The exhibition design in the face of complexity: For a semio-pragmatic approach of enunciation

Bani Nawel*, Interior Design Department, Higher School of Science and Technology of Design (ESSTED), Tunis, Tunisia

Abstract

The exposition always allows us to 'see' and 'know' as much as it explains through the installation how to 'interact' and 'make signify' its combinatory. It invites the visitor to venture into a process-based experience of constant scavenge into the depths of the meaning to finally lead him, throughout the meeting, to discover its semantic code. The exhibition is, therefore, perceived as a spatial-media engineering work; a spatial rhetoric where the communication's efficiency is reliant on the attractive and expressive performance of the processes and mediums, by which, it condenses its statements, forges its phrases and includes its visitor-reader. Speech setting, course setting, editing games, articulation, situations, signification and interaction, evocation and provocation, etc., will thus be perceived as instruments and materials of a particular language as well as tools of spatial-media strategies.

Keywords: Exhibition, complexity, design process, spatio-media, enunciation.

* **ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Nawel Bani,** Département Design Espace, Ecole Supérieure Des Sciences Et Technologies Du Design, 2011 Avenue de l`indépendance DenDen, Tunis, Tunisia. *E-mail address:* baninawel@gmail.com

1. Introduction

'The exhibition is presented in an extremely complex articulation' (Letocha, 1992, p. 36). We can only be determined to this affirmation by addressing the functionality of the expographic language. It happens that there are few works interested in this level of the research endeavour, still remaining relatively unaffordable. Talking in regards about the existence of a grammar of production persists, therefore, problematic. The notion of grammar involves putting into practice a set of rules defining a category of discourse. Yet, the exhibition designers devote, as highlighted by Veron and Levasseur (1996), in their work, a whole set of hypotheses associated, on the one hand, with the fundamental characteristics of the exhibition as media and aggregated, on the other hand, to rules allowing to build and transpose through this medium a varied discourse typology. This report leads us to perceive the conceptual approach as a complex approach that is hardly conscientious. In fact, we still lack a fundamental theory of expographic language that would reach consensus, and the research in this domain always lacks pertinence in terms of practice transference as well as in terms of appropriateness to the contemporary, pragmatic needs. In this paper, we will try to explore the semi-pragmatic squabbles that underlie the conception and the exploration of the exhibition. The methodology articulates a semi-pragmatic approach, while relating discourses, courses, inter-action, signific-action and actors' positions in the analysis of the enunciation characteristics 'in procession'. The objective is to synthesise the enunciation mechanisms in a systemic model.

2. The exhibition: a complex system

The term exhibition, also exposition, and we take here the latter to show that in its etymology, it invites us to express the complexity of this system, which is the overall of an exhibition/exposition. From the prefix 'ex' to the noun '**position**', we have at the same time a suggestion of the action 'display' and the understanding of a position '**situation**' or even a disposition '**orientation**' in space. The term sends us back, therefore, to the idea of 'displaying' a set of objects according to any given distribution. Abraham Moles (1983, p. 23) defines the term exposition 'as a well-arranged representation of objects placed next to each other to be seen by the public'. It is supposed from this comprehension that the exhibition is above all 'considered as a **system of communication**' (Moles, 1983, p. 23); a significant system updating, through a set of displaying procedures, an effective communication situation. Besides, even the idea of displaying itself involves an intention to communicate and a modality that would be the arrangement, the distribution of elements in space. The exhibition could not, therefore, be significant unless through its entirety, as a **systemic transcoded overall** that will make sense through its entities equally as a medium of its structure and alliances. 'It's semiotic functioning leans on spatial operations based on separation, juxtaposition, fitting, succession, etc, reports'. (Davallon, 1999, p. 89). Hence, it is through the set of these proximate relations that the exhibition comes within the scope of a **complex relational system**; a matrix in which each entity operates as physical presence, and at the same time, that could react as an instrument of discursive performances, interactional and expressive. The use of the notion of 'device' would here be justified by the fact that we explicitly discern logic of means implemented with a view of a predetermined end. As such, the process of installation could be defined as being the realisation of an intention through the establishment of an arranged environment according to a certain **instrumental rationality**. This instrumental rationality would associate **transmission logic** with **experience or experimentation logic** centred on the visitor as much as on the expression. This first definition brings us to consider the installation as an organising framework of the interaction as much as of the expression, meaning, as a device strongly **organised** and strongly **semioticised** whose reception proves, however, not totally open but rather to a certain degree framed by the logic of placement in space.

