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The affective-emotional communication in shoppingscapes: case study

Abstract

Shoppingscapes on urban roads, such as streets and avenues, require study and more specific attention. You must be aware of the emotional communication, an important factor with regard to the influence on the perception and acquisition process by the observer. Reaching the consumer cognitively, arousing emotion and desire to want to have the observed object is one of the goals of emotional communication, and that only happens with the proper use of elements of perception. This paper aims to highlight the need for interdisciplinary design and architecture, especially in the case of shoppingscapes in open spaces that sell fashion items. The case study raises a reflection on the elements of perception in the windows as to whether they are being clearly communicated. It also discusses how the same are interfering or being interfered by the shoppingscapes of Avenida da Liberdade in Lisbon.

Keywords: Shoppingscapes, Shop Windows, Emotional Design, Architecture, Elements of Perception.

Introduction

Every shopping process involves affect and emotion. An object only awakens the consumer desire when there is an affective involvement. However, the emotional processes are related with the way the individual perceives what it desires a process that requires interdisciplinarity between various fields, amongst which are the interactive scales of design and architecture.

Emotional design is a field much in evidence currently. At present there is a need to develop products that stimulate consumer's desire through affect. After many years of culture of "having", with immoderate consumption, particularly in our western civilization, we are perhaps entering a phase of "being", where there is a need to perceive something personal, sentimental in an object for it to be consumed. People want to feel that what they desire was projected for them, and this triggers an emotional connection.

The awakening of the desire for emotion is quite noticeable in the fashion design field that refers to the basic needs of the individual, placing him in connection with his group and, simultaneously, approaches the creative one, the inventive, the sensual one, the poetical one, without excluding the temporality and its trends. The fashion still reflects the cultural, politics, social and economic variations, defining the behavioural standard and aesthetic of a society (Feghali & Schmid, 2008).

It can be argued, therefore, that emotional design and fashion design are areas that share similar goal: to awaken the desire of the consumer for the designed artefact. Achieving this goal, however, requires large study by the designer of the elements of perception such as colour, shape, light, time-space relationships, among others.

Between projecting with perceptual elements that sharpen the emotion and the understanding by the consumer, there is an intermediate zone that consists in the way that clothes are presented. The shop window is the most common exhibitor in urban areas and where one must also know how to work with the elements of perception, since its architectural design. It enacts a game of social, economic and cultural values, creating an atmosphere of desire and emotion.

The shop window, with all its informative content, is also part of a building, which influences and is influenced. In the case of shoppingscapes on public roads, there are shop windows located in buildings intended for housing or buildings with aesthetic features of past decades, which may not match the visual identity of the brand or company that is exposing their products.

It is therefore paramount that the architectural design of a shop window is in keeping with the design guidelines of the artefact displayed. Perceptual elements like colour,

shape, light, space, time, are consequently inherent to any fashion project, and so they must also be for the shop window layout.

This paper aims to awaken the attention of designers to emotional aspects that may allow them to evaluate the efficiency of communication in fashion product sales and to point out the need for interdisciplinarity between design and architecture. For that purpose, elements of perception, shop window and aesthetic aspects of the architectural façades are confronted in a case study with shoppingscapes at Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon, Portugal.

Shop window: the emotional exhibitor

Throughout history, design evidenced the appreciation of certain characteristics according to different historic periods. Currently, its functions compose a triad: practice (characterized by concern with functionality and usability), aesthetics (cared with form), symbolic (focused on the product significance).

For Montemezzo (2003), the symbolic appeal makes the consumer or user become closely involved with the product, identifying with it and believing in the need to have it to construct the personal image before the others. According to Maldonado (2006), design is exactly situated between the “state of necessity” and the “object of necessity”, that is, between the necessity and the necessary. For human physics subsistence, the transformation of nature into usage objects is necessary. For psychic health, it is essential to satisfy the aesthetic needs that correspond to human sensorial perception.

Some products, such as clothing, attract the consumer by use of aesthetic elements that are appealing to our senses. Vision and emotion lead to shopping before the user evaluates the use and comfort of fashion artefacts or even behavioural changes or lifestyle. For that reason, the configuration of fashion design products is not only consequence of practical functions – how to promote products – but also of aesthetic functions, especially in attention to users.

“Today, all the objects in our material surroundings have an appearance that is identified by the process of perception, acting on our psyche. Therefore it is important for the mental health of man, that this artificially produced object surrounding to be optimized according to the perceptual characteristics of the human being, so that the

user of industrial products, when faced with them, can assimilate them psychically¹" (Translation by the authors).

