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Default

Does it make a difference to show parallel and distinctions regarding the selected phenomenon of “default”? Can dialogue contribute in any instances to solve design problems, whether in the field of management or that of visual design? There are many questions which accompany such a journey which cannot be answered at the outset.

The structure of this dialogue is not new, in a sense of something which hasn't happened before; but it may be new in the sense of starting an interaction between two environments, two different cultures, physically close and yet never before engaged in an intellectual dialogue to debate the common and the difference.

A prelude

Based on my experience, it is the *way* we think, not *what* we think which will generate results. I will use this overarching theme to investigate default structures in design and art as demonstrated through a few examples. Further on, the journey could guide us toward the conditions and the understanding of how we can apply and use “default” in our design and management vocabulary. Do we think in spatial or dynamic terms? This idea will generate the outcome of such a dialogue.

When Boland states that we use space as a metaphor for a journey in an enclosed space, and the metaphor of an argument as a container, and refers to Kakoff & Johnson,¹ he describes a major problem in our contemporary thinking. Using containers and metaphors which add further containers drives us into the field of associations and doesn't allow us to move into a temporal assessment of our questions. But what is temporal within the use of terms and categories? Does it mean that we must return to using stories and storylines, mythical structures or do we have to integrate storylines in our current approach to achieve what we want to achieve?

How is it possible to integrate temporal thinking without giving up the qualities and achievements of the past hundred years, which were driven by spatial, mental and perspective thought?

Let me use a metaphor easily understood: as we speak about an entire shape, represented by terms like triangle or sphere, we always think at first of a unified entity. The term "unified entity" wouldn't be appropriate for a shape or form which is built up by sub- forms. Homogeneity is a precondition for unity.

In the process of analysis, we cut the "unified entity" in order to research it.

If we analyze, that means if we cut the unified entity apart, we research it. But in such an instance we no longer deal with a unified entity anymore, rather we have the parts or the sub forms as a result of our analytical thinking. In the process we also learn to reconstruct the original entity. However, the whole is not the same as the unity, the whole is based on parts and definitions. The whole can be only seen metaphysically.

¹ Richard J Boland Jr. "The tyranny of space in organizational analysis" 2001

The way I've described the analytical process may seem to be over simplified, but in my eyes it is a legitimate matrix to assess our tools for a dialogue.

We could also tell a story where a character experiences the unified world as a child and then slowly, as he/she becomes an adult, the sense of unity breaks apart as the complexity of constituent components makes it difficult to comprehend the whole.

Does such a story offer a viable solution? I have no doubt that as long as we think of terms as categories in a sense of definition; we will end up with a spatial or imaginative entity, which is never the whole. The integrating of such an idea of morphology, i.e. the history of the terms, will allow us to introduce a more holistic view.

In this sense, a discussion regarding stories and metaphors is an important aspect for integration of the entity. However it also has a tendency to exclude and in my eyes it is a step in the wrong direction and has a dangerous drift.

Within the next chapters we will look into the definition and the change over time of the terms *design*, *management* and *default* in order to create a sense for the distortion of the underlying story which appears with the change of definition throughout the history.

We will then have a platform where we hopefully have some clear sense of the interplay or connection we are looking for.

Design

The term design goes back to the Latin root (Latin designre, design- : d-, de- + signer), to mark, to make marks or to indicate, to outline. We really don't know exactly what the prefix de- means in design. We also know that historically design as a discipline appeared with the beginning of industrialization. The need for specialists came with the separation of the hand and the head. "Skills became less important, and design disciplines became distinct from handicrafts"². It can be seen as separation between craft and design. Chippendale and Sheraton needed books to show their examples, and draftsmen who conceptualized and visualized the ideas. In that sense we understand a definition as: *design is a drawing or outline of something, or the art of making such drawings.*

But today design is everywhere, because the specialization period was successful. Designing today is making plans; systematically, it is the art: *...of working out the form of something and it has to have purpose, ...otherwise we would call it art.*

In the 20th century there were many symbolic statements in the art world regarding this expansion of the design concept. Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys are two precursors.

Within the realm of Design, which we consider the younger sister of art, such symbolic changes were never publicly stated, but the enlargement process is seemingly infinite.

The manager designs, the software engineer designs, the politicians design, the athlete designs the body- it seems there is no limit.

² Abstracting Craft, Malcom McCullough, Cambridge, 1996, P 14

3 examples of default setups in art and design

In the following we will take three unique examples within the historical context of art and design to investigate whether we can use the term default as a delineative tool within the design and art field.

The first is Marcel Duchamp, to whom we refer to as one of the most innovative artists in the 20th century. In 1913/14 he created a series of objects within the frame of “cheerful science”. In one of his works titled ‘**3 stoppages étalon**’, Duchamp used a default setup to describe the arbitrariness of systems used in the scientific arena.³ With three filaments, each the length of the original meter, he created a default setup to generate his own ruler and measurement device to make obvious how science defines its measurement systems. He took three filaments and allowed each of them drop down from a certain height. He then fixed each of the curved threads on the horizontal plane and fabricated curved rulers as a standard of measure. Afterwards he stored the three rulers with the threads which he fixed on a board in a wooden box as an art object.⁴

Within the setup of his idea, reference to scientific systems and especially to the creation of the original meter, Duchamp used his knowledge of gravity and the flexibility of the filament to generate a form by a default setup. He never knew

³ Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp, Pierre Cabanne, Belfond, 1967, réédition en 1995 par Somogy, Éditions d'Art, Paris.

