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Abstract: A brief description: This work is about sustainable graphic design and the great niches of contamination that are generated by irresponsible practices. An extensive description: One of the greatest environmental crises of recent decades is related to the consumption of paper, use of plastic and their environmental implications; all human activities are immersed here and it is hard to withdraw from daily habits, there are fundamental needs such as reading and writing that depend on a quite specific design activity. However, there is the useful use of materials and there is the useless use of them. Having stated the previous, a work is presented which was conducted by a group of design students who participated in the Scientific Research Science Program, in the study and analysis of important graphic design niches that, thanks to justifications by different consumption ideologies, promote the daily waste of important materials, manpower, production processes, distribution, consumption and waste. Thus, fictitious needs, superfluous messages anchored to indispensable messages, the reception of shallow and trivial meanings, the accumulation of substrates and a great amount of residues and remnants of which recycling is not always possible, are generated.

Keywords: Graphic Design, Sustainability

Introduction

ONE OF MAN'S distinctive characteristics is his capability to solve problems, but more important so is his ability to raise them; this aptitude defines communication professionals, particularly graphic designers.

A problem is understood as a difficulty that is solved through the conscious acting of thought; it is always presented related to multiple factors and its solution tends to generate other problems. For the designer, the specificity consists of locating, analyzing and solving formal problems of aesthetic and functional nature. The designer tends to identify problems where no one imagines that they exist; this tends to be essential for his creative presence.[1]

Every graphic design problem begins with the location of a communication necessity, the necessity is the origin of the problem, the context defines it, the semiosis interprets and re-interprets it, and the configuration solves it. Design is directed towards solving conditioned problems that do not necessarily have a single right answer: generally, there would be a number of solution alternatives of which relative exactitude depends on the meaning provided by the sorting of data.

Theory of Needs

Need is the most important motivational factor in the configuration of the surroundings, it is the result of the awareness of some deficiency or lack, which when fulfilled, produces

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[1] L.C. Vilchis. *Semiosis de los lenguajes no lineales*, pg. 105

COMMON GROUND

gratifying sensations: enjoyment, pleasure, wellbeing and relaxation. The design of graphic communications satisfies needs that it particularizes through the configuration of printed meanings.

Necessary is the term that indicates that it is and cannot cease to be. This term acquires a valuative meaning through which it designates what must be and, extensively, what must be had; from this, what is of interest for design is the exigency, the demand for a material and formal satisfaction.[2]

Communication needs are determined by culture and civilization and therefore their value and function vary according to the context in which they are generated. This means that the contextual characteristics that affect graphic design, condition the need and its value.

Primary needs are those that exist by cultural heritage – inseparable from the individual's social development – as opposed to secondary needs – those that every human being can do without.

The limitations and determinants that the human being start with can be illustrated with a triangle of which first side represents the environment in which he lives, the second represents the mental aptitude that he adopts in order to live in this environment, and the third is the certainty of his mortality, and the praxis has the objective of satisfying the triangle's sides.

Thence emerge, as Sloterdijk affirms, areas in which aspects that relate man with objects are defined, in graphic design this is translated as the conception of needs, which can be classified into:

- Vital needs: biological, of subsistence and socialization.
- Fluctuating needs: sexuality, one's own space, and personal identity.
- Derivative needs: of pleasure, eroticism and production.
- Pure needs or desires: of power, recreation and daydreaming.
- Material needs: of possession of objects and security.
- Non-material needs: spiritual, protection, emotional, epistemological, or of innovation.

Any specification about needs must consider the degree of urgency that they represent in a specific culture. One must keep in mind that, although not all needs are satisfied through visual texts, these do play an important role as satisfiers or mediators of complacence.

To the previous we must add that advances in technology make graphic design objects accessible to a greater number of people, a fact that forces the designer to be alert to the indifference and depersonalization generated by industrialization, which is translated into the use of mechanistic methodological models in which only the 'message – marketing – results' logistics is considered.

Niches of Unsustainable Design

Each area of needs represents a graphic design niche because in each of these areas messages are conceived whose broadcasting is only possible through mass media, and so the graphic designer's essential task consists of the transformation of the environment expressed in graphic objects that, by extension, modify man himself.