Couto (2012) states that perception generates affection whenever it activates categorization, knowledge, experience, memory or any other sense attribute. Once the user's decision to buy is based on emotion, it is irrevocable. Damásio (1996) explains that this occurs because emotional evaluation is connected to cognition, which contributes with the decisions and the relations of the individual with himself and with the world.

Félix (2006) claims that emotions interfere directly in the perception process of objects, since they can be understood as enjoyable sensations or not, depending on fatigue, affection, anxiety, and external stimuli. This observation must be apprehended by designers and architects, mostly if they have to attract attention and perception of consumers in the complex environments of streets or avenues. Such thought was formulated based in *Gestalt* Theory. It proposes answers to why certain forms are more pleasing than others and opposes subjectivism by looking for explanations for the existing relations between subject and object in the perceptual field. For Gomes Filho (2004), *Gestalt* shows that what occurs in brain is not identical to that which occurs in the retina and also, that brain excitement does not happen in isolated points, but in its full extension.

We can claim that Emotional Design found one of its roots in the Gestalt Theory. The perception of objects and their interpretation does not only depend on the observer's eyes, according to theorists in this field. The most important statement in this context is that the way in which the parts constitute and become related as a whole, influences the way the organism adapts to organize and to manage balance.

"Emotions must be considered to establish our adaptive functions, because they determine our position in relation to our environment, pushing us toward certain people, ideas and objects or distancing ourselves from others. Despite the emotional responses of each one be different, the processes that precede these responses are universal²" (Translation by the authors).

¹ Hoje, todos os objetos de nosso entorno material possuem uma aparência que é identificada pelo processo de percepção, atuando sobre nossa psique. Por isso é importante, para a saúde psíquica do homem, que este entorno de objetos produzidos artificialmente seja otimizado de acordo com as características perceptivas do ser humano, de tal forma que o usuário de produtos industriais, ao se deparar com eles, possa assimilá-los psiquicamente (Löbach, 2001).

² As emoções devem ser consideradas para estabelecer as nossas funções de adaptação, porque elas determinam a nossa posição em relação ao nosso meio ambiente, impulsionando-nos na direcção de certas pessoas, ideias ou objectos e afastando-nos de outros. Apesar das respostas emocionais de cada um serem diferentes, os processos que precedem estas respostas são universais (Félix, 2006, p. 41).

The importance of understanding symbolic and emotional relations that pertain to fashion design is precisely because the consumer is governed by pleasures. The user is interested or identifies with the design production when it, somehow, provides pleasure and offers positive emotions.

There has to be a need, desire or pleasure of looking at. Perceptual elements are responsible for stimulating the look, once this act just occurs when the attention is aroused. Costa (2011) affirms that “the eyes and the look are disposed or in state of latent attention, always desirous of pleasure”. Pleasure is a psychological motivation for the eye, and consequently, for the emotions. However, in cognitive and affective processes, both cultural and individual differences are very relevant.

Niemeyer (2008) believes that in order to comprehend the way the products arouse emotions, it is necessary to know the interest of people and what to offer them.

The fashion market offers its products to consumers through different means: printed or electronic media, shop window, among others. Fashion shop windows standardize bodies, clothes, and behaviour, involving several emotional levels and thus become a meaning carrier of life habits of those who use or consume the product that in turn, provides pleasure and emotion.

For a fashion product, the shop window communicates along three domains: the three-dimensional, the emotional and the visual. It also articulates business, products and users, with a reading that is quite inclusive due to the social, economic and cultural characteristics of exposed objects. A composition structure upon the interaction of light, colour and form is responsible for attracting consumers and establishing the desired meanings.

An object only arouses the desire of its observer if the latter becomes affectively involved with the former. However, the emotional process is related with how the individual perceives the object of desire. When faced with a mannequin dressed and inserted in an idealized environment, the act of looking triggers an interaction between senses. Vision captures the information that is processed in the brain.

The light impulses captured by the retina are led through the optical nerve to the brain, where the images are formed and set in motion the emotion. For Pernão (2005) ‘when we speak about what *we see* we are speaking of what we *think we see*. To ‘see’ in the sense that we use to ‘perceive’ is not only a physical issue, but a mental one.

There are, in fact, relations between environmental stimuli, the images that they create and the perceptive act. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate how the visual elements are displayed in spaces where perception and understanding by means of visual communication are indispensable: shoppingscapes. Literature review sustained

the visual elements that are pointed out in the next section, in relation to photographic images taken at Avenida da Liberdade.

