

## The Design of the Self

*After finishing reading the short text you will now read, I realized that the invitation to talk about design in a psychoanalysis magazine had provoked in me a curious result. What you will find is not a linear reflection, with beginning, middle and end, but a sum of small insights and divagations. Something between the fragmentary prose and aphorism. I see, and I'd like to underline this here, that psychoanalysis and this invitation have placed me in a very particular place: a divan.*

*It is from there that I speak.*

*“A man sets himself the task of portraying the world.  
With images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships,  
islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses and people.  
Shortly before his death, he discovers that the patient labyrinth  
of lines traces the image of his face.*

*Jorge Luis Borges*

How to present, in short, to a different audience, a vision of someone who sees, practices and thinks design? How to make it in a way that the bridges that each one of you will make between these two disciplines, united by the humanistic dimension, and are perhaps closer to each other than a first look may suggest, can be useful?

I recall, in order to start giving myself away to this reflection, an event in which I took part, an International Design Congress, in which the host institution's president, during the event's opening ceremony, begun his speech with these words: *“Designers are people who, having difficulty in expressing themselves with words, have decided to draw.”* The irony and device that he made use of are evident, in reducing the expectation and then making a beautiful speech about our profession and responsibility that is for us to take as transforming agents of the and in society.

*“It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.”*

*Pablo Picasso*

To draw is, let's recall, our first impulse of expression and the manifestation of an *embryonic interiority*. Each one of us, as a child, has drawn before writing and before being educated with the official language of communication, this which I use now. Most of us, in this moment, abandon drawing and, along with it, a magical dimension, rich in meanings and senses that only drawing as language can offer.

These first scribbles, although pure drive, but already with a potency of *“work”*, are born as a *playful* and *exploratory* game of the Self that manifests and transforms the world – a white paper at first – small field of action already loaded with meanings and challenges, which will expand into a whole universe to be explored throughout his life. Each encounter with a new *“white paper”*, larger every time, it puts the question of this Self that acts on the world and, from this question, draws and draws simultaneously, testing and finding limits, tastes, colors, potencies, meanings, senses, differences, emotions, tensions, contrasts and passions.

From drawing to Design an evolution takes place, of complexity and territory. The drawing, which at the end becomes a tool, and a new end presents itself: the will of thinking and transforming the world through the intellectual and practical action on matter; imagination exercise and drawing of a new world that embraces and shapes itself to dreams, desires and necessities of a man that is always different and new like the river of Heraclitus.

*“Art is made to disturb, science reassures.”*

*Georges Braque*

The *design* has been, since always, an integrating discipline and a discipline of frontiers. At the frontier between technique and art, with the challenge and mission of democratizing the access to the beautiful, not only in the aesthetic sense but also in the ethical one. Incorporating the beautiful to the world of industrial reproduction and of the machine, *design* carries in its womb the vocation to the search for *harmony*. Not just the harmony of form, but also the harmony of contents, integrating art with science, ethics and aesthetics, reason and emotion, efficiency and poetry, ergonomics and seduction, the Self and the Other.

*“What I am trying to translate to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the implacable source of sensations.”*

*Cézanne*

Facing the challenge of drawing *that which doesn't yet exist*, moved by an intention and by the capacity of imagination, the *designer* starts this collision with matter, in a dialogue with the white page where, I realize, an alternation of state between the actor and the spectator processes itself and, in every gesture, lets itself be taken by the *instrumentalized chance*, a kind of *absent presence*, this *subject* acts and observes in order to materialize, throughout this dance and this dialogue with the paper, a result and an *object*. An *object* that draws itself and is drawn at the same time, revealing itself and surprising even its own author.

It's in the shape of the object that the content of the subject reveals itself.

The aesthetic is the visible face of the spirit.

Therefore, if educated to know how to read everything that registers itself in the matter by a subject that dreams and desires, maybe we could also read in it what will be written in its unconsciousness, and that manifests itself in the creative gesture as *work* and as *mark*.

*“For those who know how to read, I have painted my autobiography.”*

*Picasso*

## **Design and market: where does a drawing start?**

*“Nothing is beautiful, except man alone: all aesthetics rests upon this naïveté, which is its first truth. Let us immediately add the second: nothing is ugly except the degenerating man—and with this the realm of aesthetic judgment is circumscribed.”*

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

Let's move forward now to a practical dimension: the exercise of Graphic Design, my world, in relation to the market.

To communicate is the nature of every design. The clothes we wear talk. The objects we choose and that create the ambience in our house talk. The architecture of our city talks.

A special area of design, Graphic Design, dedicates itself essentially to communicate, and today is an important and anonymous part of the life in the city.

