Speculative and critical design as a project method: an experimental approach focusing on the violence in Fortaleza

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This research did a historical analysis of speculative and critical design, conceptualizing it and discussing the changes in the paradigm of the functionality on modern and post-modern design. This conceptual method of contemporary design emerges in specific sociocultural contexts. It works as a tool for ‘visualising possible futures’, aligned with the rise in complexity of relationships, the fast pace of technological advances and the new needs of people inserted in this context. I developed the discussion navigating from the ideas of Baudrillard (2008) about the consumption society, the functional and symbolic character of objects, Krippendorf (2000) and his ideas on the designer’s subjectivity and complexity in relationships proposed by Bauman (2001) as a context for the problem and to understand the ideas of speculative and critical design by Dunne and Raby (2013).

For the project’s practice, I used a hybrid method, borrowing the method from Bonsiepe (1984) and mixing it with the required freedom for conceptual design and qualitative research. This project also explored the meanings and productions of speculative and critical design, a method yet to be fully explored in Brazil, and focusing on an illustrative practice based on the consequences of the everyday violence and insecurity in Fortaleza. This practice opted to employ conceptual criticism, obstructing violence by extrapolating security and surveillance. Many times, this research opted to dislocate violence and work with parallel concepts, since this concept can’t be positive in itself.

Moreover, this work holds social importance, when reflecting on the current level of urban violence in Fortaleza, exposing behaviours generated from fear, insecurity and the current public policies, which are far from solving the problem. It is also important to highlight the need for critical and conceptual design, reflecting on the capacity of the discipline to be a tool for reflection and transformation, essential for the context of post-modernity. The designer has a role in the construction of material culture in society and, by utilising the techniques of design for critical thinking, this professional can guide the ways our society want to move forward. The conceptual practice permeated by subjectivity is a determining factor for the sociopolitical function of the designer.