

Diversified Wayfinding Design

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Abstract

The present study illustrated diversified designs under the current wayfinding system design. The advancement of science and technology, urban construction, close communication and cross-boundary trends, etc. made the wayfinding design no longer an isolated design, but integrate with the environment, architecture, space, information, emotion, technology, culture and life. The features for the ways of designing wayfinding were analyzed from three perspectives: the signage system, cross two-dimension and cross-boundaries. The diversified wayfinding design not only provided the sense of order in a particular environment or space, but also beautified the environment and set the mood. Moreover, it could offer people pleasure and delight so as to bring a healthier and more reasonable lifestyle and make the design to integrate with the life in a harmonious way.

Key words: Wayfinding design; Diversity; Environment and space

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INTRODUCTION

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Wayfinding design could be seen everywhere in public places of our urban life including airports, subways, shopping malls, hospitals, and schools. However, with the development of the economy and the society, people are having increasingly more requirements on their

living environment. Except for the material aspects, people start to attach more importance to the spirit and the environmental and cultural aspects. As an indivisible element in modern living environment, wayfinding design is undergoing diversified expansion while changing our way of understanding public information and experiencing public places.

The ways and media of information transmission in wayfinding design are extended from traditional plan to the overall space. Wayfinding is not merely attached to the wayfinding plate but also to the walls, grounds, ceilings, the air and surface of all sorts of available objects; it not merely relies on printing but also can be made manually and can rely on light or projection or can be directly embodied by material object; wayfinding can not only be shown by wayfinding plates, but also by objects and architectures, odor can be smelt, surface can be touched or sound can be heard, or lighting system or vegetation. All in all, any kind of object or surface could become the carrier to transmit information for wayfinding design, which not only provides the designers with larger available and creative space, but also greatly enriches media for people to experience the environment.

Wayfinding design is one of elements in the environment, and its connotation is extended imperceptibly. It's not only used for informing positions and giving directions but gradually steps in and affects the people's lifestyle together with the environment and naturally integrates into modern life. As an important link in environmental and special expression, wayfinding design serves people in space and is no longer an isolated design, but integrated with environment, architecture, space, information, emotion, technology, culture and life. Therefore, it not only brings people a rapid way for giving directions and convenient and effective life, but also cares more about people's experience and interaction with the environment. The wayfinding design not only provided the sense of order in a particular environment and space,

but also beautified the environment and set the mood. Moreover, it could offer people pleasure and delight so as to bring a healthier and more reasonable lifestyle and make the humans and design to integrate with the life in a harmonious way.

Wayfinding design is extended for the reasons as below: Firstly, it's scientific and technological factor. The development of science and technology brings the ability of people into full play and strengthens the ability of people to know, change and adapt to nature. After several times of industrial revolution in the world, especially the appearance of computer and internet, the human being steps into a new and rapidly-developed information society, all sorts of new media and new materials are created ceaselessly and they affect the people's living environment and lifestyle continuously. New technology and materials are applied in the art with astonishing speed and combine and contact with art. For example, now the emergence of such art forms as digital tech, image, multi-media and interaction not only greatly enriches form and technique of expression of the art but brings broader creation platform to wayfinding design. Digital tech and multi-media have created interactive and dynamic space, as a result, the relationship between the people and the space is gradually controlled by digital processing signal, and the people's behavior and environment become interactive, which brings people fresh environmental experience and participation feelings. The wayfinding design taking the plan and printing as media and transmitting information by the wayfinding plates in traditional sense rapidly becomes a mixed design field, any kind of interactive media, two-dimension, three-dimension, four-dimension, static, dynamic, sound and image, all of which can be taken as the way and method for information transmission of wayfinding.

