International Association of Empirical Aesthetics
(Russian Branch)

Perm Institute for Arts and Culture

EMOTIONS AND ART

Problems, Approaches, Explorations

Perm 1992
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Cultural background and different approaches to emotions in art are the subject of this volume. Theoretical investigations on the problem of emotions in art (music, painting, architecture, literature, dramatic art) are presented. Special sections are devoted to the problems of information and emotions in art, semantics of aesthetic image, symmetry-asymmetry of art objects as well as perspectives for new arts are investigated.

For psychologists, philosophers, art critics, teachers in art.

Editors

L.Ya. Dorfman, D.A. Leontiev, V.M. Petrov, V.A. Sozinov

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DESIGNERS’ AND USERS’ EVALUATION OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN OBJECTS

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Introduction

In our daily lives we are surrounded by objects of all types, shapes and sizes without which it would be difficult to satisfy our needs. The choice and use of an object is based not only on functional requirements but also on affective and aesthetic motives that we may not always be aware of.

The main objective of Industrial Design (I.D.) - a discipline simultaneously involving technology, aesthetics and market demands - is precisely that of achieving a harmonious blending of the claims made by these different components. In highly schematic form, it may be stated that I.D. must meet the following requirements:

i. to facilitate certain activities by designing objects serving specific purposes;
ii. to produce objects endowed with formal characteristics such that they may be appreciated "aesthetically";

iii. to design objects that are competitive in market terms. This objective is linked both to economic aspects - hinging upon the investment of capital in production and on the profit motive - and to aspects of a social nature depending on the symbolic value of such objects in terms of status acquisition and identity reinforcement (in more or less metaphorical terms, the possession of a certain object may mean sharing something with others and belonging to a certain group).

The specific aim of this study is to explore the relationship constituted by the designer on the one side, the user on the other, and the object acting as the go-between, as the element of mediation and communication between the two. We assume that the more "legible" its functional and aesthetic meaning, the more successful the I.D. object is.

We shall adopt the schema proposed by Norman (1988):

```
Design Model
  User's Model
  
  DESIGNER

    USER

    SYSTEM

System Image
```

"The Design model is the designer's conceptual model; the User's model is the mental model developed through interaction with the system; the System image results from the physical structure that has been built. The designer expects the user's model to be identical to the design model, but the designer does not talk directly to the user, all communication takes place through the system image. If the system image does not make the design model clear and consistent, then the user will end up with the wrong mental model" (p. 16).

Norman tackles the analysis of communication between designer and user exclusively with regard to the functional aspects of the objects in question. How does the user understand that in order to use a certain object he must perform the actions that the designer regards as implicit in the physical and structural characteristics of the object he has created? For example, how does he understand that a door must be pushed or pulled? In Norman's view, this is possible when the object - in this case the handle possesses in itself certain easily recognisable formal characteristics (or "affordances" in Gibson's terminology) that show the user what to do in order to open the door and avoid bumping into it.

As pointed out above, the success of an I.D. object is measured in terms of its capacity to communicate not only the way it is to be used but also emotions and affective qualities. Objects possess specific physical qualities that may constitute the information necessary to trigger a series of processing operations. Through channels of non-verbal communication, objects transmit messages originally devised by their designers. The user then interprets these messages in such a way as to arrive at a global appraisal of the object in terms that are aesthetic and affective as well as functional and cognitive.

The section of the communication process that we are concerned with here is what we may call the area of expression. While linked to the physical properties of the object, this is also characterised by the personal process activated by the perciepent, which is influenced by the subjective and affective factors and element of taste involved in this relationship between physical (object) and mental (subject).
Our objective may be defined in terms of the following points:

1. Communication between designer and user. Our primary aim is to investigate whether the expressive qualities perceived by the person observing, handling and using an object are the same as the ones that the designer was seeking to express and communicate. In other words, is there any agreement between the designer's creation and the user's appraisal of it?

