

## ***Introduction***

The aesthetic refinement of an industrial product doesn't just refer to the care with which shapes and styles are handled. Of course, today, most scholars and designers will agree that aesthetics in the field of industrial design goes beyond studying, analyzing, and creating forms. In this discipline, aesthetics is fundamentally tied to the user's sensory experience. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that experience is mitigated by a set of elements: the product's form, functionality, material, color, finish, usability, and sustainability. I've decided to call this set the FfmCFUS Ensemble not only out of my passion for music but also because of the similarity I've found between the design process and musical performance. I'm not the only one who thinks so, either. Authors such as Oliver King and Birgit Mager, for instance, have drawn parallels between design processes and methods and the image of a conductor's hands at work<sup>1</sup>.

I'm aware that it is unusual to consider sustainability an intrinsic part of the aesthetic experience in the field of industrial product design. This doesn't mean that industrial designers don't consider this factor, but that they normally handle it separately from the aesthetics of an industrial product. The way I see it, the element of sustainability must be present and integrated from the beginning of the industrial design process. This is because the satisfaction of sharing or participating in good - sustainability, in this case - can create feelings of optimism, solidarity, and, as a result, pleasure and beauty, which are undoubtedly part of the aesthetic experience.

What is truly beautiful always goes hand in hand with what is good. In this case, that entails what is good for the individual, for

1 Oliver King y Birgit Mager, «Methods and processes of service design», *Touchpoint*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2009): 21.

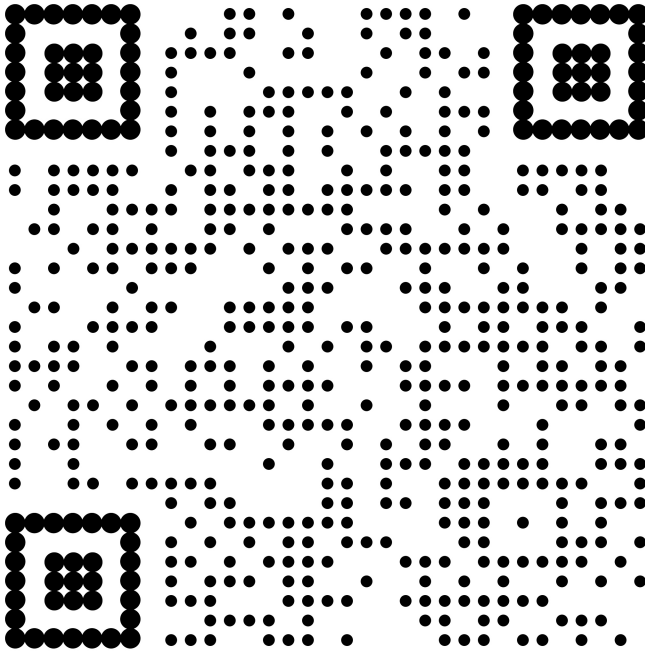
culture, for society, for the planet, and for all of humanity. On the other hand, what's bad is ugly. Ugliness doesn't usually provide a healthy, pleasant experience.

In other words, the aesthetic experience can extend beyond the sphere determined by a specific user and a particular product; that is, it can also occur in the interaction between a specific individual, product, place, and time. This invokes the social dimension of industrial product design, which is capable of impacting our daily life, our behaviors, and our social, cultural, and environmental contexts, either positively or negatively. The product's economic value is undoubtedly important, but it should not be detrimental to the good of humankind or the environment. Actually, what truly makes sense economically is sustainability. The term «economy» deserves a thorough review by 21<sup>st</sup>-century experts in our current context.

The aesthetic of industrial design discussed in this book is a holistic one. We will start by defining the concept and making our way to the impact it has on our lives and our surroundings, even if this proposal may seem too ambitious to some readers. I do not intend to convince or impose my point of view. Instead, I invite all readers to reflect on this topic together and come up with new horizons and aims, especially in light of our current situation and future environmental, social, and cultural landscape, which may have a positive or negative impact on us and on the generations to come.