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[2] Cf. Agnes Heller. *Una revisión de la teoría de las necesidades*, pp. 57-67

The visual message of designed objects should not be ignored because it defines their role in the media on different levels: as a carrier of forms, as mediator of interindividual relationships, as an agent transmitter of culture, as an indicator of property and social status, and most importantly, as a former of social conscience.

The synthetic nature of graphic design is manifested in the necessary integration of structural and functional complexities, the first is linked to visual grammar and to the different genres of formal configuration, whereas the second includes practical aspects, referred to marketing, as well as symbolic aspects concerning the semantic field of the designed.

Nowadays, in addition to the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions of graphic designs, prevails the mastery of marketing. In each of the spheres of need, niches of consumption have been developed, turning the message's receiver into a potential consumer.

The economic development of the different business sectors depends deeply on the graphic designer's activity. There are theories like Elena Fraj's[3], which refer to the *ecological consumer*; according her point of view, it is the consumer segment that affects decisions made by the government and the companies, whose concern for the environment is focused on the demand for new products and services that emerge from the consumers' needs.

In disagreement with this idea, y agree with those who understand that "every design action has been and is premeditated, provoked, compared or requested by someone, at times, by the designer himself. Also, in most cases, the final objective of a project is to be reproduced (multiplied) industrially, interfered with or inserted within a corporative concept."[4]

Many examples could be mentioned, however, we will only mention some of the most common ones:

- Monthly, along with the statement of account of every credit card, in addition to the envelope that contains this statement, there is an average of three flyers and a telemarketing brochure. This niche also includes yearly renewed bank cards and the amount of stationary that is used to conduct transactions at the bank window.
- Daily, millions of medicine samples are distributed which tend to come inside a box the same size as the one purchased at the drugstore; these samples contain a single pill but use the same amount of packing materials as the complete set of pills that is sold at the drugstore.
- Every season, big department stores distribute thousands of catalogues printed on glossy paper, with colour selection, glazed, simply put, presented elegantly. Likewise, these stores sell special bags to store merchandise, and we shouldn't forget this example of absurdity: last December a department store chain placed on the handle of each bag, an envelop printed in colour which, when opened, emitted the sound of Santa's laughter. Have we any idea of what this is translated into in material resources?
- Every supermarket of every chain distributes weekly a newspaper with the week's offers, and some chains, to avoid stealing, alluding to "*consumer safety",* make their employees wrap the products in plastic adhesive tape, place them in special containers, or distribute them through special flyers in customer service. We mustn't forget the products that come from the factory in double packing like razor blades, tooth brushes, batteries, computer mice, etc. or the bags in which the merchandise is placed.

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[3] Cf. Elena Fraj y Eva Martínez Salinas. *Comportamiento del consumidor ecológico*, pp. 83-84
[4] Rodolfo Fuentes. *La práctica del diseño*, pg. 27

- All the airlines distribute among their passengers different objects that by themselves or as containers involve graphic design, like bootees, headphones in plastic bags, blankets wrapped in plastic bags, airline magazines, action cards in case of emergency, magazines sold on the airplane, menus, promotions for miles (rewards) and special cards, not to mention all the stationary involved in ticket purchasing and check-in. We must mention in this field the great waste generated with the food: small packs for salt, pepper, sugar, toothpicks, wet wipes, napkins, etc.
- In every hotel around the world we find different products labelled with the place's identity, which are renewed every day, many times ending up in the garbage bin.
- Software is sold in large cardboard boxes that contain a single CD and a small booklet in some cases, and in other cases heavy manuals that end up being obsolete when the next version is released.
- Any device, in addition to the complexities of its packing, comes with instructions that lately have been multiplied and are received in English, Spanish, Italian, French, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, etc. out of which, of course, only one language will be used and the rest thrown away.
- In magazines it is common to find product samples glued to the page with the corresponding ad: creams, medicines, shampoos, juice powder, perfumes, etc, all of which are possible waste material.
- Fields such as the government, the church or the universities now include as part of their investment advertising expenses, information brochures, flyers, surveys, acknowledgement letters, instructions, etc.

