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A Doctor of Graphic Design, he splits his professional time between Paris and Zurich. Interested in the context of public space, he has just designed a new traveller information system for the future Grand Paris metro (2022-2030). As a researcher, he has published several books including "Signs for Peace, an Impossible Visual Encyclopaedia" with Vera Baur and Lars Müller (2012) and "Faceau Bran Territorial" with Lars Müller (2013).

design

exchange

question

method

public space

From questioning as design to the design of questioning

In the field of design, “re-stating the question” is a common technique that allows us to move from an approach based on responding directly to the question to a more responsible one based on analysis and a prior understanding of the underlying problem. However, here we will treat questioning as the intermedial staging of a real interaction as a form of shared narrative. Based on the analysis of three installations, we will develop an approach with which to stage and disseminate the question that goes above and beyond the explanation itself. These examples, which are taken from different projects, scenarios and settings, are proof that it is possible to convey a problem more effectively by posing a series of questions. This text is written using this very method to call into question the restitution models of such highly extolled research papers on design.

1. Raising the question and questioning it

Can we consider questioning one of the essential elements that defines the creative attitude of design? Does the culture of questioning allow us to separate ourselves from the design approach that is subject to demand without considering the correctness of the question? Does restating the question allow us to shift from focusing on demand to focusing on the underlying problem in the question? What is the method for restating a problem? Is this process achieved by posing a series of questions? Should we wait for a response before asking the next question? Can a series of questions, even unanswered questions, help us to gain a better understanding of a situation? Can we use this research method in situations of interaction with another receiver? Is it possible to draw another person into the questioning process by asking him a series of questions? Is it necessary to give answers? Should we answer this last question?

2. The scientific value of the question

And while we are on the subject, should we not arrange this text in question format? Is it reasonable to believe that this method would allow us, for example, to introduce a scientific issue more efficiently? What do we mean by a scientific issue when dealing with design? How can a series of questions generate knowledge? Is this knowledge different because it originates from a series of unanswered questions? Does questioning enable us to address a topic more openly? Does it allow us to develop progressively an opinion or point of view on a topic? Does the questioning technique make the reader more involved with the text? Does the reader provide any answers? Does the reader participate in the questioning? Should a scientific text give answers? Can a

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Image 1 Installation of the exhibition “Quotidien visual”, Paris.

good question make us grow? Does this style of writing allow us to move from an affirmative approach to a different one based on the construction of a common challenge rooted in diversity? Can questioning be considered a research method? Does it pertain to the field of design specifically? How does it differ, for example, from the methods used in the field of sociology? Would this approach allow us to progress in a non-linear way? Should we maintain the questioning method throughout this text?

3. The public question

How important is the presentation? Is the question perceived differently depending on the medium used to pose it? How does the presentation of the questioning highlight the subject matter? Does a question affect us differently depending on whether we read it alone or in a public space? Can we use design to make a series of questions relevant? Can we make a particular situation more relevant through questioning? Does questioning help to establish a dialogue and to look for common

ground? Is there a desire to participate in the questioning? Is asking a series of questions enough to encourage the receiver’s participation? Does the system of questions encourage constructive dialogue? Does answering a question by asking another question allow us to avoid counterproductive discussions or does it make us put our heads together? Let’s think again: do we need to give answers?

4. First case study: a design exhibit

I had to create a traveling exhibit to present my work. However, I thought it would be more interesting to share the activity than the results. The exhibit titled “Quotidien visual” was divided into several interrelated, interactive phases: large scrolls introducing the project design process; evolution from the initial sketches to more or less complex visual systems; videos of different aspects of the workshop; visual diaries chronicling my everyday designs; and finally, in some phases of the exhibition, a wall with 100 questions about the society in which these projects are being carried out, in other

words, questioning the state of our democracy and the role of design in this context. These questions, which emerged during the creative process in collaboration with people, an artist and a designer, were displayed at each exhibit on large walls with rows of chairs arranged in front of them.¹

5. Who is the receiver of these questions?

Should we consider that these questions were directly related to the subject of the exhibit or that they would foster its development? Did these questions about democracy open up a debate about design and democracy? Did they cause my work or my involvement to be perceived differently? Would it have been possible to address these issues without the help of questions? What is the relationship between the questions? Does the narrative style end up being as linear as that of a normal text? Does it really allow readers to participate in this questioning in the form of dialogue? What would their role be? Would they answer the questions or ask new ones? Would it obstruct development or blend in with it? Might this narrative form make it easier for people unfamiliar with design to understand this field? How important is the presentation and staging of this questioning? Does the chosen linearity highlight one question over the rest? Why are they numbered? Can we assume that all questions lead to the same kind of development? Are there several types of questions? Could a specific question help to deepen the discussion around a topic? Would it lead to a topic being categorised in the author's name?