⁴ « Mes trois stoppages-étalon sont donnés par trois expériences, et la forme est un peu différente pour chacune. Je garde la ligne et j'ai un mètre déformé. C'est un mètre en conserve, si vous voulez, c'est du hasard en conserve.» in Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp, Pierre Cabanne, Belfond, 1967, réédition en 1995 par Somogy, Éditions d'Art, Paris. p.78

exactly what kind of form he would get, but he knew the range of outcomes through his default setup.

Jackson Pollock worked with the idea of coincidence, accident and hazard. A default setup allowed him to play and include the accident as a generator in his paintings. Pollock used a can with a hole, filled it with liquid paint and moved and danced over a horizontal laying canvas. These so called drippings were the base of a process to generate an extensive and famous series of paintings.

Recent research showed the fractal quality in Pollock's paintings. His paintings show identical structure, at any magnification - mathematical entities which are geometrically similar, called fractals.⁵ This is another example where shape isn't *created* by the artist or designer, rather the shape is generated through the "nature of the employed media". The design happens within the process of shaping the setting.

Weblogs

The third example is more contemporary and is used currently in the web and information design field.

⁵ Pollock's
Richard P. Taylor, Adam P. Micolich, David Jonas., 'Fractal analysis of Pollock's drip paintings, Nature, vol 399, p422 (1999).

A weblog (sometimes shortened to blog or written as "web log") is a Web site of personal or non-commercial origin that uses a dated log format that is updated on a daily or very frequent basis with new information about a particular subject or range of subjects. The information can be written by the site owner, gleaned from other Web sites or other sources, or contributed by users.⁶ Weblogs are dependent on users input and emerge for that reason over time. It is a phenomenon which appeared 1997/1998 and it is a system, an organizational shape, which lives through the input of the user.⁷

The weblog may also be regarded further as a design to create a default setup to incorporate the idea of chaotic and emerging systems.

The term default originally incorporated, "through the failure, the absence, or lack of something". The software industry in particular made active use of the term and has created a positive connotation. Such a software structure allows the user to control and change the interface, since the product is adaptive. If the user gets confused, it is possible to create something like an anchor, switch back to a default setup again. Default was described earlier on as a failure, but now has a new meaning. When we design systems with adaptive co-creative aspects, we can include default setups in case something spins out of control. It is a basic setting which prevents chaos. In the first two examples we had design as a system which utilized chaos in order to create a certain kind of form: fractals. Default in such a sense can be described as the presence of knowledge and

⁶ Famous weblogs are www.Plastic.com or www.slash.com

⁷ weblogs: a history and perspective, Rebecca Blood,
http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html

application of the basic conditions or the variables of the setup in which the generating forms appear.

Management by Default:

If we shift that definition into a management environment I propose to make a distinction between a known and backed up environment and an unknown, unconscious environment. A known and backed up system, for instance, is the use of an Enterprise resource planning (ERP) software, which is a set of applications that automate finance and human resources departments and help manufacturers handle jobs such as order processing and production scheduling.

Within an unconscious, an unknown environment there is a lack of decision processes and lack of structure. Therefore, outcomes happen by default. The players within such an environment don't know the conditions, the physics, biology or intellectual capacity of the environment.

Managing as designing

Management is a complex enterprise and has many players within a setting. A default setup seems to be a great idea in general to prevent a management environment from unstructured and unformed settings in the first place.

But the questions are imperative. Do we know the basic conditions to set up such default structures?

Are we always conscious about the programmed and non-programmed decision making processes?⁸ Herbert F. Simon introduced the idea of programmed decision as being repetitive and routine. A definite procedure has been worked out for handling them. Such a decision making process can be backed up with default settings, I would even say they have to be backed up in that way so that time and resources can be focused on non programmed decisions.

Nonprogrammed decisions in the management environment are novel to a certain extent, unstructured and consequential; they haven't arisen before and deserve tailored treatment.⁹

But is it always so easy to make a clear distinction between programmed and nonprogrammed decisions? The daily 'muddling through' teaches us a different lesson. The management environment consists of many players. It is a social environment. The chain of actions and the flow is often interrupted by the least conscious link of the chain. The idea of a structured organism in three "layers" exists in theory but the internalization has not been yet achieved. The differentiation between the basic work processes – the processes that deal with physical materials, the systems which keep the flow, the liquid medium and the intellectual layer of a social organism can be understood, because this is the place where spatial thinking is essential, but understanding doesn't mean that we are able to apply it in our actions.

⁸ The New Science of Management Decision, Herbert A. Simon, New York, 1960, P. 5

⁹ The New Science of Management Decision, Herbert A. Simon, New York, 1960, P. 6

Management by default creates chaos within certain layers of a social organism. Default setups are only applicable within the layers of programmed decisions. If we would treat an entire social organism as a field of programmed decisions the environment is on autopilot, and therefore unconsciousness.