2. Differences in appraisal between groups of experts and non-experts. The aim here is to ascertain whether there are any differences between experts and non-experts in the appraisal of I.D. objects. This represents an exploration of how different processes of learning, of professional training and of cultural formation can influence the appraisal of objects. Numerous studies (Purcell 1986, Devlin & Nasar 1989, Groat 1982) have brought out the fact that appraisal is in fact conditioned by learning processes.

3. Systematic relationships between structural characteristics and expressive qualities. The third aim is to see if there are any systematic relationships between the structural and physical properties of I.D. objects and expressive qualities.

Methodology

The experiment involved 44 subjects divided into three groups. The first group was composed of the 4 designers responsible for the 6 objects used in the experiment (2 designers being responsible for 2 objects each); the second of 10 male and 10 female advanced-level design students aged from 21 to 27 years old; the third of 10 male and 10 female students and graduates of different faculties, experts neither in design nor in architecture and aged from 24 to 32 years old.

The material used for the experiment included 6 objects: "Didô" (a children's toy consisting of a coloured plastic basket containing plasticine), a "clothes-hanger", a "chair", a "clothes-dummy" (dummy to hang clothes on), a "wash-basin" and "chandelier". Didô, the chair and the clothes-dummy were industrially produced objects available in the shops, whereas the hanger, wash-basin and chandelier were prototypes made in part from materials other than those that would be used for the finished product. A room was specially set up with the 6 objects arranged in a semi-circle in front of the observer. The subjects were first shown the 6 objects. In the subsequent phase of active exploration they were invited to familiarise themselves with the objects by inspecting, touching and handling them at will. Finally, they were given a questionnaire to fill in. This questionnaire was formulated on the basis of an open interview with the designers. Each designer was interviewed solely with regard to the object he was responsible for. Attention was focused in particular on the significance the designer attributed to the object and on the structural and expressive qualities the designer regarded as relevant.

The questionnaire consisted of 74 items, most of which adjectives, and a scale with 7 intervals from 0 to 6, indicating respectively the maximum absence and presence of the quality described. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was concerned with the structural characteristics of the objects under the headings of shape, colour, material, consistency of material, surface texture. The second part regarded the expressive characteristics under the headings of emotion, functionality, socio-cultural taste, and dynamism.

The designers filled in the questionnaire only for the objects they were personally responsible for, whereas the subjects were asked to evaluate all 6 objects, filling in a separate questionnaire for each. The 6 objects were presented in random order.

Results

In the initial phase of processing the results, a general analysis was performed on the total data, which were broken
down and grouped into 6 subject/item matrices, each regarding one object.

The technique employed is defined as "three mode principal component analysis" (Kroonenberg, 1983, Tucker, 1964) and is a generalisation of the analysis of the principal components. This technique explicitly introduces a factorial model with three dimensions or modes. Within the model, the presence of intermediate factorial structures is conjectured for each of the three modes, subjects, items and objects.

The phases of analysis are shown below in graphs constituting the average representation of the six that would have been obtained if separate analyses had been carried out for each object.

The initial phase of analysis consists of the comparison of matrices shown in Fig. 1 as a graph with 6 points corresponding to the 6 objects. Here we see a central group comprising the wash-basin, chair and "Didə". These are flanked by the clothes-dummy, while the hanger and chandelier occupy a more peripheral position.

This overall finding - which will require specification by means of detailed analysis object by object - may be interpreted in the sense that the objects making up the central group obtained similar ratings from the those interviewed as regards structural characteristics and expressive qualities. Conversely, the more peripheral the position occupied, the greater the object differs from the others. This analysis provides us with an informative synthesis and tells us that the average representations of the subjects and of the items furnish a fairly good representation, above all for the objects occupying the more central positions in the figure.

In order to interpret the ratings expressed by the subjects, we shall present in Fig. 2 a representation of the items. The graph shows that the first and third axes are those conveying most information and the easiest to interpret. The first acts as an indicator of the ratings with respect to expressive qualities, especially the subsets of emotion and taste. This axis shows an overall trend that may be defined as bi-polar, ranging from the expressive area connotated in negative terms (ugly, sad, nasty, worrying) to the positively connotated (beautiful, attractive, amusing, original). The second axis serves as a linear indicator of ratings with respect to structural characteristics.

