Design and Aesthetic Appreciation: Form, Functionality, Performativity

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Abstract: This essay explores the aesthetic dimension of design objects, which delivers properties as emerging from considerations of their formal aspect as well as their functionality and actual use by each individual. I analyse accounts of formal and functional properties in design as alternative views given for the aesthetic evaluation of design objects yet marking how both address the contemplation of the design object. However, I consider extending the aesthetic appreciation to the properties that emerge during the user's active interaction with design objects. My view is that the global aesthetic value of design objects is the result of the intersections between these different sets (formal, functional, and performative) of properties. The aesthetic evaluation of design objects is, in that sense, pluralistic and variable, according to the particularity of the items in question.

Keywords: aesthetic properties, aesthetics of design, functional beauty, performative aesthetics

The term "design" refers to a certain class of objects and the practices that produce them. Said objects are all sorts of things that surround us; we find them in our homes, our workspaces, our towns and practically wherever we go: furniture, kitchenware, clothes, vehicles, buildings, computers, websites, and so on. These things have in common that they are artifacts planned, manipulated, and mass-manufactured in order to fulfill utilitarian functions that satisfy what humans may need or want; therefore, they are objects to be used and interact with. There is almost no part of our daily lives that is not mediated by design objects and so, their ubiquity and importance for the quality of human life is often pointed out. However, despite their ordinariness and functionality, these objects have an appearance that may be significant, subject to our aesthetic experiences and judgements, therefore, that also seems rather important in our interaction with them. Indeed, in some sense the term "design" is strongly focused on the look of the artifacts and there are institutions, such as museums, that bring the aesthetic value of some designs to the fore. The evaluation of design objects may then be seen as a composite of the different values that this practice comprises, among them functional and aesthetic value, not without tension between them.

Traditionally, aesthetic value has been understood as grounded in qualities or properties *of the form* of the objects which one attends without any concern for, perhaps in opposition to, practical goals or utilitarian interests. Design objects may have aesthetic value even when, typically, we take a practical attitude towards them. Some accounts have contended that the properties of the form are secondary, or dispensable. Modernist movement made function the central concept of good design in contemporary culture; rejecting ornament as expression of past times, the claim was that beauty simply follows functionality. Although this famous Modernist slogan has been widely contested, some recent theories allege that nonetheless functionality is somehow a source of aesthetic value. Accounts of functional aesthetic value, such as Stephen Davies (2006), Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson (2006), and Jane Forsey (2013), provide a framework that affords the appreciation of properties that otherwise will be ignored. Furthermore, since functionality is central to design, they offer an essential guide to the correct aesthetic appreciation of these sorts of objects.

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Finally, aesthetic properties would also emerge during the user's active interaction with design objects, salient in the self-reflective aesthetic appreciation of such activities. This perspective adds up to what can be called *performative* aesthetic properties, which will further enrich our view of the aesthetic field and broaden the range of properties than inhabit it.

My aim in this essay is to explore the aesthetic dimension of design objects, which delivers properties as emerging from considerations of the objects' formal aspect but also their functionality and actual use by each individual. My view is that the global aesthetic value of each design object is the result of the intersections between their different sets of properties, reflecting the complexity of the appreciation of how they aesthetically appear to us. The aesthetic evaluation of design objects would be, in that sense, pluralistic and variable. That is, considering that the category of design covers a highly extensive and diverse range of items (from those with the dullest look to those more decorative and "artistic"; susceptible to being addressed from more or less interactive and contemplative perspectives), the importance or weight of the different aesthetic properties, as belonging to each of the three groups mentioned, would then vary according to the particularity of the designs in question.

As brief description of my plan, I must first explain why, having different sources, properties of the three groups can be considered aesthetic all the same. In section one, I sketch a view of aesthetic properties and experience that can apply to the accounts of formal, functional, and performative properties in design that I give in each of the following sections, with some final remarks about what a pluralistic and variable aesthetic evaluation of design objects would look like.

1. Aesthetic properties

Addressed in relation to the objects' forms, their functions and the actual interactions with them, the properties I am concerned with must be nonetheless *aesthetic*. Although, there is no unified view of aesthetic properties, a wide variety of theories conceive aesthetic properties as "response-dependent", that is, recognized in the experience of an object that, therefore, requires first-personal acquaintance of said object. However, aesthetic properties do not intend to refer just to mental states. Insofar as the responses are directed to the objects, aesthetic properties emerge as the merited response to certain objective features that elicit them; in this sense they are still somehow object-centred. So defined, aesthetic properties are often considered dispositional properties: steady dispositions in objects to cause certain reactions in suitable qualified observers. I think that the description of aesthetic properties given by Robert Stecker's *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art,* Glenn Parsons' *The Philosophy of Design,* and Thi C. Nguyen's "The Arts of Actions" are compatible with this understanding of aesthetic properties. And so, my analyses of formal, functional, and performative aesthetic properties of design will refer a great deal to their respective theoretical accounts.

