

Reflecting on Web Design

Before enrolling in Advanced Topic in Interactivity (York University, Canada), I did not give attention to interaction or interface design. In fact, my past education, I had a bad experience with those topics and ended up despising them despite their forthcoming dominance in the design landscape. In my current context of masters candidate, I realised that it is not the time to close myself to particular domains of design, but should embrace everything I can during this (last) diploma. Advanced Topic in Interactivity helped me to understand better this sphere of design and to grow more critical to graphic design as well.

I had the opportunity to meet designers from Facebook and Google that shared what they know, and also their vision about design. However, the turning point was when I viewed the film “Design Disruptor”, which talked about product design and how new services disrupted established entities. This movie echoed in this course especially because all the products designers built were apps — which were based on interfaces. All those encounters influenced this class and the approach I took to explore the project.

Something that I grew critic particularly about during the semester — and perhaps that explain some motivation behind the approach I had on the project and furthermore on my thesis work — is the immense number of tools for app development, prototyping, design, etc. that is offered to web and product designers. As I entered this course, I already had to learn some of them, which revealed to be very useful and I am hopeful that I will be able to reuse them someday. However, the more I did research around those tools and how to use it, the more I discovered other tools that would complement, augment, facilitate and other functionality of a tool that I was already learning. I found this never-ending potential and extremely high speed of “progress” very confusing and disorienting. It occasionally feels like an “anarchy of permanent revolution” (Johnson, 1997). The time I would put to compare the different tools and see what would be better for my task than the other takes time on my creation. I reacted to this situation through my project and made something positive about it.

The idea behind nurturing creativity in an alternate way through play and rules with an application was to break from the learning curve I would have to face everytime I had to learn another tool. Thus, to reduce it to a gamification of the creative process and to follow rules to draw sketches erased the learning curve as well as simplifying the act of making. There would be no need to look at video tutorials, attend to workshops, etc.: just create. And in the end, all those new tools share the same goal as I intended. However, I have felt that at some point, in the process of creating my app, which I could not use one tool to complete my task. There was a constant fragmentation in my process in order to deliver a nished product. Of course, I have seen that developers of the tools that I used are aware of the gaps between each of the different products and somewhat work to bridge them. However, this situation pushes me to ask why and how this fragmentation happened?

The approach I had on my project was greatly inspired by the Conditional Design movement, which is meant to be driven by logic and the “most important aspects of a process are time, relationship and change” (Maurer, 2008). There is only the process between the designer and the outcome. That is the feature that I wanted to highlight throughout my app and the feel of it. It ironic that my skills could not achieve to apply this feature in the process of creating the app itself.

In the perspective of my thesis work, the project explored in Advanced Topic in Interactivity opened my horizons and helped me understood better interface design. Working with the web browser is also working with an interface. With the current context of graphic design, it becomes more relevant that “we [should] call all designers ‘interface designers’” (Bonsiepe, 1999) because it becomes more important to design means to access and navigate through information than the form of a message. In that case, perhaps there was too much focus on navigation and interface design and not enough on ideas that truly goes beyond what is being made in product design today.

By doing the process of designing an application in the course, I reflected on the iterative particularity of web design. The difference between web and traditional design is the physicality of the design object. Two-dimensional design is anchored in time by print or other means. Meanwhile, web design is a “rarely substantive, realised product” (Bruinsma, 2014); there is always an upcoming update or a new version that features new functionality and alters what was done before. Nothing is nished nor de nitive. The idea of evolution is very appealing but must be achieved in a way that the progress is substantive and, in the end, result in a more meaningful iteration.