Correlations between items may be interpreted in greater detail by examining the grouping of different qualities. For example, the first group - defined as that of negative emotion and taste - combines and correlates descriptive adjectives of the emotive sphere (sad, nasty, repulsive) with two adjectives from the area of taste (ugly and common).

The second group combines some adjectives from the emotive area (disturbing, worrying and serious) with others regarding...
taste (crude, vulgar, ancient) as well as an adjective of functionality (useless) and one of dynamism (static).

In the third group, two items from the emotive area (sensual and warm) are found together at a distance from the other groups. The fourth group may be defined as that of positive emotion, taste and functionality and correlates adjectives of the emotive area (amusing, relaxing, attractive, gay and pleasant) with others from the areas of taste (nice, modern, sober, original, elegant) and functionality (useful, convenient and practical).

The last two groups are the only cases of systematic correlation between physico-cultural characteristics and expressive qualities. This is, however, limited exclusively to the relationship between shape and dynamism. The first of these groups presents a correlation between adjectives denoting structural characteristics (rectilinear, full, hard) and an adjective from the expressive subset (stable). The second again shows a correlation between structural characteristics (irregular and uneven) and expressive characteristics (movement and dynamic).

Projection of subjects on to the factorial space determined by the first two axes shown in Fig. 3 makes it possible to compare the ratings given by experts and non-experts. This graph gives a fairly clear view of the position occupied by the experts, who are largely grouped in the right-hand squares corresponding to the first factorial axis together with the designer. The area thus delineated could be defined as that of experience. Conversely, the distribution of the non-experts shows a fairly high level of scattering and little homogeneity.

This initial phase of descriptive analysis is followed by a more analytic phase in which statistical significance is investigated by means of probabilistic approach. The results of the application of a t-test to the subject’s rating for each object are shown in Table 1.

The table refers to items for which significant differences were found between designers and users. As expected, this occurred mainly for items displaying expressive qualities. As regards
structural characteristics, significant differences were found for very few items. In the case of the "Didi", for example, while the designer gave a higher rating to its concavity, his attention being focused on the small toys contained, the users rated its convexity more highly as their attention focused more upon the basket itself. The designer and the users also differed in this case over

Table 1. Differences between designers and users (Student's t distribution - d.f.=19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBJECTS ITEMS</th>
<th>dido</th>
<th>hanger</th>
<th>chair</th>
<th>dummy</th>
<th>basin</th>
<th>chandelier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleasant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensual</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggressive</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amusing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disturbing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attractive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relaxing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worrying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elegant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>original</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redundant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>precious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convenient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fragile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>firm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 +1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Plot of subjects on axes 1 and 2

1 = \( t > 2.845 \) \( p < 0.005 \)
2 = \( t > 2.528 \) \( p < 0.01 \)
3 = \( t > 2.056 \) \( p < 0.05 \)
4 = \( t > 1.752 \) \( p < 0.05 \)
+ designer rated higher
- designer rated lower
S = design students
L = laypeople
functionality, the former regarding the object as less useful and convenient.

Examination of the average ratings for all objects brings out a number of interesting points. As regards the emotion subset, it may be noted that on average the designers rated their objects more highly with respect to the items regarded as intrinsically positive (e.g., attractive, gay, warm) and gave a correspondingly lower rating with respect to their opposites (repulsive, sad and cold). They also rated their objects more highly with respect to certain items bearing negative connotations in ordinary life (distressing, disturbing and aggressive) or the ambiguously connotated as sensual. It should also be noted that the main difference between the experts and the non-experts also arose with regard to the latter items. The ratings given by the design students lie in general midway between the designers and non-experts.

As regards the taste subset, a very similar trend was found for the three groups. One major difference did appear between designers and users in that the non-experts gave higher ratings for such items as beautiful, original and modern than the design students.

Table 2 below shows the significant differences between design students and non-experts with respect to the two subsets of emotion and taste.

