

Aesthetics of Interaction

What I saved from the first insight I had is:

The way we design the interaction creates the aesthetics of it.

An artefact shouldn't be always beautiful to be aesthetically attractive, it depends on the meaning that this artefact has in the intention of the designer. The designer can design with different intentions: functional purpose, playfulness, criticism, emotional purpose, etc. We can add meaning to the object, change the way we use it, transform the object itself in something else, or change the emotional reaction of the users.

Aesthetics of interaction is the way we add meaning to the design of the interaction of an artefact.

In the mind map I highlighted three elements: aesthetics, emotion and criticism.

Aesthetics makes us perceive! Emotions make us feel! Criticism makes us think!

Aesthetics of interaction is perceived through the aesthetics of the object. Aesthetics describes what we can perceive through our senses – how it feels, looks, smells, tastes, sounds, moves – during the experience with the artefact – in a specific situation, with a specific context of use. Aesthetics is strongly connected with the beauty – but not necessary with the good, pleasant and nice acceptance –, with the coherency to the rules & principles – that define proportions and canons – and with taste – which is a matter of pleasure and satisfaction of the user. While beauty can be measurable through canons and pure judgments, taste is subjective and affects the perception of the beauty (i.e. we can judge a sculpture beautiful, because respects the 'canonical' beauty, but nevertheless don't like it).

Emotions make us feel deeper sensations. Emotions require a link between what we perceive through senses and our memories. When we integrate our perception with our memories we feel emotions. These emotions can make us reflect with a logical and critical thinking. Donald Norman presents these elements of emotions in his framework, with three stages: visceral, behavioural and reflective. The aesthetical and emotional parts of interaction are very important for the user experience. Through aesthetics and emotions we can describe the user's perceptions and responses that results from the user of the object. I would say that user experience could be connected also with criticism, ambiguity and playfulness; what is the difference than with aesthetics of interaction? For me the difference lies in the user. While user experience is based on what the user perceived, the aesthetics of interaction is based on what the designer intends communicate.

Finally we have criticism, which makes us think. Criticism works through provocation, intrigue and the creation of a twist. Unlike ambiguity, which allows the users to interpret the object without force them to a specific conclusion, the criticism should have a specific aim designed by the designer. Criticism shouldn't be seen as negative critical design, designing gently provocative artefacts can go further the critical design. Negative critical design has the power to have a strong emotional impact on the user, but short-term effect – because as humans we try to dismiss unpleasant sensations –, while gently provocative artefacts can be adopted by the users in their everyday life, remind them their aim each time they will use them and lead the behaviour of the user.

As we know and as shown in the mind map, there are several elements linked to each other that creates a network around the words 'Aesthetics of Interaction'. The most important elements are: aesthetics, emotions, criticism, UX, appraisal, coherency, playfulness, usability, beauty, intrigue, provocation, ambiguity and motivation. When we design for interaction all of them are useful, none of them is essential. The variety of these concepts and the different fields (technology, psychology, philosophy, sociology, art, etc.) involved in the topic makes this subject extremely complex. How to design the aesthetics of interaction is learnable only through experience. The designers should be at first users: experience different situations, explore different concepts and play with different solutions proposed by other designers. Then they should start experiment and grow this knowledge, by creating artefacts with different aims and different conditions, in order to mastering the subject. Only when they will be able to see the subject of aesthetics of interaction from many completely different points of view, then they will be able to add different meaning to the design of the interaction of their artefacts.