But lets start by recalling that, at least since the influential work of Frank Sibley reinvigorated the interest in the plurality of aesthetic properties beyond the beautiful and the sublime,[1] aesthetic properties have been understood at the core as a matter of perception. Although, whereas non-aesthetic properties (for instance, being "heavy" or "rectangular") would be noticed by anyone with normally functioning senses and who is paying sufficient attention, the aesthetic ones (like being "monumental" or "austere") wouldn't be so easily detected, as they require the exercise of certain sensitivity that Sibley, recalling the classic term from the eighteenth-century tradition, labelled "taste". After Sibley, most defenders of aesthetic properties appeal less to taste than to a certain sort of experience in order to explain how aesthetic properties are so perceived as they emerge from a non-aesthetic base, but they are not inferred from it. This means that non-aesthetic features are *never* sufficient condition for aesthetic properties and this underdetermination leads to the possibility of facing persistent aesthetic disagreements among perceivers. But it also means that such disagreements would only be genuine if we assume that people that disagree cannot be right at the same time about the *same* thing, so there must be at least a chance to set up the dispute over the description of that which in principle we all could perceive, inasmuch as we are suitable perceivers. It is thus

admitted that aesthetic properties are not appreciated in the mechanical or natural response to the physical features of objects because our different sensibilities, circumstances and context of appreciation affect our perception. Moreover, some background knowledge on the type of object in question is also commonly admitted as necessary for a correct aesthetic appreciation of the objects. In fact, nowadays, many accounts of aesthetic experience distinguish a "perceptual" from an "experiential" account of aesthetic properties that includes not just sensory perceptible properties but also expressive, representational and symbolic properties as they are realized in an item captured not only by our sensory perception but also our thought and imagination.[2] Since our experience does not have to be neither only nor primarily perceptual, we can appreciate aesthetic properties in the imaginative experience of novel plots but also in the mental representation of a mathematical proof or a chess move. In short, aesthetic properties are properties of how objects of the senses, the imagination and of the intellect *appear to* us.

Now, as Robert Stecker points out, for our experience to be aesthetic, we must take satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, from the appearance of these objects "for their own sake" (*Intersections*, 24) and so guarantee the autonomy of such experience. The influential view of Kant's *Critique of Pure Judgment* established "disinterestedness" as the requirement for the autonomy of aesthetic pleasure. According to Kant, aesthetic judgments are subjective, as they are based on a felt response of pleasure, yet claim universality, since humans *a priori* share the same mental faculties and ought to respond similarly insofar as our judgements are independent of any interest, sensual, practical or theoretical; that is, our aesthetic judgement must respond only to the form of objects in the absence of the perspective of any further benefit or advantage that they might bring us. However, Kant's conception of disinterestedness seems particularly strong about its demands and would be built not just in the exclusion of but in opposition to any instrumental use of the object in question.[3] This operates a separation from the everyday world that, like others, Stecker thinks is mistaken. Among its consequences, a restrictive attention to (an equally mistaken mystical view of) art and nature has been given in detriment to many other, practice oriented, things that equally deserve to be considered proper objects of aesthetic appreciation. Instead, Stecker proposes dropping the notion of disinterest and formulating the autonomy of aesthetic value in terms of an experience valuable for its own sake that is compatible with its being *also* instrumentally valuable, or valuable for something else (*Aesthetics,* 54) and that permeates our lives inasmuch as it can happen anywhere.

From here on, I will align with Stecker and affirm that aesthetic properties are appreciated in a sort of experience that focuses on forms, qualities, or meanings of objects, and their interrelations, which we appreciate for their own sake.[4] Consequently, the aesthetic value of an object, compatible with its instrumental value, is measured by the value of the experiences that those forms, qualities, and meanings bring about.[5] In any case, aesthetic experiences are object-centred and happen in our encounters not just with artworks and nature but with all types of things. The same sort of independent value can be found in different contexts of appreciation, reaching the field of the everyday and design objects.

2. Properties of the Form

Aesthetic properties are properties that we perceive or experience in the appearance of objects, which have been commonly understood as their *form*. But, again, there are various ways of conceiving what the form consists of.

Kantian formalists understood the form of objects as something immediately available to the senses. Colours, lines, rhythms are typical examples of non-aesthetic properties immediately given to sensory perception that produce the experience of unity, harmony, balance and structural properties in general; in these approaches, aesthetic properties are perceived without reliance on any background knowledge. Furthermore, as the form was understood as immediately available to the senses, the formalist doctrine separated form from representational content, yet formalists grounded

the value of art in something special about its forms. One of classic formalism's main figures, Clive Bell sustained that "the significant form" gives rise to the distinctive "aesthetic emotion" (*Art*, 3). However, to confine the aesthetic experience to the appreciation of form in such terms is, for many, an obscured and narrow description of the aesthetic that significantly reduces the reasons why we value art and, on the other hand, hampers the candidature to appreciation of aesthetic value of non-artistic ordinary daily-life objects such as designs for what they are.

