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**DESIGN OF COMMUNICATIVE EVENT: THE  
“COMMUNICATIVE NAVIGATION” METHOD**

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***Abstract***

Regarding design as a communicative practice calls for new methods of conceptual work. If the goal of design is a communicative event then concept should be regarded as a dynamic process of the generation of meaning, which creates a shared communicative space of conformity and understanding. As the communicative event cannot be reckoned in advance, its design should be not the implementation of a particular concept, but its dynamic and nonlinear application. The methodological resource of the neopragmatist theory of social action helps understand the designer’s conceptual work as a diversified and partly spontaneous interaction between all the aspects of the situation and present the concept as a textual framework that isn’t just a delivery of the initially constructed design but the process of its evolving. Such conceptual work requires flexibility, quick response, and improvisation from the designer. The “communicative navigation” method is key to the achievement of this goal. This method is based on the idea of spatial and contextual thinking, which helps create a conceptual framework as an open semiotic system. The use of the “communicative navigation” method activates the designer’s imagination, nonlinear thinking, and intuition, helping them develop complicated projects that generate communicative events.

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## **1. Introduction**

In a society overloaded with fragmented and highly specialized information, design becomes a tool of creative communication: it does not merely contribute to a better understanding of the actors, it is capable of developing joint innovative solutions (Lola & Aleksandrova, 2017). The idea of design as a communicative practice changed as it moved from the realm of industrial production to the information media created over the last hundred years.

### **1.1.A communicative event as the goal of the design**

The new conditions have changed the goals of the design practices: in the industrial era, it was the product that met functional and esthetic requirements whereas now the goal of design is to create an impression or a communicative event. New media greatly affect communication by actively involving individuals in the joint creation of texts and their interpretation (Manovich, 2017). Design product has become a mediator, a means to deliver the message from the designer to the Other. The addressee of the message is no longer perceived as a consumer because the product is created not for consumption, but the new intellectual and emotional experience of the Other.

### **1.2.New requirements for the conceptual framework of design product**

An impression is a communicative event that cannot be planned and measured in advance; it is designed and has its own dynamics and nonlinear logic. The goal of the design is a communicative event that gives the Other a new intellectual and emotional experience and changes her or his vision of reality, opening new opportunities for knowledge and actions. This notion of design as a practice that gives life sense and development rather than mere comfort and functionality echoes the idea of Escobar (2018): “design does not transform the world, it is rather part of the world transforming itself” (p.215). Rethinking the goal of design raises the question about the conceptual work on the product that can create the possibility of a communicative event.

The conceptual framework of design product has a certain structure: a concept (an idea) is developed into an emotional shell, an image, and then is enhanced with additional codes, which creates a variety of possible interpretations for the Other (Lola, 2018, p.58). A conceptual framework has a communicative potential from the beginning: designer tries to see the product with the eyes of the Other, anticipating their reactions and expectations. However, to realize this potential, it is necessary to develop the conceptual framework that won't just expand the range of interpretations but will encourage improvisation.

## **2. Problem Statement**

If the goal of design is a communicative event, the conceptual activity should be an action in the situation of uncertainty that requires a quick reaction, experiment, and improvisation from the designer. The problem is that design is always target-oriented, and one must find a balance between a strict method and creative freedom. In other words, the idea of a conceptual framework as a strict structure may be reviewed.

### **3. Research Questions**

The main goal of this study is to describe the design as a communicative process, and its result as a communicative event. To reach this goal, it is necessary to define the general methodological principles and thus specify the notion of conceptual work in design.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose task is to define the requirements for conceptual framework and the method of its development.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. The methodological resource of neopragmatist communicative paradigm**

The methodological basis for the communicative event construction method is the neopragmatist communicative paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2014). It defines communication as the activity of individuals that creates a shared semantic reality. Unlike the individualistic approach, which explains the activity of individuals with preset goals and plans, the neopragmatist approach focuses on the dynamic process of the production of meanings (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). The idea of a processual character of the social reality deepens our understanding of communication as a process of conveying and gradual socialization of individual experiences, ideas, and values. The situation in which this interaction takes place cannot be reduced to the circumstances; it's a possibility horizon that keeps changing (Joas, 1996).

The neopragmatist approach reveals the analytic possibilities of the principle of situationism, which regards the situation as a dynamic environment. In such an environment, individual motives may change and actions plan significantly transform. In other words, the communicative situation is unstable, fluid, and mobile. Therefore, the result of communication cannot be preplanned. The principle of situationism helps understand the creative nature of the social act (Kazarinova, 2006).

With communication seen this way, the design of a communicative event should be not an implementation of a particular concept, but its application with the use of imagination, intuition, and improvisation. The concept should be not a plan, but a flexible and mobile construction: on the one hand, it should direct actions; on the other, it should constantly change. To create such a concept, the designer should use a non-linear practical logic, which should be to a certain degree independent from the will and intention of the acting agent. In solving constantly changing operative problems, this logic is discrete, paradoxical and focuses more on hypotheses and guesses rather than consistent conclusions (Bourdieu, 1990).