Can we consider this questionnaire a scientific contribution? Does intermediality play an essential role here? Despite the presentation format, could these questions be the result of a long email exchange?

6. Continuation of the first case: *The design exhibition sign*

During the fifth stage of the same exhibition in Montreal, the installation was supplemented with a sign posted in a public space. The sign posed five questions: "Does design make us happy? What makes us happy? For how long? Can it also make us unhappy? What is design?" These questions served a dual purpose of announcing the exhibition and starting a debate around design².

7. Question your discipline

What does the creation of such a public debate mean? What role does questioning play on this point? Does questioning allow us to consider something that would otherwise seem like a slogan? Can we achieve an effect other than affirmation through questioning? Could a series of additional questions lead to real reflection? Could a series of questions foster the evolution of a topic or a change of narrative? Could new points of view be formed? Does the status of the questions change depending on the dominant position of the media in the public space? What, then, is the question's status? Can we talk speak of public questions?



Image 2 Installation of the exhibition "Quotidien visual", Paris.

1. "Quotidien visual", an itinerant exhibition initially created for the Anatome Gallery in Paris in 2003, which was then moved to the KISD in Cologne and the HGB in Leipzig. In 2004, while on display at the Mudac in Lausanne, an installation on democracy created in collaboration with the plastic artist, Nathalie van Doxel, was added to the exhibit.

2. A project developed from 2009 to 2011 at the Design2context Institute with Ruedi and Vera Baur and MonyaPletsch in collaboration with Jordi Cano in Barcelona and Arena Vent. The book was published by Lars Müller in English and Catalan.

With the number of responses received we were able to cover one-half of the wall, on which we pasted their questions in different colours, typefaces and sizes. Each question was posted in its original language. We created a website with the list of questions and images of the projects, which motivated other designers to ask new questions until the entire wall was covered. The entire process was documented and the most salient questions were collected in a journal.

8. Second case study: a design school

The invitation extended by Jordi Cano and ELISAVA management to create a typographic fresco in the hall of the new school building allowed us to create an intermedial installation based once again on the questioning technique. First, we emailed a group of friends interested in design, asking them for their input. With the number of responses received we were able to cover one-half of the wall, on which we pasted their questions in different colours, typefaces and sizes. Each question was posted in its original language. We created a website with the list of questions and images of the projects, which motivated other designers to ask new questions until the entire wall was covered. The entire process was documented and the most salient questions were collected in a journal.

9. Questions raised

How does intermediality favour the transition of dialogue between experts to an open participation project? Can it be affirmed that the graphic display of the questions on the wall and the collection of the questions in a journal managed to invigorate the numeric project? Did the documentation and lessons learned from the first phase make the project more accessible? Does the fact that there were so few repetitions, despite the mix of languages, means that participants checked their ideas with previous participants? Did the students act as multipliers by promoting the dissemination of the project? In order get involved in this role, do they need to be convinced not only of the numerical part but also the creation of the wall with the use of data? Which element really encouraged participation in the project: the creation of a lasting book or the political debate around the role of design?



Images 3 and 4 Installation "Design in Question", ELISAVA, Barcelona.

10. Third case study: a military prison

As part of a joint project for the monument at the Montluc military prison in Lyon, we investigated the various historical events that occurred in this place of imprisonment, torture and deportation. By reading historical documents, speaking with historians, witnesses and prison employees, we were able to formulate more than a thousand questions. These questions were written on small blocks of yellow wood and arranged in key prison locations as part of a large installation open to the public during “Heritage Days”. The questions were also posted on a website. Members of the public who were so inclined could continue the process of questioning the history of this place by reading the memoires.

11. Sensitive questions

Does the unanswered questioning method allow us to raise sensitive issues that history has not addressed adequately? Does it help us to confront assumptions? Does it contribute to taking a more open approach to history and starting a debate on topics of interest? In short, does it provide a better understanding of scientific questioning? How can a monument be designed as a place that promotes intermediality? What is the role of the *in situ* and what is the role of the media? Does gathering testimonials and developing shared questions provide an intermedial approach to the monument? Can it connect historic sites with a common theme and make them more accessible? Does questioning favour the creation of bonds between the past, the present and the future?

12. Final questions

Has this series of questions taught us anything about the method of questioning and, more specifically, its application to intermedial situations? Do we ask ourselves the same questions regardless of the medium? Are some media more affirmative than others? Does the effect of a question differ depending on the medium where it is published? What impact would the dissemination of unanswered questions have on television? Does intermediality make it possible to assign different roles to each medium, each one supported by the function of the other? Does the questioning promote a better understanding of the topic, encourage joint reflection and the ability to share a problem? Does it help to open minds and fight against preconceived ideas and prejudices?



Images 5 and 6 Installation at Mémorial National de la prison Montluc, Lyon.