As said earlier, the traditional formalist view is contested by acknowledging that "formal properties" are not "those aesthetic properties exclusively determined by sensuous or physical properties",[6] given that the appearance of objects of the imagination and of the intellect can also have form. But, whereas a moderate formalism admits that, it will not accept the aesthetic relevance of the context and the knowledge of the observer.[7] Others have defend though that such factors affect importantly the capability to pay attention and affectively respond to certain aspects of the objects, being capable of altering the experience of those properties. In this sense, non-formalist accounts note that aesthetic experience is mediately informed and hencehow, imbued with thought, imagination and emotion, aesthetic experience will reveal expressive and representational qualities.

Arguably, the separation between form and content held by formalism does not work in the appreciation of objects such as artworks. The formalist requirement for non-referentiality that is supposed to exclude from the form features referring to anything "external" to the objects has for long been questioned. Using exemplification and most notably expression, Nelson Goodman showed how world meanings do not locate out the artwork's and therefore can be attributed to "pure" abstract paintings or works of architecture (*Ways of Worldmaking,* 59-65).[8] Moreover, many have insisted on the fact that, when dealing with artworks with clearly representational content, *what* they say is not independent of *how* they do it. Clearly, works such as novels or films represent characters, actions, points of view in a certain way, conveyed or embodied in a certain form and are grasped through such form. In short, form does not exclude meanings yet what matters aesthetically speaking is whether we derive satisfaction from attending to how the content of a work is conveyed or embodied in the work in question for its own sake. However, this does not preclude that through our aesthetically engaging with the work other instrumental values are also achieved.

Noël Carroll defines the form of artworks as the "ensemble of choices intended to realize the point or purpose of the artwork" (*The Philosophy of Art*, 143) that, within a historical and pluralistic approach to art, goes often beyond aesthetic gratification. Carroll's broader view of form can apply to other sorts of artifacts like design objects. Both artworks and design have functions and forms, but unlike art, design would have no content. Herein, Jane Forsey defends the muteness and immanence of design objects.[9] She clarifies that "this is not to suggest that designs cannot also be used in communicative practices: many designs become symbols of wealth, power, elegance, and so on", consequently, "many of our consumer choices involve attempts at self-expression or self-definition through the objects that we purchase and use". However, design objects "do not themselves speak, or were not created as forms of (profound) communication" (67, n. 90). In short, in contrast to artworks, designs are "'mere real things', to use Arthur Danto's phrase" (28). Another leading theorist of design, Glen Parsons, also analyses these "meanings" of design as expression of the spirit of a certain time and recalls that even the slogan of Modernism "beauty follows form" did not involve the elimination of the expressive and symbolic dimension as "design products can still 'say' something or express an idea or content via their functional elements" (61). Instead, Parsons argues, what Modernists rejected was ornamentations as superimposed layers of symbolism and expression that obscure the essential functionality of designs in line with what they thought was the spirit of our age.

By underlying the contrast between the artists, who try to communicate an original vision, and the designers, who are not expected to say anything profound and are often anonymous, Forsey and Parsons are signaling the everydayness and utility of design. They leave aside the practices that bring art and design very close and so increase the relevance of the expression of the designers' own style

for the aesthetic appraisal of their forms, rather than borrowing style from the realm of fine art. Here is proof of the diversity of objects in the field that we call "design" although, given that Forsey and Parsons intend to stress what is specific of this context of aesthetic appreciation, they deal with design as belonging mainly to the quotidian life.[10] In any case, inasmuch as ornament has to do with the appearances of objects independent from their functions, it could point though to the ground of aesthetic value of design.

Having the same functions, objects show nevertheless a great variety of forms. Such diversity satisfies every taste not just to feed the markets but as a praiseworthy signal of creativity. Functionality may still be manifest in the appearance of designs that we still recognize as sofas or coffee-pots and constrains the options taken by designers from considerations of structure, size, economy, safety or the appropriateness of the materials for the use in question. But such limitations may nevertheless seem small in comparison with the wide scope of formal possibilities open to designers and support the belief in that "function always *underdetermines* its form" (Parsons *The philosophy of design*, 104) where anyway aesthetic value would rest.