These samples are only general references to the irresponsible actions that result from marketing demands, causing the thirsts that Kant warned us about: thirst for possession, thirst for domination and thirst for ambition, excluding the ethical dimension that undoubtedly includes the ecological dimension of a discipline.

> Thanks are due to nature for his quarrelsomeness, his enviously competitive vanity, and for his insatiable desire to possess or to rule, for without them, all the excellent natural faculties of mankind would forever remain undeveloped.[5]

All these graphic design niches involve complex productive chains that integrate apparently biodegradable material, such as paper, without annotating that when paper is submitted to printing processes, this modifies its natural reincorporation into earth, because it already contains ink, varnish, and laminates that transform it into a severe contaminant which leaves behind severe environmental prints.

To the previous we must add the amount of human and material resources that are used and the amount of waste generated by all these objects, which are actually gadgets that constantly lead to influencing useful functions towards styling or fleeting fashion.

We must consider a definition of sustainable graphic design that transcends the fact that an object is or isn't biodegradable. The concept is related to the purposes of design, the materials that are used to materialize it, its social function, its useful life, how it is distributed, what it is used for. The analysis of each of these areas, which are decisions linked to marketing

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[5] I. Kant. *Fundamentación de la metafísica de las costumbres*, pg. 21

and to the design process, will affect in a fundamental way what Donald Fuller[6] calls *environmental cost*.

Conclusions

The designer must search for the adjustment between form and context, understanding this as "the place in which the object is located; the use that will be made of it; the production methods, etc. […] all that is outside the designer's area […] were he begins and what the design must be adapted to."[7]

If we wish to elevate graphic design to the upper levels of culture, the designer must acquire a critical conscience to understand the effects of his task on social life; only this way will his work be congruent with the essence of communication needs: the message. This involves the development of appraising criteria that will allow pinning down not only specific priorities, related to the design itself, but general priorities concerning culture in the sense of a continuous process of human improvement.

Moving towards sustainability requires profound changes in the action fields of graphic design, developing coordinated systems of decision making based on real communication needs, leaving persuasion objectives in second place.

As graphic designers, we must also be agents of environmental change, promoting ideas and sustainable innovation, rejecting futile and useless projects, managing the transcendence of each of our projects, because it is indispensable for us as professionals of communication to understand the importance of being part of this fragment of humanity that takes on the responsibility of making possible the environment's transformation, sustained by networks of knowledge, communication, resources and incentives,[8] this will allow sustainability to be a possible future.

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[6] Donald Fuller. *Sustainable Marketing*, pg. 129

[7] Xavier Rubert de Ventós. "Hacia una integración de arte, ciencia y técnica…", pg. 9

[8] Marco Keiner. *The Future of Sustainability*, 21 and pg. 238

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Professor in Posgraduate Program of National School of Visual Arts in National Autonomous University of Mexico. Pioneer in Mexico using digital resources in arts and design. First woman director of National School of Visual Arts at UNAM (2002-2006), has published four books about Graphic Design Theory, Graphic Design Metodology, Non-linear languages semiotics and Graphic Design Hermeneutics, 32 research papers and 18 didactic manuals. Manager from two diferent firms: a technologic center and a graphic design place. Teacher during 30 years, is oficial tutor from postgraduate program in the lines of researching projects, semiotic and hermeneutic studies; participating in academic events in Mexico, Dominicana Republic, USA, Canada, Greece, Spain, Cuba, Peru, Holland, Uruguay, Argentina, Germany and Portugal and presenting conferences in Mexico, Panama, Cuba, Spain, USA, Lisbon and other countries; also, being advisor thesis from more than 120 researching student thesis works in different universities. Professional graphic designer, working in Mexico, USA and Canada in firms like BMG Entertainment, Environmental Law Institute or UNESCO in traditional and digital way. Visual artist, has exposed digital art, collage and visual poetry in more than 30 exhibitions in Mexico, Panama, USA, Rusia, Spain, France, Greece, Palestine and Frankfurt.

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