

The “Graphic Coding of Intentions” Method

According to McLuhan, the era of digital media has given start to a world where space and time are overcome. In a simultaneous world, everything resonates with everything else, enabling thinking about everything at once (McLuhan, 1964). Digital media transforms time, dividing it into temporalities that present their own version of the present (Metahaven, 2018, p.10).

Different times overlap, and one perceives them as simultaneous rather than a flow.

Consequently, the future is no longer something that is going to happen, it’s already here; we live in it, although it remains hidden. We experience the future as a deep involvement with the present moment. How can this perception be translated into a language that we and others understand? It’s a very important question for designers, because they are able to capture and coat the cultural and technological changes that remain invisible to most people. Designer is an artist who, according to McLuhan, can capture the hidden meaning of her or his actions and of new knowledge as they happen and coat and present these intuitions in the models and “navigation maps” of the future (McLuhan, 1964, p. 65).

Creation of a product (whether an idea, a technology, an event, an object, etc.) that anticipates the future requires a certain conceptual framework. A product design is usually based on a concept that becomes a starting point and a criterion for evaluating creative solutions. Finding a concept requires some analysis of the background data, and then the concept leads designer to a foreseeable and expected outcome. However, this linear logic of moving from a past experience to a new product won’t work if the creator’s task is to register and coat her or his own perception of the “future that’s happening now”. In such a situation, the product must at be to a certain degree unexpected for its creator. Paradoxically, designer should give a form to something that she or he doesn’t yet understand and then clarify the new meaning within the conceptual framework of the future.

In this case, the conceptual framework must be a space of variants similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s “plane of immanence”, where the concept creates itself and emerges as the “clots of meaning” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996). The conceptual framework set as a “plane of immanence” is an intuitive understanding where meanings emerge partly deliberately, partly spontaneously.

The conceptual framework understood in this way must meet the following requirements:

1. It must be an open system without a fixed starting point or a predetermined outcome.
2. It must create a range of variants (“a garden of forking paths”) and thus activate non-linear thinking.
3. It must set the direction of thinking and the points of verification in the way that confuses thoughts rather than arranging and calls for imagination and improvisation.

A starting point in this case would be intention, and not concept. Intention is a specific mode of meanings that are not linked to each other but flow from one to another, constantly changing and creating new overtones. Any attempt to analyze and explain intention results is an irretrievable

loss of meaning. To keep its semantic substance intact, intention should be put into a specially constructed form. Designing such a form can be called translation.

Translation of intentions into form (visual, verbal, etc.) is particularly difficult because intentions don't have clear meaning, they are a "nebula", a plasmatic substance that is only supposed to lead to meaning. The position of designer is close to that of the translator of poetry. We can find a remarkable method of such translation in Milorad Pavic's "Dictionary of the Khazars": Tibbon, an ancient translator of the Bible, "asked someone to read the translation aloud while walking away further and further while he stayed put and listened <...> and Tibbon would make corrections based on the impressions he had derived from this reading walk." (Pavic, 1984)

Applying Tibbon's principles "while walking" and "aloud" gives a key to the transforming of spontaneous, uncontrolled energy of the intentions into signifying ensembles that activate the process of generating meaning rather than fixate it.

My method of developing conceptual framework called "graphic coding of intentions" is used on Tibbon's principles.

This method includes the following operations:

- 1_ Drift: emotional immersing into the intention.
- 2_ Text: creating a text where intentions would be articulated in a free manner.
- 3_ "Mental landscape": creating a graphic composition that would express certain meanings and simultaneously make their existence possible.
- 4_ Triggers: extracting from the text the key codes that help replay the general meaning of the intentions in semantic constructions.
- 5_ Mapping: placement of triggers into a "mental landscape".

This kind of the conceptual framework is not a logical construction, it's flexible, unpredictable in its development, and reacts to changes. At first sight, the presented method may seem close to a speculative approach (Dunne and Raby, 2013) with its appeal to an experimental and free vision of the world, but that's not right. The method of "graphic coding of intentions" appeals not to fantasy, but to a rational implementation of intuitive knowledge; its goal is not to construct imaginary objects or environments, but to recognize the real world.

This method was used by graduate students for their master's projects focused on the representation of scientific data in virtual spaces (online education platforms). The method has also been used in the development of interactive web-applications for the research of multimodal texts (Cinema 1: The Movement Image by Deleuze). Application of the "graphic coding of intentions" method helps designers overcome the inertial linearity of thinking and employed "fluttering" predicative mind. This method developed their skills in creating the conceptual framework as a self-organizing system open to signification and resignification.

References

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