Stecker has argued that the aesthetic experience of everyday artifacts is based in formal properties that do not need either to manifest their functions nor enhance the artifacts' performance of their functions. By emphasizing that artifacts will have variable features (forms, sizes, colours), Stecker contends that they are responsible for the variability too of any artifacts' aesthetic value. Their different looks give them different aesthetic characters (including their different expressive and symbolic dimensions) in contrast to perfectly functional design objects yet with no aesthetic appeal at all. On the other hand, Stecker does not mean to ignore the objects' functions, as they are undoubtedly part of the relevant background knowledge that affords their correct aesthetic appreciation, but his point is that the recognition of their functions does not translate into properties aesthetically valuable and only plays a role in aesthetically appreciating artifacts "through an interplay of function and [independent] formally valuable aesthetic features of the artifacts in question" (*Intersections*, 153). Such interplay highlights though the possibility that aesthetic features of the form actually help to enhance the artifacts' performance of their function, which is at the core of what Stephen Davies call "functional beauty".

Davies attributes "primary" functions to utilitarian artifacts. By primary functions, he means those that are central to the kind of artifact as such. Davies declares functionally beautiful the object "possessing aesthetic properties that contribute positively to its performing its intended principal function" (237). But Stecker states that this is a case of interaction between two values, aesthetic and functional, that remain different in sort. Indeed, Davies' notion of "functional beauty" names "the logic of aesthetic judgements as they relate to human artefacts, [...], in which non-aesthetic [...] and aesthetic goals *interact and combine*" (237, my emphasis).

Stecker gives the example of plates shaped in a way that makes them better for arranging and consuming food. The interaction between aesthetic properties, which he refers to as design properties, and functional value could of course be negative, when the former hampers the latter. However, in other cases, no interaction occurs since formal design on an artifact is purely ornamental, fulfilling purely "secondary" functions; and so, the plates might have a visual pattern painted that pleases aesthetically without affecting their function at all (147). Hence, Stecker's analysis limits the possibility of intersection between aesthetic and functional values to the constrain of the formal features of design objects in virtue of their belonging to an artifact kind and the possible enhancement of their functional utility carried out by aesthetic properties. He adds though one more at the end, which occurs "when a secondary [aesthetic] function naturally emerges from the primary one...; *an experience in which the artifact plays a central role when performing its primary function*" (148-149). Like when the plates on which food is served (primary function) enhance the overall experience of eating a meal which gives them "*functional aesthetic* value [...] that is closely enough related to, though not identical with, the primary function of the plates" (148, my emphasis). Thereby, this is

the closest that Stecker gets in combining functional and aesthetic value, "as they are wrapped together in expectations, even norms perhaps, about the role dinnerware should play", yet keeping the distinction between them. Finally, Stecker underlines that, since the aesthetic aspect of artifacts is an important part of our interaction with them, the way artifacts are made, used and appreciated contribute also to the understanding and evaluation of a way of life, or social or cultural practices in which those artifacts play a role. But this has nothing to do either with objects' functionality nor with their aesthetic value per se but with a larger appreciative enterprise that comprises both them and other kinds of values. I agree, that is a different issue, yet I want to point out that one of the possible interactions described by Stecker (namely, when aesthetic features of the form enhance the artifacts' performance of their function) matches Davies' notion of functional beauty. However, both Stecker and Davies keep function and aesthetic value separated, for both things interact and combine but do not blend. My view though is not to exclude such possibility of appreciating aesthetic-functional properties, as other accounts of functional beauty defend. These functional aesthetic properties though would still be properties emerging from the contemplation of the appearance of the object, not from the subject's interaction with it.

3. Functional Beauty

Davies and Stecker attempt to reconcile functionality with the idea of the aesthetic value of an object as based on its appearance. They draw some ways in which aesthetic and functional value may intersect and even interact in utilitarian artifacts but neither of the notions of functional beauty and functional aesthetic value given integrate these two elements. Other theories have gone further in the ambition to blend function and form seeking to show a kind of beauty (meaning aesthetic qualities) that is functional in the sense that objects' purposes locate on the basis for certain kinds of aesthetic judgements, and that, taking functionality as a defining feature of design, is essential to guide its correct aesthetic appreciation. This suggests that there will be no functional beauty properly speaking unless considerations of function actually integrate the aesthetic character of the objects. Yet proposals divide according to the different explanations of the ways in which function is at the base of aesthetic judgement offered.

Some philosophers appeal to the canonical Kant's aesthetics and his notion of "dependent" or "adherent" beauty. Different from free beauty that presupposes no concept of the objects, adherent or dependent beauty does presuppose concepts of what each object ought to be and it is measured in accordance to its perfection therewith.[11] Whereas paradigms of free beauty are to be found in natural objects such as flowers, which bear no content and to which we respond to their forms alone, the beauty of other objects, typically artifacts, depends upon attending to them in terms of particular determinate concepts. That is, artifacts cannot be aesthetically appreciated in a correct manner ignoring the kind of thing they are and the purposes they aim at. Hence, the aesthetic appreciation of design objects that serve certain utilitarian goals, requires attending to their functionality. Now, in Kant, even when aesthetic appreciation demands seeing the objects as what they are and what they are for, their concepts and content do not determine their beauty, which will mean confusing aesthetic pleasures with sensual and practical ones. In a nutshell, whereas Kant admitted dependent beauties, the requirement of disinterestedness makes it inconsistent to defend that functionality is involved at all in what makes the object beautiful .[12] And yet, Kant's interpreters have discussed whether such dependency of certain beauties still leaves room for the influence of functionality in aesthetic pleasure.