#### **5.2. The social semiotic approach to process of creating conceptual framework**

If communication is the process of creating a shared semantic space then a communicative event is a semantic structure. The social semiotics that evolves in the neopragmatist tradition has given us valuable methods to understand the dynamic process of creating socially significant texts (Thiboult,

1991). The semiotic analysis of the contextualization process is particularly important as it introduces codes a textual framework and thus turns the flow of linguistic impressions into a semiotic system (Gasparov, 1996). The textual framework, or the limits, help regarding the context as space where connections appear among individual elements and fluctuating meanings arise.

The methodological resource of the neopragmatist tradition helps understand the designer's conceptual work as a diversified and partly spontaneous interaction between all the aspects of the situation and present the conceptual framework as a textual framework that isn't just delivery of the initially constructed design but the process of its evolving.

The methodological principles of situationism and non-linearity define the requirements of the conceptual framework. It should be an open system that sets the general direction for actions without affecting the choice of particular ways; a context for the transformation of the sequence of signifiers into a semantic ensemble; a semantic space with a specific texture, density, and deformations.

The author's method of the "communicative navigation" helps develop a concept that meets all these requirements. The use of the non-linearity and principles of situationism helps transform the conceptual framework from a plan of actions into a dynamic process of creating meanings, which helps the designer to retain her or his creative freedom.

## **6. Findings**

The conceptual framework should sustain a free flow of thoughts and emotions. Understanding the limits and essence of freedom is an important professional task for the designer. It is only through this insight that a designer can find an effective application of her or his creativity. The conceptual framework should be a navigation tool for consciousness: it sets the path designer should take and creates a structure of the creative reality where she or he can find everything she or he needs.

This approach helps reveal the key feature of "communicative navigation" method: it must emphasize not the motives and the directions of actions, but the space where these actions take place. Following the idea of Debord (1997) that any creative work is creating new conditions for an incident, this method may be defined as a way to construct situations where an incident happens in the predefined time and space. In his theory of drift, Guy Debord links serendipities to the sensitivity to the impulses of the territory with its terrain and constant flows. In the conceptual work, it is possible to talk about a "mental landscape" that must have terrain, wave-like deformations, and flexion.

The "communicative navigation" method for constructing the communicative event is based on the idea of spatial sense and thinking. Using the "communicative navigation" method, the designer creates a partly controlled, partly spontaneously evolving situation that encourages the Other not just to interpret the product design but rather improvise, which helps them feel like a co-creator of its meaning.

The method lets the designer present the communication space as a landscape with its own terrain, deformations, and distortions, where meanings appear not as a conclusion of logical reasoning but in the process of grasping the situation in its entirety. In such a space, actors become the members of a joint journey, or rather expedition, which requires from them quick reactions, intuition, and improvisation, and not just the correction of their initial intentions.

### **6.1. The “communicative navigation” method: the principal features**

The “communicative navigation” method includes the following operations: emotional immersing into intention; creating the “mental landscape”; defining the codes; creating the conceptual framework.

A starting point would be intention. If the goal is to design a communicative event, intention should give the starting impulse. The intention is a specific mode of meaning that is constantly changing and creating new overtones. Intention doesn't have a clear meaning, it is only supposed to lead to meaning. The first operation of the method is an emotional immersing into the intention. Then the designer creates a "mental landscape". It's a graphic composition that expresses a certain state of mind. It's a mental space where intuitive understanding turns into meanings. The next stage of the method is translating the meanings emerged in the “mental landscape” into words or codes. These codes work as triggers for consciousness. Finally, revealing the links between the codes produces a conceptual frame.

### **6.2. Real design and speculative design**

This kind of the conceptual framework is not a causal link, it's a flexible construction, unpredictable in its development. The imagination is very important in this case. At first sight, this approach may seem close to a speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013) with its appeal to an experimental and free vision of the world, but that's not right.

Speculative design transfers VR experiments into the real world and thus gives an opportunity to understand the possible consequences of new concepts and ideas. It focuses on the search for possible outcomes of the construction of imaginary worlds. The speculative practice is based on the ability to imagine alternative worlds and develop design hypotheses in a virtual environment. Generally, such experiments are close to conceptual art as it combines intellectual activity and esthetic experiences. The entertaining side of such experiments is also important. Creating imaginary worlds has always been a source of inspiration for creators. The idea of intellectual experiments, "useful inventions", modeling of multi universes has been adopted by social and political sciences, philosophy, and art (Suarez, 2009).