On the package of the water that quenches our thirst, in the newspaper that informs us, in the books that instruct us, in the signaling of the subway that orientates us, on the computer screen that connects us, in the restaurant menu that treats us, on the tag of the clothes that dress us, in the directions of the medicine that cures us, on the poster of the theater that touches us, in the brand of companies, in the identity of every service and product is the territory of Graphic Design.

In a context of message profusion, as it is in the city, the identity and clarity of every information that comes to us mediated by symbols, the dominant vocabulary of the urban man, must be carefully planned and drawn to serve the citizen.

Nowadays we live in a dynamic of social organization that has structured itself around *Corporations* – productive entities based on the logics of specialization by competences. The vast majority of people are linked to a company and it is there that they will build their professional life. Reality and the dynamics of life in the city end up making this same environment, however, the place where great affective experiences of this person take place. It is there that he or she will draw and achieve his life project, make friends, learn to deal with the other, date, get married, suffer, celebrate and dream.

These corporations are identified and recognized by us through their *brands*. We refer to them, often, as “brands”. It is curious to realize that their action in the world and their identities are associated with the concept of brand, which men leave as a mark when he acts upon the world. The evidence of a presence and an essence.

This presence and this essence are the result of a complex and delicate balance of values. Practical values, like the technical quality of its product, for instance, and

humane values, such as the reason of being, philosophy and vision of the world that orientates them.

This complexity gave birth to a new type of specialization inside the universe of graphic design – strategic design – and a new area of knowledge called “*Branding*”. Technically, the best way to understand, build and manage *value of brand*.

And it is in this context that psychoanalysis appeared as an inspiration and tool in my particular way of seeing and addressing some of the great questions involved in this wide and fascinating theme.

*In a sensitive creature, what is not done through an affection produces nor good neither evil in the nature of that creature.*

*Shaftesbury, Characteristics of men*

How did that happen?

After many years receiving and listening to clients that came to us with aesthetic demands, I started questioning my doing:

*“Children of the society of consumption that we are, maybe we’ve withdrawn ourselves from noble motivations for which a man feels he must “speak” through his work. What marks are we leaving behind? What do our clients look for when they look for a Designer? Are we identity scenographers? Exterior decorators? Clients’ hairdressers? Make-up artists”*

I realized then that these aesthetic demands should be understood as a *symptom*, as a will to *talk better of oneself*. An opportunity for reflection.

*“If the artist has a mission, I think it is that of improving the quality of the unknown.”*

*Waltercio Caldas*

The next step, the hardest one, was to see and make see that this challenge wasn’t just a challenge of form, a “*how to say*”, but also and before everything else a challenge of content, a “*what to say*”.

In the market dynamics, pressured by globalized competitiveness and shaped by the shallow market policies, these corporations ended up withdrawing themselves from the essential humane questions and looking for a solution in shape, in aesthetics, the question of *identity* and of *difference* that they need so much in order to survive, but that is not constructed as scenography (they often end up being just that...) and with an aesthetic made to order.

*“If your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough.”*

*Robert Capa*

In this sense, we realize that before *offering answers* – the matrix of our formation inspired by the concept of design as a “*problem solving*” – we should start by (re)placing *new questions*, more complex ones, looking into promoting a context of reflection that we informally baptized as “*corporative psychoanalysis*”.

A fundamental identity reflection where the focus is *make the brand talk about itself*, according to the dynamics of individual interviews with key-people of the institution, and aiming at answering the fundamental questions of every individual:

Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

With that we realized that if a company looks for an *identity*, that this identity must be the expression of a *world vision, values and dreams* that are a *collective work*, product of individuals that must know and identify themselves with these values in order to achieve, there, as a group, their dreams, their potency and their reason of being.

Only then will we manage to reestablish the contact of aesthetics and ethics, recovering the symbolic and magical dimensions of the world. Charming once again with the senses and meanings of the world of objects, harmonizing shape and content and making anew the meaning of *making products* as a *work of art*, a legacy and a way of making their mark in the world.

*“Ethics and aesthetics are one.”*

*Wittgenstein*

Well then, where does a drawing start? It seems to me, nowadays, that a drawing starts in the subject. A subject in constant mutation that searches, throughout his trajectory of encounters, a way of speaking of himself, of sharing his vision of the world with his equal, so that he himself, in his encounter with the other, with the different, may perfect the drawing of his self.

*“The most important and beautiful, in the world, is this:  
that the people are not always the same, they were not finished yet –  
but they are always changing.  
They are in and out of tune.”*

*Guimarães Rosa*