Visual elements in shoppingscapes

The shoppingscape addressed is located on Avenida da Liberdade, in the city of Lisbon, Portugal. It is one of the main avenues, with gardens and wide sidewalks covered in Portuguese style pavement (*calçada portuguesa*). It connects Praça dos Restauradores to Praça Marquês de Pombal. Many of original buildings of the avenue were replaced, but there are many renovated buildings from late 19th and early 20th century. Fashion shops are installed in the latter. Some have suffered aesthetic and structural modifications in a section of the façade for the installation of shop windows. Others kept the pattern and only adapted the expositors. In the first case, it is clearly noticeable the existence of a dispute of attention between the aesthetic variables of the buildings and the shop window.

Fig 1 shows that some constructions have fragmented aesthetics and rupture in architectural rhythm. In comparison, in others it is possible to notice conformity with the style of the façade.

In terms of exhibition system, the shop window represents a physical rupture between object and the observer, making it more difficult to perceive. As an exhibition space, it is a break in the aesthetic rhythm of the building in order to intentionally arouse attention. In a general way, a shop window is a compartment with a glass main facade, where goods are exposed. Its main components are the glass, the lights, the colours and the forms that compose the scene.

For Moles (1972) *apud* Souza (2007), the shop window should provide an atmosphere that promotes the desire for acquisition, simulated by lighting, colours, forms, and finally by all visual components that arouse the interest of the observer. When the passer-by perceives a well-structured composition of these elements, emotional access is offered to the observer.

For this to occur, it is necessary for the glass to provide appropriate visualization and not an obstacle to perception. The glass reflects light from a variety of sources, therefore, architects must take into account space and time as perceptual elements. In the organization process of the visual stimuli, light and movement must also be considered as fundamental elements.



FIG 1: Aesthetics of the building and shop window. Shoppingscape of Avenida da Liberdade in Lisbon.
Photo: João Paulo Garcia, 2013.

There is a need for architects and designers to be more sensitive to the understanding of space, considering its constant modifications of appearance, motivated by light and movements of observers. The capacity to imagine or to foresee such variables has implications in the outcome of the project, and consequently on the quality of the shop window.

Fig 2 is a composition with three photographs taken at different times of the same day (morning, afternoon and evening, respectively). It shows the importance of this reflection. During the day, the natural exterior illumination suffers changes, interferes in the interior illumination of the shop window and in its visualization.

These images show that only to the end of the day do the displayed products become more visible, due to a reduction of external light. When natural lighting is less intense than the lighting of the shop window, the glass is no longer a perceptive barrier for the observer.

The colour variation by light refers to synchronic and diachronic concepts. Both have an important role in the perception process. According to Pernão (2005) synchronic organization and analysis of visual stimulus by colours allows the differentiation of forms, volumes, texture among other visual aspects. Diachronically, there are colour variations throughout the day (morning, afternoon and night).



FIG 2: Influence of the natural exterior illumination in the shop window perception. Shoppingscape of Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon. Photo: Personal Archive, 2013.

Space is also important while perceptual element, since the perception of what is displayed depends on the vision angle and its positioning in relation to the store, in some cases impeding perception partly as exemplified in Fig 3.



FIG 3: Influence of movement and space in the shop window perception. Shoppingscape of Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon. Photo: Personal Archive, 2013.

The displayed items are easily confused with the reflectance of the avenue, compromising perception, cognition and consequently emotional and affective relations with the fashion product. In this case study, the glass, time and space have revealed to be considerable barriers in the process of visual communication.

In the interpretation of the information that surrounds us, perception is accentuated in the conditions of differentiation, as Bateson (1987) *apud* Pernão (2005) argues. In the specific case presented in the image, the information of the shop window and of the avenue is mixed.

"The entire amount of information received is necessarily received from signals of difference, and any perceived difference is limited in advance. Slight and slow differences are not graspable. They are not food for perception³" (Translation by the authors).

These details require attention, because they might be responsible for a fragmented and incomplete scenic composition of the shop window. *Gestalt* fundamentals remind us that if the whole is seen in parts, it loses meaning and becomes incomprehensible. Simplicity is one of the fundamental laws in the perception process, since it allows the observer to group the stimuli according to similarity.

In the domain of perception and sensorial mechanisms, space and its mobility possibility are the primary vectors that confer meaning to the perception of physical space, while the most direct and immediate perception is of colour (Durão, 2010).

In terms of shop windows and their totality, one can see them as chromatic windows in the urban landscape, whose meanings depend on the perception of the observer. The internal lighting systems create a chromatic environment of diverse meanings for the observer of the expositive system. The same occurs with colour elements, clothes or mannequins forms.