3. The installation: a matrix of spatio-media performance

Contemporary research studies focusing on the semiotic functionality of the exhibition are characterised by their dominating inscription in the field of information and communication theories. These studies have just raised the question of the exhibition sense by reframing it relative to the **dyad exposition-visitor** seen through the institutional frame that encompasses it and via the visitor's look considered as sense operator, which Bernard Schiele (2003) refers to as the exhibition sense proves here closer to the symbolic functionality (Davallon, 1999) as defined by Jean Davallon in the same sense that the exhibition is perceived as a concrete place for the accomplishment of the sense as much as a theatre for a singular experience lived by the visitor. The question of encoding-reception of discourse opens, thereby, a horizon of reflection extremely large. The expographic device will be understood in this work as a **language system**, a whole decomposable into units and into system links (**diachrony**) related to each other according to systematic associative system (**synchrony**) and contributing to the transposition and the clarification of a specialised discourse and at the same time to the suggestion of a specific, exploratory functioning mode. The exhibition allows us to 'see' and 'know' as much as it explains to us by means of then installation how '**interact with**' and '**signify**' its combinatory and this is how it launches the dual virtues of the media by imposing itself at a time as a medium and as an intermediary for the production as much as for the reception of a discourse. The exhibition would then be considered as spatio-media and the installation as **interface and matrix of encoding-reception**. This means that all the constituent entities of the exhibition would convert into a medium of the installation (organisation act) to operate during the visit as additional hints and constitute systems of hints that would later on combine into a set of **units content/expression** and **units content/interaction** that build system. Such system proves to be generator of sense and even generator of language logics and expographic user logics and as a consequence generator of expographic spatio-media logics. Therefore, the exhibition is no longer considered as only a **language system**, but equally perceived as a device that will make useful the expression and the functionality of language and this is even by integrating in its field visitors and objects organised in a way that will render effective the communication of a discourse. It is, moreover, 'this usage of a layout with the aim of receiving something by somebody according to a given mode that seems to be one of the specific aspects reminiscent of a figure and a media process'. (Parr, 1961). The exhibition process instrumentalises objects by means of the installation to make the exhibition function as a Media. That is to say, to come into 'context' forges the objects to both discourse and percept. Even the fact of considering the installation as a contact interface would consequently invite designers to build it in a way that provides visitors with **comprehension clues** (**signification clues and interaction clues**). Designing an exhibition is as, a matter of fact, building and semiotising an installation according to a **bicephalous approach of encoding-reception**. The act of installation would thereby be comparable to a dialogical exercise during which designers transpose a discourse while prefiguring and modulating by means of editing, the set of inferences or of interactions and expressive resulting issues. Thus, we come to the issue of considering the installation as a matrix of spatio-media performance; which matrix would stand then based on **a dual set of editing inferential and ostensive** at the same time.

4. The installation: a device of bicephalous enunciation

The examination of the device regime of the exhibition demonstrates as a matter of fact that the process of presentation–representation is not sufficient to make the exhibition a communicative device, which is happening in the exhibition is the establishment of a discourse on objects as well as on the way of 'understanding' and 'interacting' with them. The production of sense oscillates, in reality, according to **a dual programme of enunciation**. The first being **spatio-semantic** (related to the spatial modalities of signification) so focused on the space and correlated with the implementation of the discourse course, while the second is **spatio-pragmatic** (related to the spatial modalities of inter-actions) and so centred on the visitor and relative to the implementation of course discourse. These two alternative regimes of signification prove extremely related because it deals with the visitor,