Some have described the role of the knowledge of the function in the appreciation of their dependent beauty negatively, namely, as constraining what we can find beautiful in an object, like excluding certain forms incompatible with the objects' function.[13] This view matches one of the possibilities of intersection between functional and aesthetic value analyzed by Stecker, leaving the experience of beauty *free* of functionality and relying exclusively on the appeal of the aesthetic

properties of the form, chosen by the designers.[14] But in order to support the idea that the functions of the objects have a role in their being beautiful, a different interpretation has been given of dependent beauty emphasizing that we appraise the objects because of the perfection *in the way* they fulfill their purposes. First Robert Wicks and later, following his arguments, Jane Forsey argue that it is precisely because the notion of dependent beauty affords the contingency in design forms in relation to its purposes, that we appreciate the beauty of certain concrete designs, especially when we compare them with other possibilities. The contingency of an object's particular form shows how its function relates to *that* particular form, which leads to the experience of beauty. However, Glenn Parsons objects that this is just another way to subscribe the underdetermination of form by function (115). Indeed, I think that the emphasis on the contingency of a particular form as the source of aesthetic pleasure could lead to Stecker's view, who insists on signalling the *different* look of concrete beautiful things in respect to others of the same kind as the explanation of their distinctive aesthetic character, not the function they all share. In order to make functional considerations integrate the aesthetic character of the objects by delivering some distinctive properties, a closer (more necessary so to speak) connection between certain form and the object's functionality should be offered

Recurring also to Kant's notion of dependent beauty, Jerrold Levinson explains that the appreciation of the beauty of artifacts whose identity is of a purposive or functional sort depends on seeing them as objects of a certain kind, because our perception does not construe objects as abstract sensory presentations and, then, seeing them "*as for* something" makes the objects display "properties that would otherwise lack" ("Beauty Is Not One", 194). How consistent the contribution of objects' practical dimension to their form is with Kant's own view may again be quite controversial. The idea is, however, developed by other accounts of functional beauty that do not appeal to Kant's notion of adherent beauty. The most relevant account of functional beauty in this vein is proposed by Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson (2008).

Indeed, Parsons and Carlson claim that our recognition of the aesthetic properties of an object is influenced by our knowledge of its function that somehow alters the appearance of the objects. Applying Kendall Walton's theory of the structure of proper aesthetic judgements of works of art to the case of functional objects, Parsons and Carlson defend that, viewed under their "functional categories", objects have perceptual properties that are standard for the type, contra-standard, or variable. And these properties tend to display aesthetic qualities such us elegance and simplicity (when the object has mostly standard features), "looking fit" (when not having contra-standard features the object has though variable ones that make things *appear* especially *apt* for carrying out its function), and "visual tension" (salient when the object has contra-standard features that would make it appear unsuited to perform its function yet pleasing when the object is however manifestly functional). Grounded in a perception of the connection between non-aesthetic elements and their function that pleasures, these properties exhibit this essential dimension of design. But it is important to note that Parsons and Carlson claim that these are aesthetic properties; perceived in response to non-aesthetic features that are indicative of the objects' functionality yet refer to how the objects *look* or *appear to* us, pleasing by their own sake independently of whether the objects are, or not, actually efficient. So described, functional aesthetic properties are grasped in the contemplation of the object, not in the interaction with them.

However, as already noted, some authors, like Stecker, are sceptical about the possibility of the translation of the perception of functionality into properties aesthetically valuable. He particularly contests the idea of turning "looking fit" into an aesthetic category since it is not a sufficient condition to arouse aesthetic pleasure. As said, objects perceived as fully functional can have no aesthetic appeal, proving that formal properties, especially the variable ones that stand out over standard features, would be responsible of their aesthetic value, their elegance or simplicity, for instance (*Intersections* 145). It is true that Stecker concedes that, in the case of pleasing visual tension, contra-standard features that usually undermine aesthetic appreciation sometimes can enhance it, but de-

pending on their combination with certain positive formal properties, such as colours or unexpected shapes "that please the eye and engage the mind in forcing us to wonder whether they serve some purpose or are just decorative" (150). He is ready to extend this to the case of looking fit. Nevertheless, Stecker still denies that our recognition of functionality penetrates aesthetic experience, which is precisely the claim made by Parsons and Carlson. Hence, the debate is open among those that, like Stecker, remain skeptical about the possibility of translation of functionality into aesthetic properties and those who affirm that seeing objects under certain functional categories to which they belong sometimes can affect aesthetic perception in the understanding of how their actual form is well-suited for their functions and given the competence and expectations of observers (Paris 2020, Sauchelli 2013). Big tires in a pickup truck make it appear pleasingly powerful, whereas it may look wrong in other kinds of vehicle (Parsons 119).