Secondly, it's urban environment factor. The social progress and plentiful material enable people have more requirements in the spiritual layer, life shall be paid attention to and the human emotion and personality shall be satisfied. Especially for the urban frantic pace and life pressure, people wanna a relax and cheerful environment even more desperately so that they can be relieved and relaxed physically and spiritually. In terms of such aspect, wayfinding design actively participates and wants to provide people with a relax and cheerful experience while giving directions. People extend their pursuit of increasingly high life quality from interior to exterior and from personal space to public space. If there is no unique landscape image, unique humanistic temperament and artistic aesthetics and matching marks and other public facilities in the city, no matter for the urban residents or any one of the passer-by, the city will puzzle and disinterest them at different degrees when they are wandering there. An open city needs unforgettable place marks and easily identified and atmosphere-rendering wayfinding system to guide people. Wayfinding system

not only provides people with easily identified directions but provides the city with unforgettable place marks, by which the people can pleasantly experience the urban culture and atmosphere and the impressive urban image can be shaped. Wayfinding design in modern environment acts as the bridge for communication between the people and the city, reasonable and considerate wayfinding design can let the people in the city experience the considerate and humanistic services from the city; it not only pays attention to the certainty of people on direction and route but concerns whether the people get around the city are joyful spiritually and whether they can truly sense and blend into the environment and atmosphere of public spaces in the city and the distinctive urban image and charm that it brings to the city, and the people linger on without any thought of leaving.

Thirdly, it's the communication factor. Seeking for common development by communication is the world's development trend at present, the development has broken through the geographical boundaries and resources are shared by human beings in the world, which promotes the human's common development to the greatest extent. Under the mega trend of globalization, the communications between countries, cities and human have never been so frequent. The emergence of internet enables people to communicate with people in any corner of the world without leaving home and know the boundless universe outside, the convenient traffic conditions enable people to easily reach the places they want to go. All sorts of tourisms, communication activities, international competitions, meetings, exhibitions and academic research are extensively held in the world, and the global immigration also contributes to the cultural transmission, the human society and life are incomparably active. The reason why the communication runs so smooth is also closely related to the design. Each country has its own language and regional culture and each person has his/her own education and growth background, it relies on the signage system to break through the language and culture barriers in communication. Signage communicates by easily identified graphics instead of words, which reduces the culture and language barriers in a certain degree. Now we can see the wayfinding system focusing on graphics and being supplemented by words at airports, stations and in public places where the international activities are held and there is a high flow of visitors, telling people where the exits and entrances, emergency exits, elevators, toilets, ATM, convenience stores, hospitals, restaurants and other common places are, so that people can get such information without any obstacle in any place at any time and can travel in each country more free and convenient.

Lastly, it's the cross-boundary factor. The highly-developed modern science makes the breakthrough and continuously forward innovation of single discipline harder and harder, so the boundary between disciplines blurs and disappears gradually and margins between

disciplines blend into each other, which makes the interdisciplinary study and interaction gradually becoming a new mode of study. Breakthrough of margins brings continuous expansion of forms and connotations of the design, independent designer in the past are gradually replaced by the designing groups embracing talents from different disciplines and fields today, a wayfinding system looking like a single design is actually a comprehensive discipline integrating architecture, environmental science, psychology, ethology, sociology, man-machine interaction technology, man-machine engineering, communication and materialogy, etc.. The discipline margins inject new energy into the wayfinding system and bring more fantastic ideas; the designing focus has turned to emphasize the cause-and-effect relationship between the ideas and forms.

With its forms and connotations extended continuously, there are rich designing resources springing up in the wayfinding design, which brings the ever-increasing diversification of the wayfinding method.

1. THE SIGNAGE SYSTEM

The signage is the soul of wayfinding system, as an image symbol, it crosses languages and words, shows

sophisticated meaning through visuals. No matter how a set of wayfinding design system is innovative in form and media, its core significance is still transmitting information in a clear and accurate way. And the signage system contributes most.

The significance of the signage system is mainly transmitting information. But the signage design at present must integrate with the aesthetic trends and our daily life, especially under the background in which the media and connotations of the wayfinding system are increasingly extended and the signage design is diversified. The traditional stereotyped and emotionless signage design has been changed into emotional ones displaying individuality, showing sceneries and cultures of various places and nationalities, and interacting with human beings. This lead credence to the basic toilet signs (Figures 1-4). At first, basic Imageics were used to transmit information, then characteristic illustrations were adopted as the language for expressing, and finally the two-dimension plane was abandoned with the male and female dolls to be used as media. And now dynamic signage brought by modern projectors is used. This displays that the ways of signage design and expressing are greatly increased. Not only is the description of significance highlighted, but also the artistic quality of the signage themselves.



