

Darwin Cruz

Matthew Lange

Communication Design Theory

Over the years, there have been several thousands of design objects. Some new ones appear as new technology evolves, while other designs objects tend to die out and live in the past. Many of the design objects can be connected to communication theories, even when we don't know they are. Some of them can be right in front of our faces our whole lives, and not even notice. One of these designs is something we see, use, and help us in today's world, in order to safely cross the street, and that is a crosswalk light. The idea of a crosswalk light was related back all the way to John Peake Knight, inventor of the traffic light. Its purpose is to help pedestrians cross the street in the safest way, so they don't get hit by oncoming vehicles. And it still holds true today. The first crossing light was first instilled in December 1868, on Bridge Street, Westminster, in London. They tried many different variations, to help pedestrians safely cross the street. Some variations are with light up words saying, *Walk* and *Don't Walk*, then changed to blinking, a countdown, symbols, and even a man wearing a hat. The crosswalk lights were still being tested, but by the time the 1930s came around, crosswalk lights were starting to appear to the public. After that, many iterations of crosswalk lights were born and now it is used everyday, by anyone that wants to cross a street. But even though the pedestrian light may be seen as an everyday tool, it is still connected to several communication theories years later.

The crosswalk light might be a simple design object at first glance but provides more information that one might think. The lights are supposed to let pedestrians know when to cross and when not to cross the street. But within its design, are some symbols that communicate with

pedestrians in an interesting way, thanks to Otto Neurath. Otto Neurath was a philosopher and the leading founder a theory he conducted in the 1920's. Otto Neurath's theory is called logical positivism. According to Lupton Miller, he says that "logical positivists attempted to analyze language into a minimal set of direct experiences, claiming that all languages can be reduced to a core of observations, such as big, small, up, down, red, or black" (Miller 42). Crosswalk signals are a good example of what Lupton Miller wanted to show with logical positivism. In a crosswalk light, there are generally only two symbols. One of a person walking to the right, and the other is a symbol of a red hand. This is what Otto Neurath vision logical positivism looks like. In fact, when Lupton Miller talks about a symbol that looks like a male figure, he says that, "The sign is positive because as a picture, it is based in observation; is *logical* because it concentrates the details of experience into a schematic mark" (Miller 42). In this case, the symbol with the person walking, is clearly supposed to indicate to the pedestrian that it's safe to walk. While the other symbol, the blinking red hand, is to indicate a to stop because the light is about to change. Logical positivism is being shown and represented through crosswalk lights.

However, logical positivism isn't the only theory connected with crosswalk signals. Crosswalk signals are also connected to another theory called constructivism. Constructivism is a learning and teaching method of which people learn through experiences. They interact with a problem and get a more active role in the learning process. And when people get a more active role, they are able to learn from it. In fact, as Misti Neutzling, Erica Pratt, and Melissa Parker say that with constructivism, "It is suggested that new knowledge and skills are created as learners interact with each other and make sense of differences between their current knowledge and new experiences" (Neutzling 757). In this case, crosswalk lights can be a kind of constructivism. With crosswalk lights, it makes the learner, the pedestrian, learn when it is safe to cross and

when not to cross the street. The pedestrian is interacting by actually walking. Once they are walking they know they are safe, and gain knowledge for the next time they have to cross the street. And this knowledge is passed down generations. As time passes, more and more people do it, the more it becomes part of society. In fact, according to Misti Neutzling, Erica Pratt, and Melissa Parker, they state that, "With regard to learning, Palincsar (1998) believed that individuals working in pairs or groups to achieve or structure knowledge, that is, utilizing the collective memory, could reach more success than those working alone" (Neutzling 758).

Before we came to today's crosswalk lights, we used to use one version of the crosswalk light that used to be one with the words *WALK* and *DON'T WALK*, on them. This early model made its debut in Washington D.C in 1939. In this early version, people used the words, *WALK* and *DON'T*, as a way to send a message to the pedestrian. It could've been done by words or symbols, but people used language. It didn't matter as much, back then since it was something new, but what was most important was that they were able to communicate with pedestrians. And the use of language can work the same way. The use of language can still communicate a message, whether it's spoken or written. For example, according to Ferdinand De Saussure. He says, "Without moving our lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verses. Because we regard the words of our language as soundimages, we must avoid speaking of the "phonemes" that make up the words" (Saussure 66). When pedestrians see the word *WALK*, they can get the idea of walking to cross the street. This goes true for when the word *DON'T* appears on top of *WALK*. People will understand the idea of not walking during this time, because they will see the incoming vehicles. The concept of when to cross and when not to cross lives in just 2 simple words.

As you can see, the crosswalk lights are examples of communication theories, in our everyday life. It is a very simple, but important, tool that communicates a type of communication that can determine life or death, literally. It has become part of our society and many people have grown up with it and even new generations are learning from it. Their designs could have been around for a while, and probably could have been in front of our faces, even if we don't realize it sometimes. The theories have had an impact in the past and are still making an impact, even in today's modern world, through designs like the pedestrian lights.

## Works Cited

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