addresses to him to coordinate his encounter with objects and with represented discourses. This consideration leads us to perceive the exhibition as a **space for writing**, in which writing is associated with the externalisation or, figuratively, with the materialisation of conceptual thinking. On the communicative level, and by considering these two alternative regimes of signification, we equally discover that the visit engages the visitor into an exploratory functioning constantly governed by **a dual process of communication**; the first inviting him to think about the **enunciation user slide logic** and consequently **the slide regime of signific-action** and the second engaging him into a reflection on his own posture-on **the navigation user-slide logic** and consequently the **slide-regime of inter-action**. This examination allows as a matter of fact connecting upstream the represented discourse that the visit is to be perceived as a **bicephalous communicative experience** (*informative and communicative*) sensitive as well as cognitive. The visit is not therefore understood as a face to face, but rather perceived as being an **experience of mediatised** interaction or else mediatisable by a spatial and indicating slide that communicates on **user slide logics of inter-action and signific-action**. The efficiency of contact would be ,on its part, dependent on the ability of designers as well as visitors to pay more attention to the communication experience in which they were engaged.

5. Conclusion

The way of implementing an exhibition as a communicational process generating from a social situation of mediatised interaction of a bicephalous target (*informative and communicative*) has led us to make out the semiotic work that ensues from it, meaning to make it communicative as if being dependent on the semiotisation of the material arrangement as much as on the production targets of its language (*making it possible for a reception guidance*) and equally of the social game usage (*the game of connivance between the producer and the visitor*) to found communication. The consequence of this method has led us to think about the manner whose semiotic work of production could optimise the functionality of the expographic language according to strategies defined beforehand (*seen as objects of reflection for the instance of production and as matrices of strategies of appropriation for the instance of reception*). Both turned up concepts served as pivots of this reflection the one of inferential communicational strategies that makes effective the communicative target of the slide and that of ostentation as a mode of semiotic functioning of the exhibition considered as a semantic system with informative intentionality. According to Sperber and Wilson (1989), the ostensive-inferential communication involves two levels of intention: the informative intention and the communicative intention. The informative intention is the fact of willing to inform about something. The communicative intention is meant to inform the audience of the informative intention or as said by Sperber and Wilson (2002, p. 80) to 'make it obvious for the audience and the communicator that the communicator has this informative intention'. The exhibition thus communicates, by means of gestures of implementing the exhibition, information and informs about the information and the informative approach adopted by means of the representation. It displays objects and indicates, through a set of spatial processes of mediatisation, how to look. It is itself, as a display gesture, an ostensive communication act. The expographic space would be presented, then, as a field of connivance built around this communicative intention. Hence, in short, it is about a conceptual point of view to move from a communicational intention open to a communicative target systematic and well-focused.

References

Davallon, J. (1999). *L'exposition a l'œuvre: strategies de communication et mediation symbolique*. Paris, France: Harmattan.

Letocha, L. (1992). *L'exposition est un langage, museo seduction-museo reflexion.* Quebec, Canada: Musee de la civilisation.

Moles, A. (1983). *Vue generale de l'exposition. Expo- Media, Cahier No. 1* (pp. 23–33).

Nawel, B. (2019). The exhibition design in the face of complexity: For a semio-pragmatic approach of enunciation. *Global Journal of Arts Education*. *9*(2), 043-047. https://doi.org/10.18844/gjae.v9i2.3996

Parr, AE. (1961). Mass medium of individualism. *Curator, 4*(1), 39–48.

Schiele, B. (2003). *Le musee de sciences, montees du modele communicationnel et recomposition du champ museal*. Paris, France: Harmattan.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1989). *La pertinence: communication et cognition*. Paris, France: Minuit.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (2002). Pragmatics, modularity and mind-reading. *Mind & Language, Special Issue on Pragmatics and Cognitive Science,* 17, 3–23.

Veron, E. & Levasseur, M. (1996). *Ethnographie de l'exposition, l'espace le corps et le sens, BPI, coll. études et recherché*. Paris, France: Centre Georges Pompidou.