A game of lights, colours and forms are responsible for attracting the consumer and for communicating, since the designers have the control of these elements in the project. As Lancaster (1996) refers, colour appearance depends on three variables: light, surface and distance. Each one of these variables must be controlled, to some extent, by the designer.

Light control is possible through orientation, alignment or other artificial resources. Surface can be controlled in terms of size, form, texture and pigmentation. And it is still possible to manipulate the visualization in accordance with distance and angles of vision.

Colour and light are two inseparable elements of perception, since light is essential for determining the perception of colour. Light is, therefore, the condition of visibility and the physical appearance of reality. As structural element of light, colour is a visual stimulus that activates the retinal sensors, so, in other words we can claim that

³ Toda a quantidade de informação recebida é, necessariamente, recebida de sinais de diferença, e toda a percepção da diferença é limitada à partida. As diferenças apresentadas de leve e lentamente não são apreensíveis. Não são alimento para a percepção (Pernão, 2005. P.63).

the visual environment consists of colour perception (Pernão & Durão, 2011). In the shoppingscape studied, there are diverse chromatic focal points, as shown in Fig 4.



FIG 4: Chromatic windows. Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon. Photo: João Paulo de Melo, 2013.

For Lancaster (1996) colour is perceived in two forms. First there is colour as an attribute of objects, where it is the ratio of what is seen with the experience and visual memory. The second form is colour as sensory phenomenon and its effects on the environment and in humans.

According to Itten (1973), the eye and the mind register different perceptions by comparison and contrast. So you need to give special attention to the psychological, physiological, and visual aesthetics of colour and light.

The more reasonable chromatic effects depend on the balance between variety and contrast. Colour can model, harmonize, differentiate, consolidate, equalize or modify proportions, depending on the variation and space position of who observes it (Silva, 2006). Therefore the choice of the dominant color in a display case is indeed important.

It is a fact that fashion design follows chromatic trends. Which are changed with each new collection of clothing. But it is recommended to evaluate the possible effects of a certain color in a display case before exposing, especially in the case of public roads

and so many interferences, as already mentioned above. Fig 5 illustrates this assertion.



FIG 5: Chromatic compositions in shop windows. Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon. Photo: Personal archive, 2013.

The visual message of a display unit is cognitive, emotional and aims to communicate a value. At the same time, it is part of a building that also has signs and meanings. This is where designers and architects should be aware, since when you look around, the whole texture of your visual field consists of colour.

Knowing that the visual environment consists of perceptions of colour, it is correct to say that it determines lines and shapes, directly influencing the visual communication of the brand. Lancaster (1996) states that when using large colour intensities in buildings or advertisements in them (shop windows), there is interference in all buildings around. When there is too much visual information - mostly chromatic - the observer can only differentiate that which possesses a unique personality or that contains something to identify.

In the case of Fig 5, the same brand represented by quite disparate colours can trigger different emotions in the observer. Based on the psychology of colours, red, combined with the rectangular shapes of the store indicates intensity, importance, power and awakens feelings of this kind. On the other hand, blue is a cold, more passive colour, and is more related to tranquillity. Furthermore, in an open environment, surrounded by gardens, red stands out while blue merges with the reflection of the sky in the glass, for example.

This paper does not aim to discuss the colours that should compose a showcase or review existing ones on captured images. To do so would require an instrumental analysis or comparison with standardized samples. What we intend when we reflect about colours is that the designer and the architect involved with the brand must consider the capacity of the observer to absorb and to perceive the relation between colour and size, forms, structures and too much stimuli in the environment where the shop window is located.

Derefeldt *et. al.* (2003) adds that in addition to the state of adaptation of the visual system of the observer at the time of observation - which includes space and time - we have to consider the experience of the observer and the chromatic appearances.

"In architecture, the process of conceptualizing the colour is extremely complex, as it requires a knowledge of many aspects of visual perception, physiology, psychology, history of materials and their application methods, understanding of the context and ability to articulate the colour with light to bring an innovative concept of space and a continuous accomplishment of the idea, which is not compatible as just introducing a pigment for colouring the space"⁴ (Translation by the authors).

Colour is among the stimuli, that which stands out due to its importance and presence. It affects the brain wave activity, the functions of the autonomic system and hormonal activity, and awakens emotional and aesthetic associations, as quoted Silva (2006). For the observer to understand the message you want to convey it is necessary to not only perceive the colours and their consequential ways, but understand them cognitively in terms of what colour denotes, its effect, its spatial organization and its chromatic memory.

