Color and shape applied to product design (oral)

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1. Introduction to the research

The research builds upon prof. Henriette Koblanck’s work summarized in the acronym ITK, Identity Tool Kit, a method that aims to assist designers and contractors in meeting on "visual platforms" relating to the development and production of products and services, and kicks off from point 4 of the ITK method, “Shape & Color”.

The aim of the research is to find a method to represent the complexity of the relationship between color and shape, in the specific context of the design of product or service, in order to make possible to communicate this parameter during discussions in a team of professionals or to the end user, further to be adoptable in design education.

The process will be developed and tested by this project, is ongoing and will hopefully develop into a valuable tool that aims to be supportive to the ITK method or also to be used alone. Some of the addressed issues concern how to choose and arrange the color, how to describe and share information and knowledge and how to evaluate the consistency of color projects.

2. Brief description of the ITK method

The ITK, or Identity Tool Kit, developed by prof. Henriette Koblanck’s is a method that kicks off from her direct experience in the design field. She was looking for a design process that was able to include the clients in the design process, making them an active part of it and taking them beyond the normal role of “passive customers shopping for a final product”. Henriette Koblanck has used the ITK method, derived from her vast experience as a renowned designer, in about ten years of teaching. It has been employed in academic field by approximately 600 university students within several disciplines and in numerous professional projects. It is based on project evaluations, and the method has been found very useful by a high score, 90 %, of the participants [1] [2] [3] [4].

The perhaps main observation, made by Henriette Koblanck, that later led her to develop the ITK method, was the lack of a "terminology of aesthetics", and the discrepancy of the individual concepts as regards perception and communication, in particular about color. It seemed then necessary to find additional ways to support the presentation of design projects, when being discussed in the final phase, after the project was realized.

It is more an approach to design than an instrument and consists of a process, composed by six individual steps, which involves the future visual identity of the product or service that is being designed:

1. State Board (graphical representation or through images and words of the State of Fact).
2. Position Board (representation of the current positioning of the type of product or client company).
3. Future Board (reference representation of the position to be achieved at the end of project).
4. Shape & Color (shape and color, the final goal of this research, which is ongoing).
5. Condition/Tone (emotional and tonal connotation of the brand or object).

The measures, which are supported by key words, images and graphs, and which describe the core values and their impact on the axes, are finally collected in matrices or advice that are involving at least two of our sensory channels of communication: visual and auditory.

At point 4, the “Color & Shape”, it is very important to reduce the maximum number of colors and shapes to be used in order to achieve visual clarity in the final profile. Then the subsequent fifth step, on the future use of the product or service, is conceptually launched.

3. Method of approach

The fourth step “Color & Shape”, examined in this research, is a crucial step and, in the words of Prof. Henriette Koblanck, concerns the translation of the “affective qualities, shapes and colors” into building blocks inside the future board that delineates the final project. This step involves the choice of color or color palette, for example in case of a product, interior, exterior or service that has more than one color or when it has been decided to include different color range versions of the same product on the market. It is a very important passage usually made directly by designers, more often by manufacturers and marketing people without a specific knowledge of aesthetics.

Generally, only large companies or refined niche brands, in addition to fashion, graphics and communication, devote a thorough attention to the selection and use of color. However, the rapidly changing global and cultural integration in recent years has apparently heightened the importance of color, a trend supported by evidence of sales reports that show the precise relationship between color and market. An example of this is the DuPont Color Popularity Chart, Annual Report (a color chart on best-selling products in the automotive field) for the rate of sales to color preferences accomplished globally around the world.

Monika Moro focusing her research on color and design finishes, is collaborating with Prof. Henriette Koblanck at the Swedish Linnaeus University in Kalmar, since some years, in the field of didactics and research, and is, under her supervision and direction, carrying out workshops with the aim of testing and defining point number four “Color & Shape” of the ITK method [5] [6].

Historical reference are the workshops based on color teachings at the Bauhaus that laid emphasis on personal discovery rather than theory, and proceeded investigating the interaction, potential, and behavior of color on an empirical basis, running through a plethora of teachers such as Itten, Albers, Klee and Kandinsky to name a few [7] [8] [9] [10] [11].
The Italian master of Design and Art, Bruno Munari, in more recent time, has also been dedicated to the experimentation of color through his laboratories. In his eyes to touch, manipulate, break with conventional ideas, are experiencing stages of a process of learning and training that takes form on the direct experience of game [12] [13] [14].

In the same fashion the workshops planned for “Shape & Color” are experimental and based on the perceptive experience: the finality is to put the impact of color inside the process of design not afterwards when the project has been concluded.

4. Development of the first workshop at the LNU Linnaeus University

The chromatic choice is very often considered the last step in the design process and could therefore result in a haphazard final choice. The color, when applied on a surface or a product, tends to have different behaviors as regards the impact with our perception.