I agree with Stecker that aptness for a function must be embodied in a valuable form since I think that in aesthetic appreciation, of design as of any other sort of object, appearance is always the point. Without relation to the form, functionality is not enough to cause aesthetic pleasure. But I am inclined to think that appearance of functionality can take part in building the form of objects that appeal to us, as they appear to our senses, imagination and thought. As is also argued in the case of art, appreciating the objects under certain categories can carry out a "transfiguration" of their aesthetics (McFee, 7).

Experiential accounts of aesthetic experience count on some relevant background knowledge and beliefs that can penetrate and affect our perception of objects. Informed by a wide range of elements, a complex set of aesthetic properties *can* emerge from non-aesthetic ones (as the former are always undetermined by the latter) in aesthetic experience of design: functional, structural as well as expressive and representational properties, which may serve possible purposes other than functionality of design, trying to engage the mind beyond decoration too. To dissect the exact source of aesthetic pleasure in each case might be difficult, since aesthetic appreciation of forms, rather than an addition of (isolated) classes of aesthetic properties, looks more like a continuum of intersections and interactions between them. In any case, according to a rich and pluralistic view of aesthetic appreciation, the evaluation will vary according to the contingent designs in question.

On the other hand, functions or purposes may be also plural within a type of artifact (belonging to different functional categories) and also within the members of the same type (as the purposes of individual designs may differ from the type's). Different to artworks, whose functions must be discovered typically by interpreting the works' meanings (Stecker, *Intersections*, 52), design objects have defining functions that some considered their "primary", as Davies puts it, or "proper" functions, in Parsons & Carlson's terms, central to the type. To address the proper functions of objects seems an important matter since it provides the concepts under which their beauty is judged, insofar as cases of adherent beauty as Forsey sees them. The indetermination at this level could lead to an objectionable relativism about the correctness of judgement of functional beauty, especially in the case of conflict (Parsons & Carlson).

However, theories of design have offered different proposals for the identification of such defining functions. Probably the more prominent in recent discussions are, on the one hand, theories that appeal to the designer's intentions, as Forsey does in her book, and, on the other, the "selected-effects" theory offered by Parsons & Carlson, which derive proper functions from the object's actual use and the success of ancestors (that is, earlier instances of a kind) in meeting some need or want . The intense debate between the two has provided multiple examples in support of both theories and counterexamples against them. As Stecker states, the former seems to better explain why objects are created in the first place and accommodate novelty in design whereas the latter may offer good reasons for both why certain artifacts keep being manufactured and distributed, and the changes in functions publicly accepted that happen over time; whereby the suggestion of some sort of combination of the two theories is maybe advisable (*Intersections* 142). New functional properties could

emerge with new usages, although such new usages would probably not have been adopted unless objects' original forms seemed apt for them. Sometimes the original function could be completely forgotten, for example, Madrid's Plaza Mayor planned though as a royal courtyard. However, the "full appreciation" of objects that are no longer used as first intended, like the also much-discussed case of an old church that becomes a pub, would require attention to that as much as to their current functions (*Intersections* 144). Recalling Carroll's definition, the original forms were intended in conjunction with a purpose in mind. Hence, for their appreciation, it seems to me unavoidable to endorse some sort of intentionalism, compatible with the anonymity of much design, that makes hypothesis in reference to the aesthetic choices taken in a certain time and within certain context and social practices, which are public. After all, as Stecker also points out, it is easier, in general, to assign defining functions *to* an *artifact kind*, for example, dresses, than to *individual* designs, let's say, a dress designed for the coronation of a queen. Individual designs may carry out multiple purposes, some other than the proper ones of the kind, whose particular instantiation nonetheless depends on certain intentions with which they were made or used (141). Finally, given their contingency and singularity, the appreciation of the aesthetic value of individual designs requires to counterbalance the whole range of each object's aesthetic properties, where the potential weight of functional beauty, related to the proper function of their kind *or* their own purposes, is relative to the weight of *other* aesthetic properties of their form.

4. Performative properties

Accounts of functional beauty (as well as other possible aesthetic properties as included in the term) try to ground a legitimate source of aesthetic pleasure of utilitarian objects such as design. Furthermore, if design is essentially utilitarian, functional beauty could be thought as a normative standpoint for the correct aesthetic appreciation of design, whereas other properties of the form could play a secondary role at most. After all, as Parsons argues, functional beauty is to capture at least partly the Modernist claim affirming that in good design beauty follows form. Accepting that, in so far as it affects aesthetic perception, functionality will be adding aesthetic properties that otherwise we will miss, my arguments, and I believe that Parsons' as well (120), clearly deny giving such privilege to functional properties. Instead, my proposal is to consider the weight of the different aesthetic properties, whether emerging from functional considerations or not, relative to the design in question.

