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JANELAS POLIFÔNICAS: UMA EXPERIÊNCIA PROJETUAL POR CENÁRIOS
POLYPHONIC WINDOWS: A PROJECT EXPERIENCE THROUGH SCENARIOS
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Abstract

In this article, we approach the theme "We have never been so digital" through a project experience oriented by the strategic design methodology of scenarios. In this experience, led by UNISINOS University's *Seeding Lab*, all project interactions and disseminated results were made possible by the use of digital resources. We started from an initial premise: social distancing puts distinct realities in evidence. With that being said, what realities are these? How do subjects feel and live this very peculiar moment? In order to answer these questions, we interviewed 30 randomly-selected people via WhatsAppand gathered images posted on social networks that characterized life's dissensions during the period of social distancing. The gathered visual and sound images were fragmented and assembled in scenarios that represent distinct realities. The audiovisual products, entitled *Polyphonic Windows*, promote an aesthetic

experience based on polyphony. These scenarios produce effects of sense on the society at a critical dimension.

1   Introduction

In this article, we present the process and critical thinking that accompanied the resulting audiovisual product of a project experience entitled *Polyphonic Windows*, which took place during the period of social distancing caused by COVID-19 in Southern Brazil. This activity was planned and developed by the *Seeding Lab*, UNISINOS University's strategic design laboratory, affiliated to the DESIS network (http://unisinos.br/seedinglab/). The main goal of this type of activity is to put in evidence, through the audiovisual narrative, distinct realities, worldviews, feelings, and perceptions of subjects that faced this very uncertain and peculiar moment. We understand that, in representing these realities through scenarios, we also resignify them. Our greatest challenge was to project remotely. To do so, we adapted traditional workshop techniques, related to co-creation, and used digital tools and resources for the collective construction of proposals. Therefore, even if physically distant, we were able to perform this experience together. In the next section, we present the project path and a discussion about the process.

2   The project path

The chosen design methodology was strategic design, which proposes that the project process must be done through scenarios. This manner of designing operates at a sensitive dimension because it amplifies the discourses of a diversity and plurality of subjects. It consists of a transdisciplinary methodology of ethnographic nature, based on participant observation and photomontage techniques. We are reminded that "the activity of participant observation is inspired by visual ethnography, which seeks the interpretation of a culture's ethos and uses the technique of photography for recording." (Silva, 2020, p. 94, our translation). In short, the visual and sound images gathered in digital ambiance were used as project input in the construction of the presented utopian scenarios. The scenario is represented by non-canonical narratives that speculate and imagine possible futures from articulating the present. The project path involved eight designers, among which were Master's and Ph.D. candidates and students from UNISINOS University's Graduate Program in Design, who worked remotely and collaboratively in a process mediated by both synchronous and asynchronous tools. They used live transmission platforms, such as *Zoom* and *Teams*, and file sharing platforms, such as *Google Drive*, among others. Thereby, it was necessary to adapt and resignify traditional workshop processes and techniques that usually occur on-site.

The projection involved three interrelated stages: 1. gathering of visual images posted on social networks that represented life's dissensions during the social distancing period and also of sound images from interviews conducted via WhatsApp; 2. fragmentation of the collected images; and 3. assembly of the visual and sound fragments. The image gathering was made on the premise that new visual narratives emerged from the dissensions of the social distancing period. Thus, for approximately 20 days, more than 300 images were gathered in social networks. Inspired by the ethnographic technique of participant observation in digital ambience (Silva, 2020), each subject/researcher observed and collected the images that, in some way, would narrate how the observed subjects were facing social distancing and the imminent risk of COVID-19 contagium. There was no intention to classify such behaviors but only to perceive what was being narrated.

This activity demanded an interpretive, emotional and sensitive approach from the researchers. During the first stage, 30 different subjects were interrogated on WhatsApp with the question: "If you could shout something out your window, and the whole world could hear it, what would it be?". The intention behind this question was listening to these subjects' wishes and feelings through the metaphor of the window, since many protests were occurring during the same period in Brazil and throughout the world with people banging pots and pans out their windows, also known as "*panelaços*". We asked the question to a diversity of people who were close contacts, friends, or acquaintances of the researchers. Our goal was not to gather a sample of subjects with a defined socio-demographic profile. We understand that each subject experiences social distancing in a distinct and unique manner. Same sex, age, and class individuals, for example, reported completely different experiences – that is, we did not want to determine our participants based on social stereotypes. This experience promoted subjectivity, and that is why it is polyphonic.

