognise spaces for designing.
Therefore, this is a change of the design thinking not more as Product Design but as Behaviours Design: that redefines the value of the relationship between things and people and between consumption and production to amplify, and not to simply strengthen, the human activity as more conscious innovation vision.

Research Method

Behaviours Design is a new way to think focused to the construction of new ideas from the acknowledgement of products as a meeting-place between technological skills of the companies and the expressed and unexpressed needs of society.

Indeed, the designers work as translators between the company culture, as a rational subject, and society culture, as an hybrid subject.

The designer's mission is the construction of a dialogical relationship between these two cultures. On one hand the company culture is expressed by three different rationalities: the economic rationality, the technological rationality and the management rationality. On other hand the social culture is expressed by three different rules: rules based on traditions, rules based on behaviours and rules based on human relationships.

The dialogical relationship is based on communicative tools, one to translate the company culture and one to translate the social culture.

The communicative tool of Company is the Brief, according to its meaning of "information".

The Brief is a schematic, analytical and closed structure; it's constituted by three key factors: the Price - which is fixed and divided in the input price, the process price and the output price; the Target - which is about the consumption and the use contexts, and it's recognisable only if the company is aware of its market; the Strategy - which is recognizable as communication strategies, product strategies and strategies of market positioning, and it's most indefinite and variable factor.

The communicative tool of Society, managed by design, is the Concept, according to its meaning of "intention". The Concept is a plural, sensorial and "absorbing" action; it's conditioned by three aspects: Material Aspect, which is directly linked to the design action, the Social Aspect, which becomes a cognitive mesh for design action; the Language, which is the most personal and changeable aspect and is built on the other two. In particular we can recognize in the Material Aspect, three different features: technical, of meaning and of use. At the same time the Social Aspect will be express by present aspects, hidden aspects and aspects in the perspective time. Finally the Language can be both a communicative language, an explanatory language and an inductive language.

A resourceful cross-fertilisation arises between Brief and Concept: the famous italian designer Michele De Lucchi has call it Counter-Brief. Its role is to define the creative boundaries of the design action.

It's a vision about shapes, functions and meanings, which are represented respectively as signs, uses and behaviours.

The Counter-Brief connects the aspects of Brief with the aspects of Concept and assign different conditions. It assign to the Price a numerical condition against the morphological condition of Material Aspect; it assign to the Target a theoretical condition against the perspective condition of Social Aspect; it assign to the Strategy a short-time vision against the long-term vision of Language.

This is a specific creative approach that I define Consumption-Centred Design developed on two complementary fields of study, Strategic Design and User-Centred Design.

Consumption-Centred Design starts from the analysis of behaviour and consumption evolution. Its aims are, on one hand, to discover latent needs and opened problems, in the other hand, to define trends and "spaces" for expressing concepts of new products.

Starting from the analysis of the Brief Context, the first working step of Consumption-Centred Design is the construction of the Research Context.

It isn't exactly defined but it can be explained by a behaviour (doing) or a perception (feeling) or a feature (being). Indeed the aim is to build a map with specific coordinates: the consumer, the production and the market. This specific operative action is called Behaviours Mapping and its aim is to build a representation of behaviours and contexts of use relative to the interaction between the specific objects category and subjects.

The data sources of this step are interviews to the consumers, photo-reports about the consumption contexts, research for texts and images from indirect media such as internet, books and magazines.

The second working step is the identification of a Focus Index, a possible sequences of problematic knots organized according to the highlights of the previous mapping phase.

