What is social design?

By Jorge Luis Muñoz

Design's social impact is a research area not covered enough by designers.

Design's social relevance has struck the term «social design», which, despite lacking of a clear definition, it already encompasses its embodying line of work. Indeed, many understand social design as the responsible, ethical exercise of design, or as militant design next to political and social movement, or as an effort added to worldly social improvement. Actually, social design is more than a practice, is a tendency that can certainly find itself with ethical exercise or militant design, but what defines it is the knowledge and exercise of design's social impact. As seen in its diverse meanings, social design aims to define itself as the study of relationships between design and society.

In such way, knowledge of social design comprises three large scopes. First of all, given design's deep social impact, its long range and duration in time, it necessarily reinforces social imagery and therefore, society's representation of itself. For social design has as its primary goal the study of general, group and individual social self-representation. That is, a first objective of social design consists in knowing what is, how it surges, this social self-representation, and how design impacts it, whether it is to communicative purposes or to knowledge of the effects it produces.

A second goal delimited for social design is the study of design's influence in cultural norms and society's structures, whether it is to influence them, change them or differentiate them. By its nature, design communicates, and by doing so it spreads setpoints operating as truthful or as something invested with a high degree of certitude. Therefore, such setpoints operate as cultural norms or norm reinforcers. This is widely known in commercial and even institutional design, and might as well be used in support of human communication, besides its necessary application in a social scope.

A third and very first goal of social design would be the facilitation of human communication. If a good knowledge of social relationships, of the culture where they move and the way to be of groups and social classes is possessed, in addition to technical and artistic components of graphic design, then it is possible to contribute to human communication.

It's now a common theme the fact of existing isolation, every time each individual perceives in accordance to its perceptual structure, plus communication hardly surpasses setpoint spreading, precisely due to the individualized perceptual conditioning. Design could be the 21st-century paradigm in the context of human communication. But the subject of social design, detached from design's social context has a lot to go on; for the designer should decide if he wants to be a publicitary annex or a vanguard of the society he lives in. This is, to restrict himself to institutional and commercial lines of work for these are the most profitable

ones, or along with them to penetrate the communication possibilities of design.

The minimum topics that allow understanding the relationship between design and society is the following:

Anthropological topics

- Man, family, society, culture, race, evolution, civilization

- Nature, culture and society

- Cultural norm

- Culture as a symbolic order

- Culture, subculture and counterculture

- Acculturation, enculturation and transculturation

- Cults, beliefs and practices

- Tongue, language, speech and dialect

- Lingo and idioms

- Intercultural relation anthropology

- Otherness and culture

- Facial and bodily expressions

- Environment

- Indigenist, rural and urban anthropology

- Social group integration issues

- Political and politics

- Power and control

Sociological topics

- Role and social status

- Social classes, communities, groups and percentile rank

- The social bond: Solidarity and Collective Consciousness.

- Institutional orders: family and community; society and State

- The role as a link between objective and subjective dimensions of social

- Socialization process

- Concept of group. Group characteristics. Group classification. Group functions in terms of individual and of social structure.

- Collectivity, crowd, mass, auditorium

- Leadership. Types of leaders.

- Social structure: its constraining, enabling function

- Reflexivity, discursive consciousness and practical consciousness.

- Time and space as components of social systems

- Societies and social systems

- Communication and culture

- Social imagery

Temática Neurocientífica

- Neurophysiology of human needs

- Motivation: mechanisms and reward brain systems

- Semiology of psychic functions

- Perceptive structure

- Ideation and idea association

- Judgment and Reasoning

- Consciousness and Orientation

- Thought and Language

- Emotions, feelings, passions

- Intelligence, imagination and volitivity

- Neuromarketing

These are topics that would help a designer to understand his society, and in no way there is in attempt to induce to the formation of socio-designers, anthoropo-designers or something

like that. A designer at first must possess a vast culture, besides his technical-artistical abilities. The old designer, a customer's appendix, is no longer fit for these times, where the mere market saturation, demands the knowledge of the last social percentile.

Published on 13/02/2015

FOROALFA