Still, another source of aesthetic pleasure might be summed up: the user's active interaction with the object. Particularly promoted by everyday aesthetics, there is a growing interest in the aesthetic value of our own activities, including actions, reactions, and body movements as well as our deliberations and choices. What is offered by this performative framework is an agency-focused standpoint for aesthetic appreciation. This standpoint is coherent with tracing aesthetic salience beyond the "sensuous qualities" of objects (as defended in section 1) and seems worth exploring for the aesthetics of designs since they are meant to be used or enhance active interaction with them. Properties salient in the appreciation of such interaction or usages are aesthetic since they emerge in more or less satisfactory first-personal experiences of mental and physical processes involved in our activities and valuable for their own sake. For example, let us consider an elliptical machine. A particular graceful form of motion is appreciated, not in the machine's appearance, but only when it is used. Grasped in the actual interaction with design objects, performative aesthetic properties can be considered notwithstanding as another sort of aesthetic "functional" properties (Favara-Kurkowski & Andrzejewski 77). But, if we attribute aesthetic properties to the activities and not to the object, we may question such experience in so far as it refers just to idiosyncratic mental states, failing to observe the requirement of intersubjective validity for aesthetic judgments, and results hardly informative for the aesthetic evaluation of design *objects*. However, such worry should disappear when realizing that, as in the case of the elliptical machine, the object is designed to afford certain (performative) aesthetic experience.

The lack of intersubjective validity of aesthetic value does not seem to be a worry anyway for philosophers that, working in everyday aesthetics actually emphasize the privacy and variety of people's own responses to artifacts in their current life since, by contrast with the discussion of value in art, they do not have to match any frame dictated by convention or social practices. In spontaneous everyday life our aesthetic attention can constitute the aesthetic object in any way we wish (Saito 18–19). Indeed, the "object" towards which we aesthetically respond to are our own activities, being ourselves the only "experts" on how merited such responses are. The importance of aesthetic discourse and criticism is emblematic of the sphere of art which everyday aesthetics wish to diverge from. This is not to deny that our experiences cannot be intersubjectively sharable but, after all, "appreciating design is not a question of recognizing what everyone likes but what makes us feel good" (Favara-Kurkowski & Andrzejewski 80).

Others theories like Stecker's, but also functional beauty accounts such as Forsey's and Parsons & Carlson's, are against such a considerable break with aesthetic tradition, fearing that aesthetic value confuses too with mere sensual pleasures and moral value as well. I share their concerns. Yet, performative approaches do not have to give up the possibility of adding aesthetic properties to the intersubjective discussion of the aesthetic value of design objects. Focused on the kind of "arts" (in a very broad use of the term) intended to engender agency and activity in their audience, C. Thi Nguyen has developed a "process aesthetics" that helps to include performative qualities among those the forms of design objects dispose to cause in suitable qualified observers, in a derivative way.

Nguyen agrees that when artifacts are in use, our attitude towards them is not contemplative, whereby the target of aesthetic appreciation moves from the object as it exists independently of our activity to the activity itself, to which we attribute aesthetic properties. Nevertheless, he also argues that the aesthetic experience of activities can be shaped as part of intentional practices such as design. Following his ideas, here process aesthetics comes from the perspective of the users, and of course, we each have our own different activities, but they are not so unframed as everyday aesthetics implies. In fact, Nguyen says that, quite like the traditional arts, artifacts can shape aesthetic activity (4). Recalling the example of the elliptical machine, our aesthetic attention is directed towards certain aspects of our action. Somehow, designs sculpt particular activities. In design, artifacts help to stabilize certain experiences of action and make them more intersubjectively sharable because their usages develop under what he calls "functional frames" that guide the users under the specification of some goal and "practice-based frames" (conventions, social practices, rules….) (18). Likewise, the structure of the artifacts and the aesthetic choices made in designing them encourage and call forth certain aesthetic experiences of doing. Nguyen's view does not require that the purpose of an artifact aligns with the designer's intent but he notes that, in some cases, "it is the coordination of the prescriptions and the artifact design that can give the artist [designer] some measure of control over the audience's experience, and provide for some stability to how the audience interacts with the artifact and to the experiences which it generates" (18).

