

Return to the Design of “White Space”

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Abstract: This paper emphasizes the “white space” design closely related to the simple design style, deeply analyzes the meaning and function of “white space” design, summarizes and extends the connotation of “white space” design through classic design ideas and cases, so as to guide the construction and innovation of industrial design, so as to mobilize user participation and improve user experience.

1. Introduction

“Simple, practical and people-oriented” is a design concept widely used in UI, web, graphic, brand, industrial design and other fields. It has lasted for a long time, and even is the mainstream design trend today. There is an ingenious technique - “white space” design, which can make the design layout balanced, highlight the functions and characteristics of the product, make the user's vision focus on the key points of the product, and leave the user's associative space and room for independent operation. It is an embodiment of the design wisdom without emptiness.

2. Design Soul Beyond Simplicity- “White Space”

The real breakthrough of industrial design in theory and practice comes from the Deutscher Werkbund established in 1907. Its purpose was to design excellent products through the combination of art, industry and handicrafts. At the same time, it also determined the core of international modernist design “the purpose of design is people rather than things, and the form of design follows the function”. It pursued the principle of “less is more”, which coincided with the requirements of the era of mass machine production, and become the inevitable and best choice at that time.

When the product changes from scarcity to abundance, just relying on the quality itself is not enough to face the competitive marketplace. The rich connotation of design and the sense of identity established with users become important. Therefore, in the 1980s, scholars represented by Donald Norman focused on the emotional design. He believed that a well developed and integrated product can enhance the feelings of mind and enable users to have a pleasant feeling to appreciate, use and own it^[1].

This kind of design idea is also reflected in the practice of Japanese designer Kenya Hara. The MUJU brand he planned does not emphasize the so-called fashion, but restores the original meaning of commodity value at a affordable price, and sublimates the product to the cultural level in the humble design.

Whether Professor Norman's emotional design or Kenya Hara's simplicity to pursuit of freedom, the author believe that its core is the “white space” design. It is not a newly emerging concept, but a design trend worthy of introspection and application.

Cheng Baoyi said in his book: “The concept of 'emptiness' is very essential in Chinese thought. In music, 'emptiness' is expressed in silence. In poetry, 'emptiness' is expressed through the interruption and reversal.^[2]” Therefore, the perceptual picture of “emptiness” composed of rain, fog, snow and ice in nature has been abstracted into the “white space” in Chinese painting and poetry, removing all the superfluous, secondary and meaningless, retaining only the most important, and then becoming a kind of humanistic spirit and aesthetic taste. Visualize and apply this spirit and interest to modern design has become an important part of Oriental design aesthetics, including China and Japan.

Four hundred years ago, Sen no Rikyu, the tea master of Japan, his favorite Japanese tea serving and drinking culture “Wabi-Sabi”, influenced by Chinese Zen culture, adheres to an unfinished and silent aesthetics; The “dry landscape” courtyard takes stones as mountains and sand as water. This minimalist landscape gardening also adheres to the unfinished and silence aesthetics under changes. In Contemporary Japanese design, Naoto Fukasawa's “product fitness 80”, Tadao Ando's bare concrete, Kenya Hara's graphic design... The “Silence” is a spirit. Things don't need to be done fully, to leave space, and the unfinished part will be perfect in use^[3].

In the 1980s, German designer Rams put forward one of the 10 standards for good design: “Good design is unobtrusive.^[4]” that’s also points out the purpose of the design needs to leave a certain space for the user's personality expression. Perhaps because human have experienced a lot of wars, poverty and hunger in the modern developments, there is always a sense of insecurity in people's hearts, which needs to be filled and characterized by material, wealth or superficial prosperity. Therefore, the essential simplicity and blank of richness are easy to be forgotten and covered up by noisy business.

“White space” is not a “blank”, but a sense of life style after repeated thinking and subtraction. It is an organic, dynamic and interactive. A typical traditional Chinese painting presents a blank with a hazy object image, which is widely used in the picture, so as to satisfy the aesthetic consciousness of the viewer, and mobilize the viewer's experience, feeling, and knowledge.

Chinese designer Yang Mingjie designed a set of Chinese tableware for French brand Hennessy in 2017 with the excellent traditional aesthetic and design concepts. The edge of the bowl has a slightly undulating curve, which is convenient for hands to hold at a high place. The concave arc part of the bowl is more convenient for placing chopsticks; To limit the capacity of rice, which metaphors the Chinese wisdom of “a meal is 80% full”. Its deeper meaning is to adjust the excessive desire for material in life to a moderate 80% state, and the remaining 20% can let us get more and higher pleasure.

3. Connotation and Operation of “White Space” Design

Previous designs focused on “users or activities”-centered and transformed them as objects. Today's designers no longer provide products in their unilateral idea, but to think with users and give them imagination and display space. Users will continue to complete the product experience in use. Therefore, the design needs to return to the wisdom of “white space”:

① “White space” is a design containing life philosophy. Donald Norman said “people can't be wrong between people and design, only design is wrong”. The essence of design is communication. It's a silent communication between designers and users through products, which is the design language. It also proves what Rams said “good products can speak themselves”. Therefore, the starting point of design is not only the design concept, but the life philosophy related to human

behavior. If we find it, understand and apply it, we can reach a natural link with users.

② “White space” design needs to reserve user interaction space. Gibson put forward the concept of “affordance” to explain how we view the world - the world is not a pure material attribute, but is endowed with meaning in interaction. Affordance is essentially an interactive perspective design, which includes the cognitive response caused by vision and the behavioral possibility of interaction. Famous Starbucks emphasizes the availability of “space” rather than “drinking”. No matter whether there is a demand for coffee or not, we still pay for “space” and gradually get used to a cup of coffee; Naoto Fukasawa's unconscious design is to reduce the user's perceived load to within milliseconds, so that people can unconsciously perceive the availability of products.

③ “White space” design should focus on creating memory points. Human attention resources are very limited. Too much design information will consume attention resources and make it difficult for people to obtain key information. The human brain is actually very “advanced”. It can automatically fill in the things that are not closed, connect the discontinuous things and regard them as a whole, and supplement or even enrich the content of things according to its own cultural background and cognitive experience.

④ “White space” design is committed to shaping the brand story. Products can meet the basic design concepts, but only brands can make products realize value to a greater extent. The Danish futurist Ralph Chanson, who is famous for the “dream society”, predicted that “future enterprises will create value by providing consumers with dreams and different perceptual experience.” Through their unique experiences and stories, enterprises that have been successful in the global market, can communicate with consumers and share this connotation. The dreams and stories conveyed by Apple, Nike, Harley Davison and Ferrari have become famous. The story does not end with the unilateral communication of the speakers, but allows the listeners to “supplement” it in their mind and resonated. This is the opportunity for users to participate design together.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the “white space” design does not mean nothing, but contains rich design ideas. It is a part of the overall design. It makes the design more concise and relaxed, more focused, more memory points, and allows users to participate in interaction. It is the refinement and choice of design themes, the expression of simplified design techniques, and an important opportunity to create humanistic spirit - it can bring people to a space-time with endless imagination, so that people can freely imagine, feel and experience there.

“White space” here, of course, is not only a design technique, but also what Heidegger said: a grasp of “Dasein” (life of “existence”).

References

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