Figure 1
The Traditional Signage



Figure 2
Signage of Illustration



Figure 3
Signage of Dolls



Figure 4
Signage With Multi-Media

Moreover, as the signage is becoming more popular in the daily lives and on the internet, people have been very familiar with the connotations of some wayfinding signage in public places. They are common senses everyone knows without needs of explanations. This

makes wayfinding design become a public language beyond words to step into our lives and brings a more interesting way for communication. For example, the prohibition sign in public signage is used for expressing things that are forbidden (Figure 5), or the sign language is directly used to express the daily behaviors of modern people on the internet (Figure 6). Artist Xu Bing wrote a novel called *Di Shu*, which is using the public signage of the wayfinding system or manuals (Figure 7). It is aimed to create a universal language eliminating regional, cultural, educational and language barriers. This language is equal to everyone in the world. Xu Bing also designed a piece of software called “Zi Ku” (character database) to go with the novel. The user could input a sentence in English through the keyboard, and the computer will transfer it into signage, which is like a dictionary. This expressed the artist’s dream of a universal language. It can be seen from this that the wayfinding signage has penetrated into people’s lives with diversified forms, which not only transmit information but also bring recreation into our communication and lives.



Figure 5
 Prohibition Sign in Public Signage



Figure 7
 Di Shu, Artist Xu Bing

2. CROSS TWO-DIMENSION

The traditional wayfinding, input in some space to help people find the directions, usually adopts printing as its media. The rigid and conservative signage, when integrated with the environment, will seem quite abrupt and lack of substance. Moreover, the stereotyped wayfinding system will seem dull and lifeless. The wayfinding design at present is trying to break the bottleneck of two-dimension and seeking for more diversified special expression, from two-dimension to three-dimension and even four-dimension. Any walls, floors, roofs, flats or zigzag surface could become the carrier of wayfinding design languages. Sculptures, furniture, exhibition or devices could be used as media and everything in the space could become the carrier for wayfinding. The close integration of wayfinding and multi-dimension environment offers people fresh special experience (Figure 8).

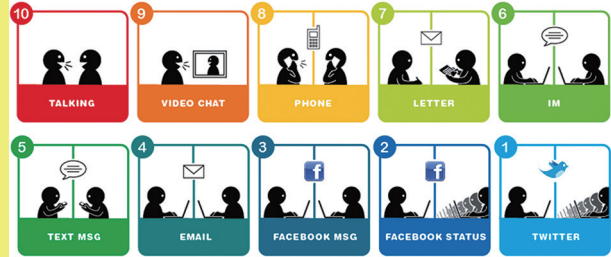


Figure 6
 Signage Language Used on Internet



Figure 8
 Wayfinding of Multi-Dimension



The wayfinding system (Figure 9) of the parking lot in Eureka Mansion, Melbourne in 2006 got rid of the two-dimension. People could only experience it through moving in the space. The wayfinding design was made through adopting the graphic illusion and using two and three-dimension deceptive prospects.

From different perspectives, the over-sized words were displayed in abstract and distorted graphic. Those words “OUT, IN, UP and DOWN” were inverted in the crucial line showing the directions. Only through the correct positions could people distinguish it.