Starting from the premise of my understanding of aesthetics in industrial product design, I believe that the healthy, pleasant aesthetic experience that tangible, sensible products create in our daily life plays an essential role in our psychosomatic sphere. This realm is closely related to our sensory perceptions through internal and external senses. That is also where aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience originate: whether or not I appreciate a product, whether or not it enralls me, and/or whether or not it amazes me.

## Style and Visual Good Manners



QR. 1. «What is object design? Tim Parsons | SAIC»,  
Kadenze, YouTube, 2-X-2018.

Not all product design requires a successful style. For example, many industries buy the tools they use based on the functional results they deliver, not the impression made by their looks. However, as Peter Dormer (1949-1996) remarked in 1990, «...the closer one gets to the public or home, the greater the need for the stylist to intercede

with a repertoire of visual good manners»<sup>2</sup>. Manners, which refer to human behaviors in different contexts, are culture-specific, and they're constantly evolving. What's considered appropriate in one situation may be shamefully out of place in another. A similar thing happens with products. As Tim Parsons notes, «We may choose to surround ourselves with objects of pedigree, displaying the latest style, prefer an eclectic mix or find matters of style pedantic in relation to function» (QR. 1)<sup>3</sup>.

Form itself entails functionality and affects the user's haptic perception. For example, the handrail system designed by HEWI offers an important contribution to reducing risk in public and private places. This design provides any sort of user physical and psychological support. The round railings are especially easy and secure to hold onto. When the railing's diameter is fitted to the human hand, coordination and transfer of force are improved. The railings are also used as a guidance system for individuals with low vision or a poor sense of balance. Their striking colors help with quick identification, especially in a stressful or dangerous situation<sup>4</sup>.

Today, on the cusp of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still great designers who are known for the refined way they handle a product's form, and who are ready to defend their focus on formal elements of design. Many of them, in turn, believe that industrial product design goes beyond appearance, and they seek to improve the other elements that impact good industrial design. To do this successfully, they often receive help from product engineers.

2 Peter Dormer, *The Meanings of Modern Design: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1990, pp. 13-14.

3 Tim Parsons, *Thinking: Objects - Contemporary Approaches to Product Design*, AVA Publishing SA, Lausanne, 2009, p. 54.

4 HEWI, «System solutions for corridors and stairs», <https://tinyurl.com/y22yuifs>. Íd., «System color: Coloured handrails made of polyamide», <https://tinyurl.com/y248e6kb>.

In other words, the main role of the product designer differs, to some extent, from that of the product engineer.

The differentiation and fusion of both professions is expressed superbly in German: the word «Industriekunst» is used to designate the design of industrial products, and it is often translated into English as «industrial art»<sup>5</sup>. However, we should not deny the skill and contributions of many «designer-stylists» in elevating the value of objects through careful, sensitive handling of the concept, proportion, and detail of the product's form.

In any case, we cannot deny that form in itself has a value that cannot be overlooked. Let's not forget the anecdote that Richard Sapper (1932-2015) used to tell about why he decided to start his professional career as an industrial designer: because his professor Romano Guardini (1885-1968) encouraged him to do so. While visiting his mentor's residence in Milan, Sapper told him of his concerns about the beauty of objects. Right then, Guardini took a small Venini vase and said, «Every time that I look at this it gives me joy, so certainly this is a profession that makes sense, because it gives people joy»<sup>6</sup>. The vase evidently was beautiful and fulfilled its functionality as a decoration.

5 Tim Parsons, *Thinking: Objects - Contemporary Approaches to Product Design*, cit., p. 54.

6 Venini is a prestigious art-glass company in Murano (Italy) that is among the main organizations dedicated to studies in glass. It is considered unparalleled in the world of art and design. Venini, <http://venini.com/en/venini-en/>. Justin McGuirk, «The black box syndrome», *Domus*, 18-II-2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y2957qjt>.