We worked with 30 audio files because that was the number of participants that answered the question during the stipulated period for this stage of the research but we emphasize that the same experience could have been done with 5 or 100 participants. Plus, the window represents, at a symbolic dimension, the opening of the subject's intimacy in a course that involves the house-world relation and puts subject-

multitude in dialogue. In the proposed question, the windows allowed the interviewed subjects to communicate desires, dreams, and wishes towards the world. The choice of using the *Instagram* social network as a vehicle of divulgation for the scenarios reinforces the metaphor of the window because of the grid format that the social network presents. In a moment of confinement, social networks such as *Instagram* constitute windows to the world.

The second stage of this experience consisted of fragmenting the gathered visual and audio images, using resources from *Google Slides*, *Adobe Illustrator*, which is a visual images editor, and *MP3 Corte*, a sound images editor. We understand that the fragmentation amplifies the interpretative space, operating with diverse systems of signification. Each researcher executed randomly the fragmentation of images, which were individually chosen. These fragments constitute the project input of this activity.

Next, the third stage was the assembly of the visual and sound fragments. "The assembly presupposes the fragmentation of reality" (Bürger, 2012, p. 132, our translation) and therefore amplifies the perspective on the real. Thus, the audio files were mixed, and the sounds were overlapped, amplifying polyphony, and promoting an aesthetic experience. We emphasize that, according to Bakhtin (1992), polyphony is the relation between numerous discourses, an intersection of multiplicities of voices in a discursive narrative. Thus, the images were assembled using photomontage principles and techniques, which are inspired by the aesthetic movements of Dadaism and Cubism, particularly. The montage happened collectively, via *Google Drive* sharing tools, through which the researchers could work in synchrony. Thereby, 18 hybrid (sound and visual) narratives were produced, characterizing the scenario. Each narrative alludes to the window, symbol of social distancing. The scenarios were shared at the *Seeding Lab* website, part of the UNISINOS University's Graduate Program in Design[1], in a profile created on the social network *Instagram*[2], and they were also wall projected in front of buildings in the city of Porto Alegre.

We consider that the experimental activity aimed at supporting artistic processes, in a project model in which the perspective of reality was not restricted by prescriptive and normative models. Traditional workshop techniques and tools were adapted so that it was possible to work in real time in a context of social distancing. We infer that utopia is a strategy that favors creativity and inventiveness, and therefore assists the transformation of reality as we represent it.

3   Critical reflection

Facing an unprecedented situation that took humanity to interrupt their routines and reflect upon their ways of living, we have the opportunity to explore the potentialities of strategic design to imagine other post-pandemic realities. In order to face such challenges, we summon digital resources under different aspects: in the processes, in the techniques, in the tools and in the means of communication. The methodology we used allowed us to question the *status quo* by evidencing that there is not a single state of things but plural and diverse realities. It was also possible to identify the emergences, the signs of change in the system. The audiovisual narrative anticipates such signs by denouncing and manifesting, connotatively, social inequalities and the political crisis being faced. From this point on, it will be possible to project strategies that support the rearrangement of systems so that they survive future projects. Developing strategies is about making judgements about the future and acting to adapt to changes or to catalyze them. Designing strategies requires sensibility and imagination. It is an open act of exploration, creation and proposition of senses. Strategic design has, in its transdisciplinary project proposal, a possibility of interconnecting different competences, views and voices on the project of strategies (Freire, 2017). Besides, strategic design can contribute to the creation of sociotechnical devices that, through the creative recombination of existent technologies, result in the production of new meanings (Franzato *et al.*, 2015).

