

Situation based analysis

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Our central idea for the analysis of any human to machine and machine to machine interface is the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior emotional quality. We must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to and which radically transforms it.
G. Debord¹

1. Situation

A situation is a concept that calls for a triadic logic. By triadic is implied that at least three entities concur to effect any given situation. Is proven in mathematical theory of complexity that in feedback processes at least a period of three is necessary to see a cascade effect². This does not imply any mathematical rule to allow situation assessment, but is an interesting analogy.

So as a general empirical rule I assume that 3 is the minimum number of entities to be considered in any design. For example in a theatrical form of spectacle there is the text, the artistic production, comprehensive of cast and crew, and the audience, their behaviour, motivation and stamina, to determine the result of the production.

A situation is generally composed by various concurring factors that are designed to concur and collide in a specific space/time to determine a specific effect¹. Situation as a notion and as a conceptual instrument pertains both to psychology and to history of ideas. What I propose here is to use it explicitly as a conceptual framework in which to perform various types of analysis.

A situation is an occurrence of intentions, people and objects in any real world space at a certain time. This determines at least a tree of concurrent causal chains to intervene, and observation is key to assist the major characteristic of a given situation. In any case we use the “real world assumption” (RWA): no situation can be isolated completely from a more general context. As we see we will use the RWA to our advantage.

¹ Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organisation and Action.

² Li and Yorke, Period 3 implies Chaos [CHK]

My approach to reading situations is top down: instead of insulating the components of a given situation, as in a marriage or in a film production, in an attempts of hierarchically order them, I begin observing situations as a whole. I expect patterns of a different order emerge first.

In time I developed a holistic set of tools to look and act upon a situation to the sole scope of assessing it. Many of those are particularly well known in forms of theatrical performance, dance, mime and in activism of avant-guards movements.

The situation assessed is thereafter “cooked” to favour such patterns to emerge, and exploit them for our analysis purposes.

Most of the tradition of the western world aims to let those pattern rise with aesthetically determined connotations. Is no coincidence, since this “free form approach” is common to art practices. Is also a and martial arts.

As soon as a particular sound or figure that evolves in a geometry, behaviour, harmony or its opposite of negative sign (destructures, crumbles, emerges as ugly or strongly disproportional) the observation can lead to the first hypothesis and the first lines of actions can be drawn.

As we said situations can be designed, or better said “cooked”: for example a performance, a car race, a spectacle of fireworks or a dinner can be conceived as “cooking” of a particular situation were with time the space is designed accordingly.

Situation design is traditionally connected with perception and emotion design.

Theatrical performances can be seen as large situations. A such any site specific performance is nothing else than a specific situation were the environment becomes one of the main characters of the story envisioned to be told (if any).

Situations usually just “happen”. To create interesting, productive situations we must use specific type of design.

Architecture and particularly city-scape and gardening envision entire ideologies of design. They craft society according to the lines of this ideological standpoints, imposing lay lines, barriers, roads, exits and so on. Certain type of situations constructed to “happen” in those spaces when successful embed meaning to meaningful actions. Never forget that also the unforeseen, the accident, the hack can as meaningfully often populate the given situation with positive global result.

Temples, fireplaces and TV tops, ceremonies, tables and chairs, tea cups and objects of cult. The design of the object is, when design is considered as functional to a situation, the result of the coexistence of functions, forms and energies determined by a

primitive desire to effect of a situation as well if not more than the purpose to its use. And any object can off course be used in unplanned to the effect of creating unexpected situations, detouring them, open new possibilities. For example imagine a crucifix that hides a blade inside.

Surrealists, functionalists and other XIX and XX century designers have long explored in these directions. Moreover Situationists have hinted to the consequences of design in crafting right to the ideological fabric of a society. In the Netherlands as an example the "New Babylon" project by Constant explored the possibilities of a leisure society and its possible aesthetics, from the sixties, Deborg was influential in the development of the T.A.Z. idea in Hakim Bey, in the '80es, and so on.

2. Transformations and transformers

I consider the study of interaction a subset of the study of transformation²

Situation analysis is a concept developed with this name to be used mostly in media interaction and performance design, but both these ends can be intended on a larger semantics than the shortsighted hyper specialised a common one.