Again, as with the concepts or background knowledge that inform aesthetic experience, the framing does not determine it, nor does it deny the autonomy of the aesthetic. Actually, despite the relatively stable focus of attention provided by designs' functional frames, the aesthetic response of the users is expected to be rather diverse; focused on agency, "the precise content of the experience, and the precise form of its attendant aesthetic properties, varies" from one user to the next, even when they are engaging with the very same work" or design (21). Besides, such aesthetic qualities are neither demanded to be externalized nor made public. But performative aesthetic experiences are not completely independent from the forms of the objects that evoke them. Nguyen mentions urban planning as process art. We can use that example to note how designs generate performative aesthetic properties in the (private) self-reflective appreciation of the activity by the people that, for example, walk through cities. As Nguyen explains, some of their delights, or uneasiness, will arise from object-aesthetic qualities, such as the visual quality of the architecture and the street and the

layout of the city, that will also condition the aesthetic quality of the choices they will make to navigate them (6). Performative aesthetic properties are qualities of the activities, not the objects, but nevertheless we may also "make secondary judgments about the quality" of the object "based on its functional capacity to encourage aesthetically valuable actions" (10).

Summing up, performative aesthetic qualities emerge in the user's activity itself. Still, we can think of some of them as the merited response to the correct apprehension of particular features in the objects as they exist independently. Moreover, inasmuch as design objects are instrumental, we may believe that the set of their aesthetic qualities would not be complete until the users have played their own active role. And, of course, this view doesn't mean dismissing the value that our personal and private engagement with the objects have for us, yet it adds performative properties that "can participate substantially in the aesthetic end product and its particular value — without finalizing that value" (25).

5. Final remarks

To conclude, by discussing formal, functional and performative accounts of aesthetic properties, my essay has tried to assess their main respective contributions to the evaluation of design objects. I have defended that the global aesthetic value of these objects is the result of the intersections and interactions between these different sets of properties. Formal properties, structural, expressive and symbolic are responsible for aesthetic value of design objects, often independently of their functionality and many other times enhancing it. But the suitability of objects' features for their functions, inasmuch as constituent of how the objects appear to us, can be a source of aesthetic pleasure, as well as the forms of the objects can dispose the emergence of aesthetic properties in the very same activities that we perform while using or interacting with them. And every case will be different. Conditioned by the forms of the artifacts and their rules for usage, performative and object aesthetics will often be deeply intermingled, increasing the richness and complexity of aesthetic appreciation in the pluralistic and variable way I defend here for design objects.

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Notes

[1] See Sibley's seminal work: "Aesthetic Concepts".

[2] Alan Goldman ("The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value") claims that aesthetic appreciation engages simultaneously our perception, imagination, thought, and feeling; such an engagement of our mental faculties with the form of the object will be the unique mark of aesthetic experience.

[3] After Kant the so-called "cult to aesthetic appreciation" turned the notion of disinterestedness into an intellectually rigorous attitude, radically distinct in kind from ordinary perception; a strong requirement for aesthetic appreciation deemed by many as actually impossible to achieve, even a myth (see Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude").

[4] Stecker's definitionis inspired by Jerrold Levison's *The pleasures of aesthetics,* 6.

[5] See *Intersections,* 23. Stecker subscribes "aesthetic empiricism" which holds that aesthetic value is the value of a type of experience. Other authors sustain instead that the primary bearer of aesthetic value are aesthetic properties. Although, as Stecker shows, both accounts would be equivalent once we realize that "the important fact for us is that response-dependent accounts of these properties define them in terms of experiences they are disposed to bring about" (37).

[6] As Nick Zangwill puts it, that view would be "the most straightforward account …. [that] would capture the intuitive idea that formal properties are those aesthetic properties that are directly perceivable or that are determined by properties that are directly perceivable" (Zangwill, 56). His "moderate formalism" does not agree with such account.

[7] In particular, Zangwill discusses Kendall Walton's objections to formalism (Zangwill, chapter 5).

[8] His account remains very influential in other more recent philosophical views that reject classic formalism. For instance, see Young's *Critique of Pure Music*.

[9] Forsey defends that craft is also mute and, in this way both, design and craft, are distinct from art. Yet, as opposed to craft, design is mass-produced and not the result of the skilled production of an artisan that directly manipulates raw materials. Thus, design emerges with industrial revolution, the possibilities of mass manufacturing and the growth of market capitalism.

[10] Favara-Kurkowski ("In defense of Forsey's Aesthetics of Design", 3-4) makes this point in relation to Forsey.

[11] The locus of the distinction is *Critique of the Power of Judgement* §16.

[12] Representational artworks are artifacts that serve purposes (think of religious painting, for instance), whose beauty is so dependent on what they are and represent. The beauty of artworks will emerge from the way artistic genius *freely* represents content in a particular form. As a matter of fact, by marking out the distinction of art's aesthetic appreciation, Kant separated high from low culture and distinguished art proper from merely functional artifacts, which do not usually promote aesthetic features above all but aim to please and are evaluated in terms of their commercial and practical goals. See Kieran (*Revealing Art,* 63).

[13] Paul Guyer, "Beauty and Utility in Eighteen-Century Aesthetics". Although in "Free and Adherent Beauty: a modest proposal" Guyer gives a more positive view of dependent beauty.

[14] See also Davies (235-6).

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