According to Zurlo (2010), strategic design aims to generate effects of meaning (which is the character of value to someone). In other words, the production of meaning is the reading key to strategy. The same author presents three strategic capacities related to the visual relevance of design. The first one consists in the capacity of seeing, which goes beyond the reading of reality, placing design in a restless and curious position facing social phenomena. In relation to seeing, the author also proposes the second capacity of foreseeing, which is a critical anticipation of the future. Finally, the third capacity is to make others see, which turns visible the field of what is possible and assists in the decision-making process. We understand the effects of meaning referred by Zurlo (2010) as results of processes of signification and of symbolic dimension. It is possible to observe that the audiovisual project *Polyphonic Windows* explores the capacities of: 1. seeing, because it presents a reading that goes beyond reality; 2. foreseeing[3], because it performs a critical anticipation on social distancing; and 3. making see, because it turns visible new representations of distinct realities. Such capacities are inherent to projection thorough scenarios. In this sense, we understand that the act of designing through scenarios is also understood as the act of narrating, according to Bentz (2015). The narrative, thus, is the locus of imagination and representation of future visions, because it makes see the project strategy. Furthermore, the project is an imagetic narrative, for it operates with visual strategies that can make see visions of the future. Moreover, "the language of images gains special relevance

on the project process because it corresponds to the world of reference (not the referent's) and to the world of imagination, that is, a textual space of delirium, dream and fantasy." (Bentz, 2015, p. 233, our translation). The project through images is at the center of strategic design's strategic elaboration when it projects through scenarios because it allows the connection of multiple viewpoints with sensibility and inventiveness.

The images, in this study, are a significant matter of polysemic nature and act in the production of meaning (Barthes, 2012). We add that the image, by representing reality, produces meaning over the real – and therefore resignifies it. Besides, according to Rancière (2012, p. 12, our translation), images "are operations, relations between the whole and the parts, between a visibility and a potency of signification and affection that is associated to it, between expectations and that which fills them". Therefore, the image lets imagination flow, which, according to Bachelard (2007), lies on the act of subject creation, not as one who unveils the truth but as one who creates it.

Aiming to project through scenarios which support imagination and the production of meaning, we summon utopia. It presents itself as a driving force, part of strategic design's project strategy (Silva, Bentz, Franzato, 2019). According to Reyes (2015, p. 149, our translation), "it is in the strength of utopia and imagination that the rational processes of project are fed and gain sustenance". Furthermore, utopia:

> [...] creates a field between the impossible present and an image of possible future in which the tensions and conflicts can be made explicit. [...] Utopia is not a type of fantasy that removes us from reality but, on the contrary, it imposes a reflection upon the present from an image of the future. (Reyes, 2015, p. 90, our translation).

We agree with Reyes (2015, p. 97, our translation) when he explains that design "uses future scenarios to put in evidence the present conflicts once there is recognition of current limitations in face of new changes – in other words, the future is visualized and projected to see the present, its tensions and conflicts". Thus, we do not point out future occurrences but we perform an operation upon reality. Therefore, we chose to project through utopian scenarios which constitute a methodology that allows us to imagine other ways of living and feeling the world. The resulting devices are our strategy to face reality, altering the *status quo* and creating new effects of meaning in society (Silva, Bentz, Franzato, 2019, p. 176, our translation).

4   Final considerations

The main goal of this experience was to put in evidence plural and diverse realities based on utopian scenarios, which face the challenges imposed by the social distancing induced by COVID-19. We consider that these scenarios amplify the interpretative space, disrupt the univocal view of reality and therefore produce effects of meaning upon the real through strategic design. Thus, *Polyphonic Windows* assists in foreseeing the multiplicity of points of view of the subjects, instigating, through imagination, the perspective of new horizons.

We understand that this project path sheds light upon the potentiality of technologies that allow creative collaboration (such as *Google Slides*, for instance) on the challenge of designing through scenarios. Designing remotely, with synchronous and asynchronous tools, proved itself possible and viable. Digital means which were, during the pandemics, the only possibility of research and data production, allowed us to reflect upon the necessity of face-to-face meetings for the project process in an increasingly digital world.

Exploring, experimentally, audiovisual resources is a metadesign activity that gives the project a critical and reflexive dimension. Experiences such as this one find, in digital ambience, ways of thinking about design, its processes and its action upon the world. Designing through networks, sharing results on networks and on the streets, in the middle of a pandemic, pointed to the fact that digital transformation of design processes is not only possible but also necessary.

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1 Available at: http://unisinos.br/seedinglab/566-2/. Accessed: 17 October 2020.

2 Available at: https://www.instagram.com/janelaspolifonicas/. Accessed: 17 October 2020.

3 We prefer the term foreseeing instead of prevising for we consider is more appropriate to the act of imagining, a type of critical anticipation. To previse implies the act of guessing what is going to happen in a predictive manner.