I used it over the years and is not strictly original. My own influence is both renaissance authors like Giulio Camillo and Giordano Bruno, Hakim Bey's notion of Poetic Terrorism and the Bauhaus minimalist rethinking of the everyday object.

See <http://www.trasformatorio.net> on this topic.

Art that follows transformations of situations into other situations (fluxes) shall be used to create multilayering narratives of great interest. The power of a change of narrative is even stronger of the change of paradigm evoked by Thomas Kuhn.

Narratives are to be orchestrated toward opening spaces of confrontation and dialogue in a semantic space that is moreover political and has implications to the core of any given society. We cannot anymore pretend that those events are not semantically enriched and emotional events, using only quantitative approach in their analysis.

More radically, objects that encode in themselves situation design, envisions ways to transform their situations in themselves. I call objects designed for this purpose, as meta-objects, or sensible entities transformators.

This is, in its simple terminological core, my approach to interface design, community design and performance. As such is

radically different from simple mainstream idea that product design, placing and marketing, is the core of the job.

I cherish this difference.

To follow some concepts that are practically related to transformation methodology here proposed and are the centre of my attention so far.

3. Limes, Liminality

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."
A.C. Clark, third law of prediction
"Sorcery: the systematic cultivation of enhanced consciousness or non-ordinary awareness & its deployment in the world of deeds & objects to bring about desired results."
Hakim Bey, T.A.Z.

For the purpose of this text we intend by liminality the area of perception adjacent to conscious perception (as in sub-liminal). It is necessary an act of will to bring a message from the liminal zone of perception to our full attention.

As an example imagine the small noise of the fridge motor. If the situation is a daytime conversation you will not notice it, yet you can focus your attention to it and you perceive a relevant change enough of it. Change the situation: while the physical qualities of the noise stay the same it can be the shift of one of the elements in the situation that makes it emerge out of the limen to our attention: imagine the same small noise relevance during a sleepless night, or a sudden loud crackling noise coming from the motor disrupting the conversation and so on.

Most of the normal activities of Dowse will be reflected in the situation space at liminal levels of perceptions. Moreover the act of dowsing will be developed and designed to activate perceptive states at limen³.

4. Awareness

Awareness is the zone of sensorial perception to which an event is perceived with the system of causes that concur to its happening, and both are brought to be acknowledged. To be aware of an activity of the information flow routed in and out our own premises (or space of responsibility) is, as an example, the scope of the existence of dowse, a routing device whose scope is to bring to senses network traffic events (and allow one to act upon them). Also in this case the organisation and relevance of co-causes and meaning for events in this invisible space are to be represented in a scale of values that might include relevance and urgency.

Shape, light quality, shadows, sounds character and musicality, speed of movement, interdependence with neighbouring elements, particles attitude, colour and modes of organisations, as well of other sensorial qualities, are all instruments tactically to be used as awareness modes, to represent information in the

perceptual sphere of human and non-human activities alike. By non human you have not to go too far: our homes are also the homes of cats and plants...

5. Flow

As any musician (or concert going) knows change in time, permanence, habitude, flow of complex representations are very important factors. From them we are able to sense what is normal, what is new and what have been evolving into something. Changing behaviours and patterns of complex and natural systems alike exhibit flows. We shall give flows a relevant aspect that is central in all transformation strategies. I want to refer here also explicitly to aspects of qualitative representations in natural system modelling. As an example consider the notion of space of phases, introduced in statistical mechanics and how it has been popularised by complex system theory.

6. Aesthetics

Behavioural semantics to be skinned by anyone. All types of interface will then be possible and experimentation encouraged by design: software visualisation, mechanical, light and sound agent based, email or messaging or else. All possible way of representing data flows can be invented, implemented and integrated in modules. This gives us freedom, as Dowse project, to go far for our own aesthetics, simulating and experimenting on our own principles even on future machines yet to be invented. Data flow over time with the maximum amount of freedom.

7. Feedback

The result is feed to the input

8. Synesthesia

9. Synchronicity

10. Co-Design

11. Open World Assumption

12. Existential Clause

13. Cases

BIBLIOGRAFY AND REFERENCES