Table 2. Differences between experts and non-experts for all objects (Student's t distribution - d.f.-119).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SENSUAL</td>
<td>5.80*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASCULINE</td>
<td>3.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORRYING</td>
<td>3.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRECIOUS</td>
<td>3.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERN</td>
<td>-2.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTURBING</td>
<td>2.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLD</td>
<td>2.48+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEAUTIFUL</td>
<td>-2.62+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPULAR</td>
<td>1.76+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- experts rated lower
* highly significant difference
+ significant difference

Discussion

The results are discussed with reference to the 3 points representing the principal targets of the present study: 1) communication between designer and user; 2) differences between experts and non-experts; 3) systematic relationships between structural characteristics and expressive qualities.

With regard to communication between designers and users, it may be stated that the differences found are not due to any ambiguity in the physical and structural characteristics of the objects considered. With very few exceptions, these characteristics are perceived and evaluated in much the same fashion by the three groups of designers, experts and non-experts.

Differences in evaluation do appear with respect to the objects' expressive qualities, especially in the subsets of emotion and taste. In the case of two objects, "Didd" and the chandelier, some differences also appeared in the area of functionality. As pointed out above, there is a general tendency on the part of the designers to give to their objects a higher score for positive items.

As regards the area of taste, it is interesting to note that on average the designers assign the objects a high aesthetic rating (beautiful) and even higher ratings for the items original and modern. It may thus be conjectured that these qualities represent basic constants in the designer's appraisal of objects. Moreover, since the objects considered are very heterogeneous - ranging from a toy to a wash-basin - such constants of aesthetic appraisal could constitute one of the aims involved in designing objects in general.

On the whole it may be stated that effective communication of the expressive qualities of emotion, taste and functionality does exist between designer and subject. Out of the 39 items to be assigned in the areas of emotion, taste and functionality for each of the 6 objects - and hence out of an overall rating involving 234 items - significant differences are found in only 35 cases.
As regards the second point, differences between experts and non-experts, the results of the multi-factorial analysis carried out indicate a certain differentiation between the two groups. It would thus appear that the tools and lexicon provided by specific training in design have a direct influence upon object appraisal.

Closer examination of the differences between the two groups reveals that these are found mainly in the areas of taste (the experts give lower ratings with respect to the items *beautiful* and *modern* and higher ratings for the items *masculine*, *popular* and *precious*) and emotion (the experts give higher ratings with respect to the items *sensual*, *disturbing*, *distressing* and *cold*).

It is interesting to note that the experts show more sensitivity to expressive qualities which normally bear negative connotations (*disturbing*, *distressing*, *cold*) and that they give a high rating to the expressive quality *sensual*, which may be regarded as a typical example of a descriptive term used solely by experts, given its specificity of meaning. When used by non-experts, the term refers exclusively to qualities peculiar to human beings, whereas the experts extend its use to the physical environment and to objects. Finally, the experts appear to be more critical and less apt to describe objects as *beautiful* and *modern*.

Differences in cultural background and professional experience have a decisive influence on the way in which environment is perceived. As pointed out by Purcell (1986), the experience and appraisal of the environmental situation is the result of comparing the information provided by the environment with the representation of previous experiences in similar environmental situations stored in the memory.

In our experimental situation, the differences in appraisal observed could be due to the fact that, in their academic training and in their work as designers, the experts are far more concerned than non-experts with the physical properties of objects, with their significance and with critically analysing the environment created. The awareness and sensitivity engendered by this specific type of training will inevitably influence the designers’ taste and their aesthetic and affective appraisal. These findings are in line with those of other studies cited above into how people of different backgrounds differ as regards environmental perception and category building. Groat (1982) shows that non-architects did not perceive the post-modern as differing from the modern buildings and that architects and non-architects employed different criteria as regards the appraisal of stylistic relations between the buildings. While the architects made a clear distinction between modern and post-modern, the non-architects applied a more gradual categorisation of buildings from traditional to modern and hence to futuristic. The post-modern style did not therefore appear to serve them as a point of reference in drawing distinctions between the groups of buildings. Devlin and Nasar (1989) examined the responses of two groups of subjects - again architects and non-architects - in the appraisal of the "high" and "popular" styles of residential architecture. There results show that the differences between the two groups lay in the way in which the two sets of buildings were assessed and categorised. While the architects preferred "high" residential architecture, which they regarded as richer in significance, clearer, more coherent, pleasing and relaxing, the non-architects used the same adjectives to describe the "popular" style. The architects saw all the buildings as less complex than the non-architects. Different physical characteristics corresponding to each of the styles were also identified for the two groups of subjects.