However, speculative design allows for creating a sharper opposition between the possible and the impossible; it can be called an artistic dissent expressed with alternative design ideas. Even the most fantastic and fruitless ideas and meaningless results are considered valuable because they undermine the basis of the “official reality” (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Generally, the speculative approach creates games where imagination, free search, and daring hypotheses are the main playing moves.

Such elimination of limitations is not compatible with the principles of the “communicative navigation” method that appeals not to fantasy, but to a rational implementation of intuitive knowledge. The imagination is a combination of feeling, sensing, and thinking (Murphy, Peters, & Marginson, 2010), and it should be distinguished from fantasy. The goal of “communicative navigation” method is not to construct nonexistent objects or environments, but to recognize the real world.

### **6.3. The example of using of the “communicative navigation” method for design project**

Graduate students Bannokov, Mukanova, and Kovaleva (2019) prepared a common project, “Catcher”, based on Milorad Pavic's Dictionary of the Khazars. The students created an ideographic map with the codes that generated semantic energy and prepared a communication scenario. The project was

implemented as a master class and a computer game. The master class was not a traditional lecture before the students but a joint effort organized by the lecturer who set a task for the audience that had various and to a certain degree unpredictable solutions. The master class was a joint expedition that was full of adventures and surprises. The task of the “Catcher” master class was to study the possibilities of interpretation of text with the use of spontaneous graphic. The question was how a free interpretation is transformed into an image and is expressed in a graphical composition.

The audience was offered to interpret a few fragments of Milorad Pavic’s “Dictionary of the Khazars” chosen by the lecturer. No context was given. To create a suitable atmosphere, the lights were dimmed and soundtracks were recorded for each fragment. The participants were offered to choose whether they wanted to listen to the tracks to the end, only partly, or work in silence. A list of questions was offered to help the participants construct their own context: where does the event take place; what is the mood of the people or objects; what is their age and condition; what are their relations; what events could lead to and be a consequence of the event; where is it; what physical laws are valid in that world; what period of time is it; is the time linear or non-linear; what parallel processes and events may take place and interact with the event; what is the weather like; how does it smell like, what is the mood (calm, anxious, happy, angry, etc.), what the sounds are like; what can this event develop into.

After answering these questions, each participant was offered to visualize their interpretation with a graphical composition on a poster. This collective experience of spontaneous improvisation and a translation into one’s own graphical language created a joint story that was used as a scenario for a computer game. The goal of the game was, however, not to graphically interpret the text but to encourage the players to improvise using its key codes. The concept was implemented in various media: animation, video, VR.

To move to a new level, a player had to pick meaningful objects and their combinations. The game offered to choose a character and to live through its storylines in VR. The number of storylines multiplied due to various combinations and interactions with the environment. The game was supposed to be set in a gallery of contemporary art in order to make the virtual reality part of the real interior. The integration of the virtual and real space enabled the players to develop various strategies and find paths in the realities of different nature. This spatial structure helped them overcome the fragmentation of the information environment and develop a skill to see the situation in general and to act considering various factors. The goal of the game creators was to study interaction as from objects to dynamic processes in space.

The virtual space of the computer game interacted with the interior of the gallery where the participants could physically connect objects with threads based on the texts and thus created new connections as they saw it. Each participant found a unique path. The paths and connections made by everyone were later mapped and could be viewed both separately and together, which generated a sophisticated map of all possible movements. The use of the “communicative navigation” method by graduate students has proven effective in the complicated projects that involve a developing communicative environment and create a communicative event.

## 7. Conclusion

The society often considers design as a universal tool for data arrangement and creating conditions for productive communication. The use of state-of-the-art digital technologies has set before the designer a number of theoretical and practical tasks related to the construction of virtual environments and a new visual language. In such a situation, the designer focuses on the communicative effect. According to M. McLuhan, the interest in effect rather than content helps understand the situation as a whole (McLuhan, 2003). The communicative effect gathers the pieces of data into a single semantic ensemble. The designer is aware of these needs and makes the creation of a communicative event the goal of her or his product. Such an approach to design raises methodological questions. The methods of conceptual work should meet the requirements of the conceptual framework of the communicative event: it should be not an action plan but a space for generating meanings where the designer applies nonlinear logic, imagination, and intuition. The suggested “communicative navigation” method, which is based on the neopragmatist paradigm of social action, helps the designer create a conceptual framework that is not a rigid action plan, but a flexible and constantly changing construction. This is what distinguishes this method from the Scenario methods that emphasize the cause and effect relations (Wright, Bradfield, & Cairns, 2013).

It must be highlighted that the objective of the suggested method is the creation of the communicative event which that helps the participants of communication solve real problems. In this regard, we must distinguish the “communicative navigation” method from the speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013) that relies on fantasy and inventing unreal worlds.

This method was used by graduate students for their master’s projects focused on the development of interactive web-applications for the research of multimodal texts. Application of the “communicative navigation” 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.

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