The aim is to gain a hierarchy of key words to express: Fullness (as prevailing conditions of the consumption), Emptiness (as missing conditions of the consumption) and Contrasts (expression of the consumption idiosyncrasys). This specific operative action is the Iconographic Matching: the aim is a comparison of “symbolic” information to obtain a synthesis.
The final working step is the Design of Meta-Concept: a creative tool for the de-construction and the re-defining of Design approach.
De-construction of the interaction between objects and subjects to understand the consumption semantic value and, after, the re-defining of new interaction more socially and culturally sustainable.
In fact, nowadays, it’s possible to assert that Creativity is not just in the results but in the tactic necessary to reach the results.
Because if the result is a defined solution of design activities the tactic used by design can change according to changes in the social, economic and technical contexts.
Consumption Centred Design can be defined as tactical toll for the contemporary challenge that is the production of New Aesthetics (A. Branzi, 1999).
The its specific aim is to build a synthesis according to different variables of the interaction between objects/subjects: behaviours (expressed as new product typologies), objects (expressed as new product performances) and market (expressed as new product values). This specific operative method is the Creation of Hypothesis: the aim is a coagulation of new product concepts.
Building a synoptic panel of Consumption-Centred Design we can organize the working steps, according to different values, on the crossings between the Syntagmatich Axis (conceptual assumption, features and specific context) and the Paradigmathic Axis (conditions, research and results).
At first, between specific context and conditions, there is the analisys of the Brief Context by Direct Data; then, between conditions and conceptual assumption, there is the construction of the Research Context with the Mapping and the Matching phases; after, between features and results, there is the definition of the Counter-Brief as overlapping of two previous steps; at the end, on the results axis, there is the creation of the Meta-Concept.

Research Action

To sum up, Behaviour Design and its tactical, Consumption-Centred Design, can be considered as an interpretative model of the design/production/consumption relationship for an exchange of knowledge between companies and society through products. It has used in different According to it, the paper reports the results of its application in the workshop, "Be_D | Brand experience Design", developed in collaboration with the companies 3M (www.3m.com), Illycaffè (www.illy.com), Alcantara (www.alcantara.com) and Industreal (www.industreal.it).
The workshop aim was focused on Design for Company Strategies based on Brand Culture Phenomena. This can be considered a special approach for company reputation which moves from the technical and functional aspects to the experience quality offered to consumers.
A design path that starts from the consumption analysis, to the construction of Brand Philosophy, from the definition of product-system and its market communication to Retail Design.
During the Workshop, the students had designed a Brand-Innovation from the direct suggestions of the Companies.
Applying Consumption-Centred Design, the first step was to define the Brief that, to widen the analysis scenario, was focused for each companies in a specific featuref of their consumers.
As Research Context, it was taken into consideration the emotional perception of consumers towards the values expressed by the products, for 3M and Industreal, and the values expressed by the brands, for Illycaffè and Alcantara. This analysis information
In fact the design action within the strategies of 3M and Industreal – a global corporation the first and a very unusual new kind of SME the second - is linked to the typological and semantic innovation of product; while the design action within the strategies of lcantara and Illycaffè - two worldwide famous brands that produce an artificial leather the first and a blend of coffè the second - is linked to the construction of the social and cultural value of brand.

In this way, the Counter-Brief was described with different claim, one for each company, that describe not the productive and competitive needs of companies but the relationship between consumers and products as specific analysis contexts.
Each one of these contexts, according to the step of Behaviour Matching, was described with images and texts as results of the analysis of direct and indirect data (interviews, reportage, research on internet and on books).
Each different claim for each company is explained by different and complementary key words as description of the "simbolic" information of the Iconographic Matching.
This Iconographic Matching, organized as visual analysis, was tested by some groups of people (with free interviews) to define a hierarchy of values.
This values hierarcy was able to identify the specific Focus Index with Fullness as a prevailing condition, Emptiness as a missing condition and Contrasts as the most problematic point.
As a last result, for each research context, some Metaconcepts were defined as guides to the design development of new products concepts.

Conclusions

The aim of this research process is to recognize a real strategic role for Design. Indeed, design is able to define the social, productive and cultural skills of products in order to develope a consumption and experience system improving the quality of life.
This specific research method, Consumption-Centered Design, is closely linked to an individual perception of the satisfaction.
According to the renowned Hierarchy of Needs of Abraham Maslow (1970), where human's needs are classified as "conative needs", "cognitive needs" and "aesthetic needs", Consumption–centred Design works on the overlapping of these three levels of needs.
In particular it focused on the "cognitive" one, considering a fuzzy logic as the base of human choices in the contemporary post-modern societies. Indeed, Consumption – Centred Design reflects on the most intimate experiences that define needs and instincts, in order to gain a semantic localization and personalization of objects, as well as to give a sustainable answer to the contemporary, inexorable globalization of the aesthetical languages.

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