It may be worth relating the differences between experts and non-experts revealed by our study to what Berlyne (1971) defines as "collative properties" (complexity and novelty in particular), which are seen as producing a rise in the level of excitement or arousal. Experts would give lower ratings with respect to *beautiful* and *modern* aspects because - for reasons of background and experience - the objects appear to them poor in novelty and complexity. Conversely, they would be more sensitive to what they consider to be the arousing aspects of the objects. Items such as *disturbing*, *distressing* and *cold* would express
qualities able to raise the level of arousal in a situation that would otherwise prove dull and boring. On the contrary, the non-experts' comparative lack of familiarity with and knowledge of the world of design leads to their being overstimulated by the information received from the objects. Thus, with reference to the same variables of complexity and novelty, the ratings expressed are mainly positive assessments of the arousing aspects of the objects in question.

As regards associations between structural characteristics and expressive qualities, the data gathered suggest that there are no systematic correlations between structural and expressive characteristics except in one very specific case, i.e. between the structural characteristics of shape and consistency of material on the one hand, and the expressive qualities of dynamism on the other. This suggests that some formal aspects of the objects are capable of producing an impression of dynamism in the observer even in the absence of any real movement. This also bears out the findings of a study by Massironi and Bonaiuto (1965) on the perception of causality, where the insertion of angular lines into a context of rectangular elements produced an effect of deformity and dynamism in the structure as a whole.

Our failure to find any systematic relations between expressive and structural qualities other than those of shape/dynamism is probably due to the fact that it is not the physical and structural properties of the objects in themselves that express any specific meaning. Such physical characteristics are instead closely bound to the context of reference and the attribution of meaning is given by the overall relationship between the various components. In the present study, this relationship is unquestionably linked to the specific nature of the objects employed, so that formal and chromatic features capable of leading to a certain expressive result for one particular object would be very unlikely to produce the same result if applied to another.

With regard to associations between expressive qualities (taste and emotion), the representation of the responses assumes an overall bipolar pattern in which "emotion" and "taste" qualities with similar connotations appear to be closely associated: for example, on one side, we have judgments like "beautiful" and positive emotions like "gay", on the other side, judgments like "ugly" and negative emotions like "sad".

To conclude, the present study has sought to explore very different aspects - ranging from communication to expressive qualities - of the world of I.D. objects and of design in the broad sense in an attempt to pin-point the cognitive and affective processes involved in the perception and appraisal of objects. The heterogeneous nature of the issues addressed at the outset means that the study will be one raising numerous problems and questions rather than one winding up with a clear and exhaustive result - though some have, if fact, been put forward. In any case, we think it worth pointing out that the hitherto little explored world of design, which would benefit from further experimental work, could offer a field of great interest for the analysis of the aesthetic experience and of the cognitive and affective processes involved both at the creative moment of design and in the user's enjoyment of the finished product.

Notes

1 Dorfles (1963) regards the object of I.D. as characterised by being produced industrially and by being - albeit not necessarily - a utilitarian object that presents a certain degree of aesthetic quality. For objects of art, on the contrary, the aesthetic function is paramount. Panofsky (1955) asserts that the class of objects of art is defined by the fact that it "demands to be experienced aesthetically", i.e. in its form rather than in its function.
References


In September 1991 in Perm, Russia, the 1st International symposium "Art and Emotions" was held. The proceedings of the symposium have been published (Art and Emotions, 1991). However, the collection was not completed. This book contains the materials of the symposium that failed to be included into the previous volume, as well as a number of articles written specially to extend and develop the theme "Emotions and Art".