The launch of this project was held at the LNU in Kalmar, Sweden, in October/November 2011, with the participation of both students of the third year of the faculty of Design and students from the first year of the Master in Design. In the case that is being here described, the students were encouraged to approach the creative process with a new awareness and understanding of color dynamics.

The students were requested to begin to think about their design projects directly from the start point of a specific color of their own choice. To each group or single student was assigned a disassembled square table (60x60x60 cm) in wood. They could keep the shape as it was or change it to follow their own idea of “Shape & Color”. It was not necessary to consider functional or material matters. Further this was for many of them the first occasion to work with wood with their own hands in the old Bauhaus fashion.

The general purpose was on one hand to make sure that their mind could return to a primordial state of creativity in which they might feel free to “play” with color. In this way, in fact, the intention was to experiment the interaction with color made by students who own a certain idea of color and design and that are therefore used to operate following a preset logic series of mindsets, trying to make them go beyond their accumulated experience. Further the workshop aimed to make the students confront the theme of color in an early phase of the process of design.

5. Conclusions

As a result the students that participated to the workshop showed enthusiasm and true passion and succeeded very well in their task within the frame of a very short time they had at disposal to present a full-scale model, also in consideration of the fact that many of them were building a prototype for the very first time.

A point of interest was the fact that a great part of the students had put in their products cultural details or concepts, some with intention other discovered how their own cultural background may influence them or better enhance their projects enriching them.

The tables presented by the students were nine in total.

Following a brief comment, where the projects are listed with the color theme.
Fig. 1 – N°1 "LIGHT-BLUE" table.  Fig. 2 – N°2 "LIGHT-ORANGE" table.

Fig. 3 - Designs by Karin Larsson  Fig. 4 – Illustration by Carl Larsson

Fig. 5 – N°3 "DARK-ORANGE" table.  Fig. 6 – Red lacquer Yuan vase and Door Altar table.

Fig. 9 – N°4 "WHITE" table.  Fig. 7 – N°5 "BRIGHT YELLOW" table.
1. The “LIGHT-BLUE” table.

The team worked excellently, enhancing the play of light on the finishing color, intervening on the shape of the legs of the table, built up by a series of pieces of
wood in different angles. They added the very nice detail of the lockers sticking up out of the surface of the table. They took inspiration from Carl & Karin Larsson, a Swedish married pair of interior designers, living around the turn of the century. They revolutionized interior design in their native country and established a style that continues to attract a worldwide following.

2. The “LIGHT-ORANGE” table.
The team made a product nearly ready to sell, impressive work and realization of the table in such a brief time, one of the students was already a brilliant wood-carpenter. They created a shape that sprung out in relation to the tone of color they had chosen. They stressed the shape enhancing the matte /brilliant effect of the surfaces, thus the result is a cool contemporary table.

3. The “DARK-ORANGE” table.
The team worked very well, rendering the table a contemporary product as regards the color and shape. Still retaining the cultural inputs they wanted to communicate in this table as the Asian team’s original intention. The color is slightly lighter than the traditional red, a vitamin color that collocates the product in the present.

4. The “BRIGHT YELLOW” table.
The team really made a table with an extremely interesting shape, bringing the slightly acid yellow tone they’ve used by choice to the best. The students will develop it further exploring in a second step, materials of different kinds with different sensorial feelings. This was perhaps the most experimental project.

5. The “BLACK and WHITE” table.
The student who worked alone decided to keep the original square shape and work on the black and white of the graphics of the Art Nouveau. She worked on the table from the point of view of a cube with six faces run through by a white line. The result was a beautifully geometrical, precise and elegant table conveying a play of light and darkness.

6. The “WHITE” table.
The team worked on the concept of having the memory of the tablecloth woven into the shape, through the curves cut in the sides and the delicate pattern tone on tone on the surfaces. It is a very interesting concept that is really worth to be studied further to completion. It conveyed the warm feeling of the domestic landscape making a good use of whites.

7. The “BLUE” table.
The student worked on the elaboration of a cube seen as an abstract form. Even if she would have liked to use red instead of blue, the result was striking, the shape interacting with light and dark tones provoked by the natural shadows of the environment. It was on the whole well worked out and experimental in color and shape.

MASTER STUDENTS

8. The “WHITE and GREEN” table.
The master student has worked very well obtaining as a result a nice shape, where she wanted to explore the meeting of square and round lines. The student has a background as an artist and has a cultural heritage of historical decorative language, and she wanted to communicate this language in a new form through a sort of
“tattoo” on the surface or “skin” of the table, the form was inspired from stars and is an Islamic architectural form. She presented a study of several possible decorations for the same shape of table. She named her table "Quantara" which means a bridge of color between geometrical form and organic ornament.

9. The “WHITE (DECONSTRUCTIVIST)” table

The student presented a very interesting final result as regards the language of form. She originally wanted to employ green as color; however she thought it was a revelation that the tone of white or another neutral color could be such an excellent chromatic choice on this particular deconstructed shape which was so rich of shadows.

Bibliography