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Discourse of the “User-centered” Graphic Design

IHARA, Hisayasu

To insist that design must be “user-centered” is a recent typical discourse in the design philosophy. Japanese aesthetician Atsuo Kawamoto has already argued this point. He defined “user-centered” design as the movement in which the aim of design activity is focused on the interaction between design and the “action” of the “user”.

However, it is difficult to apply it to the graphic design. How can “user-centered” graphic design be pushed? How can the “user” for graphic design be described?

In order to argue these points, in this paper, I will critically review three recent discourses: first of all, Paul Stiff’s two articles on Information design, which are “Small worlds: the fourth information design conference” and “From the Bookshelves: *What the User Tells the Designer*”; secondly, Jorge Frascara’s “Graphic Design: Fine Art or Social Science?”; finally, Abraham Moles’s “The Legibility of the World: A Project of Graphic Design”.

It is suggested that they can be considered as a starting point based for "user-centered" graphic design approach. In the context of information design, the main purpose of insisting that design be "user-centered" is criticizing aesthetic-oriented opinions of graphic designer. This point is common denominator in above three discourses. But in this argument there is one problem that the features of user tend to be described from the only functionalistic point of view. As a solution of this problem, Frascara and Moles attempt to describe user as "social-actor." Especially Moles's theory is most successful in focusing on the interaction between activity of graphic design and the "action" of user by using semiotics.

Sound and Technology

ITO, Hiroshi

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the aspects of sound as elements of art and design.

1. Recording Technology

In 1877, Thomas Edison presented his Phonograph. He replaced the air vibration with visual representation, and replaced it once again with aural representation. It is the first process in the history of sound recording to treat sound as isolated information. Emile Berliner invented Gramophone. He developed a way of reproduction of sound. This made recording sound becoming the mass products possible.

2. Reproduction of Music

In the 1920's, Walter Benjamin first observed mechanical reproduction beginning to find in the everyday life. He and Theodor Adorno took opposite attitudes toward mass production. Benjamin maintained that unfocused attention can be critical to the mass art. He insisted on the validity of fragmental perception. Adorno maintained

that mass art is incapable of focused listening.

3. Music and Sound

In 1930's, John Cage used the records as musical instruments in contemporary art music. His concept of silence is a kind of experiments of audience participation. He made it possible to treat listening music as environmental experience which includes all kinds of sounds from natural sound to recorded sound.

4. Sound Environment

In the 1950's and 1960's, the invention of magnetic tape and LP record revolutionized the sound environment. Glen Gould insists on the validity of BGM, a music which can be ignored. He regarded manipulation of sound as environmental experience. This idea can be applied to a strategy of listening and participation to sound environment.