Elucidating best that thought, Deferltdt *et. al.* (2003), addresses the concepts of cognitive and perceptual colour. In an environment, the colour is defined by the perceptual attributes of perception of the real world, which we estimate approximately to have six million different colours. The perceived colour space will therefore be specific to an element associated with cognition, which may be a name or a combination of temperature, among others.

If a colour is perceived in a specific region of the perceptual colour space then the perceived colour is associated with a category of a certain colour, or a cognitive colour element. Pernão (2005) states that colour is not dependent on the perceived hue, value and chroma alone, but involves the overall perceptual characteristics.

⁴ Na arquitetura, o processo de conceptualizar a cor é extremamente complexo, dado que requer um conhecimento de múltiplos aspectos da percepção visual, da fisiologia, da psicologia, da história dos materiais e dos respectivos métodos de aplicação, entendimento do contexto e capacidade de articular a cor com a luz para dar forma a um inovador conceito de espaço e a um contínuo refinar de ideias, que não é compatível com a mera introdução de um pigmento destinado a colorir o espaço (Durão, 2005).

The use of the colours altogether and its interactions and effect is another important point in the perception and emotion process in the observer. In the employment of intense and adjacent colours, each one projects its complementary in the other, provoking the intensification of both in the case of being complementary. If not, the effect of simultaneous contrast occurs. Durão (2005) presents the influence between the colours, also exemplified in Fig 6:

“To influence an existing colour, an influential colour is placed adjacently. The closer they are to one another, the greater the expression of their contrast. In terms of brightness, any colour appears lighter when placed near a darker one. A neutral colour temperature seems cold in the presence of a warm colour, and vice versa. When the background colour chromaticity is greater than an object placed in front, then the intensity of the object is reduced⁵” (Translation by the authors).



FIG 6: Colours and its interactions. Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon. Photo: Personal archive, 2013.

The shop windows of Fig 6 are in the same store. Harmony of contrast is perceived in the communication of the diverse elements. Although it has a large amount of information, it is possible for it to be perceived by the observer. The message needs to be organized, in some way, for it to be recognized as a cognitive structure.

⁵ Para influenciar uma cor existente, coloca-se uma cor influente adjacente, verificando-se, então, que quanto mais perto estiverem uma da outra, maior é a expressão do seu contraste. Em termos de luminosidade, qualquer cor parece mais clara quando colocada outra mais escura. Uma cor neutra em termos de temperatura parece fria na presença de uma cor quente, e inversamente. Quando a cor de fundo tem maior cromaticidade do que um objeto colocado à sua frente, a intensidade do objeto é reduzida.

The importance of harmony lies precisely in the capacity to unify the complex elements. As stated by Durão (2005), chromatic harmony is established by identity, similarity or contrast. The identity is obtained with variation of luminosity and chromaticity. When it contains a common hue, as graduations of red to red-yellow, there is harmony by similarity. And harmony by contrast occurs when we work with colours situated in opposition on the chromatic circle.

Besides hue, colour also has value, intensity and temperature. Architects and designers have to keep in mind all these dimensions to accomplish the aim of a project. As said previously, the colour and its combinations affect the human being in physiological at psychological level, its perceptions of temperature, spatiality and ambience.

In a shoppingscape project, initially the designer or the architect probable will think about the materials to be used according to structural properties and techniques. However, colour is inherent to all materials and it is what characterizes forms, textures, structures and coverings. From the façade of the building to the mannequin dressed, colour will influence the environment and will be influenced by it.

Final Considerations

To understand how the consumer identifies the product presented in a shop window and receives the image from the device in display it is essential to achieve harmony and effectiveness of communication. The challenge is to maintain brand identity and draw attention to the product displayed, within the busy built environment for sales.

There is a need to deal with the variables indicated in the text, such as space, time, light, form and colour perception. This process of organization starts with the visual stimuli, the colour being responsible for triggering understandings of texture, volume, limits, three-dimensional or other significant structures. It is only when the observed is meaningful to the observer is the emotional process really triggered.

Neither in architecture or design is colour considered a relevant projective tool, especially in the case of shop windows for fashion products, where there is a continuous colour change. Colour cannot only be considered in the final phase of the exhibitor preparation without foundation, where the various elements are just chosen according to personal taste.

We propose the cooperation of these reflections as a means to draw the attention of designers and architects. This implies understanding the point of view of the observer and also how information is conveyed when presented in shop windows. In particular,

at the present economic crisis, it is of great value to look more critically at shoppingscapes. Simple changes to the expositor of the store may focus the attention of the user more effectively, thus obtaining an emotional connection that results in a more successful sale of fashion articles.

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