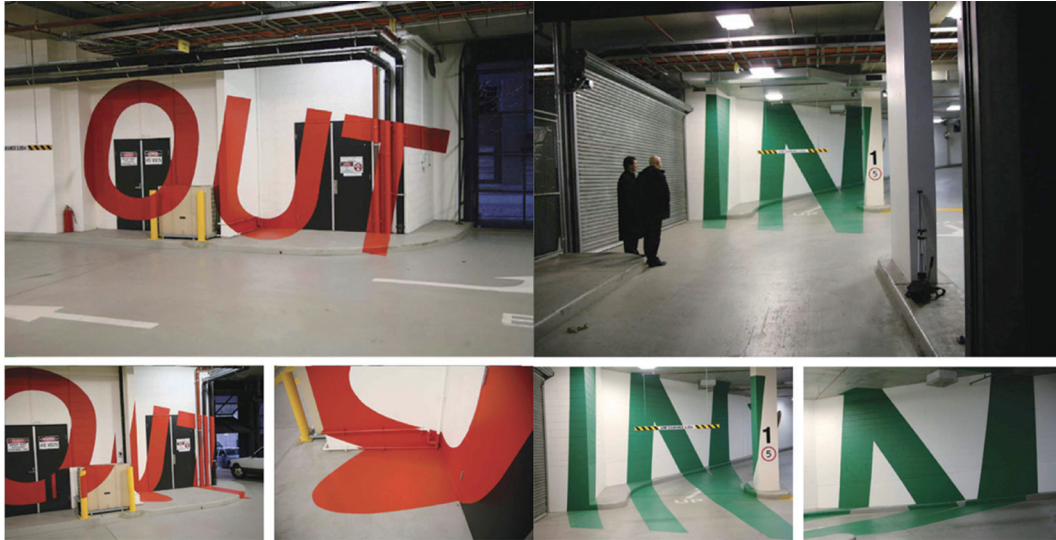


Figure 9
Wayfinding System of the Parking Lot

Swiss “Frege” Studio designed the wayfinding system (Figure 10) of the parking lot for European Film Festival, 2005 held in Swiss. A car covered with yellow canvas and written with bold words was placed there to show where the parking lot is. This wayfinding design is more like an exhibition in a space, completely overthrowing the traditional ways and catching peoples’ eyes.

Melbourne’s city museum (the former Treasury

Department) is more like a sculpture standing at the gate (Figure 11). The gate of the museum was not very conspicuous so that people often failed to find it. Therefore, a brightly colored and large folded wayfinding was designed to be a modern interfering object inverted in a historical environment. It would be subtle lead people to go up and find the entrance of the museum and the exhibition hall.



Figure 10
Wayfinding System of the Parking Lot



Figure 11
Lot Wayfinding Design of Sculpture

The whole space has become the background for the wayfinding design so as to make it freely integrate with the space and the environment. Each space has its own unique scenery, form, appearance and structure, which provides diversified design sources for space-based wayfinding. Its design allows the free mutual use and transfer between restraints and freedom so as to make a tailored wayfinding design and make the urban environment show diversified cultures and atmospheres.

3. CROSS-BOUNDARIES

The technological development brings unprecedented freedom for wayfinding design. The diversified media and carriers make the ways for wayfinding design be extended greatly. As an old saying goes “no method is method”, everything could become the sources for wayfinding design. The boundaries between subjects, media, graphic and space will become extremely fuzzy while wayfinding design is absorbing nutrition from this fuzzy boundary and creating an environment in which people and information could coexist naturally.

An Australian design team called Emery designed a wayfinding for the main entrance of Melbourne Austin Hospital (Figure 12). The wayfinding design set a flexible multi-media info system in the front gate. It was composed of a series of moving words and images transmitting the latest public information of the hospital. The visual info connected the inside and outside of the hospital and led people's sight going across the gate. Thus the boundary between the outside and the inside became vague and the entrance was bestowed with a symbolic position and dynamic existence. This method brings people a sense of crossing space and makes people feel more natural to go through.



Figure 12
Wayfinding Design With Multi-Media

People are not only information receivers but could cross the boundaries to become the carriers and senders (Figure 13) to produce and communicate information. A man was holding a sign and walked on the streets to transmit information, which was like a real-person

animation. It may arouse some dislikes, but it will make people laugh and bring joy to them in most cases.



Figure 13
Wayfinding Design With the Man

Moreover, some wayfinding design is not giving directions but explaining the media itself. A design team in South Africa made an image design for Kulula Airport. They unprecedentedly designed wayfinding on the fuselage and marked the name of each part of the plane so that the passengers could easily find out where the black box is (Figure 14). Such design not only beautified the appearance of the planes and left a deep impression on the passengers' minds, but also aroused their interests. It was a breadth of fresh air for the passengers to take an airplane and understand its inner structure at the same time.



Figure 14
Wayfinding Design on the Airplane

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that diversified wayfinding system design is entering and affecting people's lives in a flexible and unexpected way. It makes our lives full of new environments and experiences. “Diversified” here does not refer to surpass nor outnumber but “counter complexity with flexibility” (Diani, 2005, p.13). Wayfinding design breaks the boundaries from inside and outside and interweaves among various and sophisticated special environments to create new environment and new methods for perceptual environments. The diversified wayfinding design is no longer demonstrating various parts of the object, but displaying their inter-relations and its relationship with human beings, space, environments and life. It bestows multiple meanings to life through showing the subtle relationships.

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