Wassard Elea Rivista

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The Value(s) of Design

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In my book *The Aesthetics of Design*, I argued that design is mute – it says nothing, and moreover it *means* nothing. I would like to expand on this theme today. In doing so, I am aware that my position flies in the face of assertions made by designers or on their behalf by curators of museums, judges of design competitions and marketers of designed products. But I am here to deny that the "Sayl" chair by Yves Behar for Herman Miller of 2011 "makes an iconic statement", that Ugg footwear "feels like love" or that kitchen appliances by Valcucine "suggest a new lifestyle". I'll also happily add that diamonds are not "forever". Such claims, I suggest, amount to a category mistake, whereby design is treated as though it were art and designers are misidentified as artists, or at least artists manquées. This category mistake draws our attention away from the ways in which we can best understand design values. Thus my deflationary strategy – of divesting design of false claims to meaning – has an ultimate inflationary goal: that of reinvesting design with the value to which it has a more legitimate claim. Doing so, I believe, will lead to better clarity about the ways that we appreciate and talk about design.

One way, although perhaps not the only way, to approach the issue of value in design is to contrast design with art, or at least with artistic value. But before embarking on this task, a few preliminary remarks are in order. I will assume (but not argue for here) that aesthetic experience is an experience of – or revelation of – value. Of course, we value aesthetic experiences when we have them but I mean something more: that the objects of our experiences also have value, and that aesthetic experience is marked by an act of judging, or evaluation, where we assert the presence of value when we perceive or believe that the object before us is, for example, beautiful. These evaluations account for the objective aspect of our aesthetic experiences: when I say "the sunset is beautiful" I am not merely expressing my feelings in response to the world but I am also making an assertion *about* the world, one that can be the subject of disagreement and debate. The subjective aspect of our aesthetic experience is determined by the particular kind of pleasure that it can give us.

But what value, exactly, are we asserting or revealing in our aesthetic judgements? I mentioned beauty, and indeed it was the term of choice for much of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, I will consider a more contemporary account, advanced by Robert Stecker, who called it merely "aesthetic value" and sought to describe it in isolation from moral, economic, practical or cognitive values that also accompany our judgements and experiences. Stecker discerns aesthetic value to have a number of elements. First, it is autonomous in the sense of being intrinsic or valued for its own sake. It is also autonomous in the sense that it is "not defined by, derived from, or…a function of other values"[1]: it is *sui generis*, or of its own kind. Second, aesthetic value need not be positive or always experienced as pleasurable: we can be shocked or dismayed while still valuing the experience and the object in question. Aesthetic judgements, then, "can be both positive and negative".[2] Third, aesthetic value "can be found almost anywhere, in artworks and natural objects, but also in many everyday things".[3] It is "independent from other values and the type of object experienced".[4] Putting these elements together, Stecker claims that aesthetic value

> is not derived from any institution or practice. It is everywhere.
> It has to be defined in its own right […]. Aesthetic value can be
> realized in different ways in different media but it cannot be a
> different value in different media.[5]

Stecker makes no further claims about whether aesthetic value really exists in the objects of our experience or whether it is projected onto them by our acts of evaluation. It is enough for him if we can distinguish it from other kinds of values and if we can understand aesthetic experience as an experience of this particular kind of value.[6] It follows from this that a chair, a painting, a human body or a sunset can all have aesthetic value and can all be experienced as, say, beautiful. If aesthetic value is *sui generis*, then there is no appreciable difference between the value of design and art or design and objects of nature.

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[1] Robert Stecker, "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy", European Society for Aesthetics Annual Conference, Prague 2013, p. 3. See www.eurosa.org/2013/esa2013.html.
[2] Robert Stecker, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value", *Philosophy Compass*, vol.1 (2006): 1-10, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[4] Stecker, "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy", p. 4.
[5] Robert Stecker, "Aesthetic Value Defended", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 70 (2012): 355-362, p. 361.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 361. And see "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy", pp. 5, 9.

This, I suggest, is the first of design's values – one that design shares with other things. In terms of this value alone, design, art, all objects in fact, are aesthetically equal and we can have similar experiences of each of them. For example, the gracefulness I claim for a window frame in our discussion of its aesthetic value will be the same grace of a flower or the movement of a dancer; on Stecker's minimal account, aesthetic experience is indiscriminate and aesthetic value, as he notes, is everywhere and is the same everywhere. In some instances, we may not move beyond this assessment, such as when I judge an 18th century Saunier desk to be exquisitely beautiful. In other instances, as with objects of nature such as sunsets and flowers, we can perhaps go no further in our evaluations. But designers, curators and design theorists are quite right to believe that the value revealed in our judgements of design is often *more* than this singular, autonomous aesthetic value. The mistake they too often make is to then equate this further value with that possessed by works of art rather than conceptualizing a value unique to designed objects. To consider this mistake, let me turn to the deflationary part of this paper.

One of Stecker's goals in describing aesthetic value in such broad terms is to make the case for a further value that only artworks possess – artistic value – that cannot be applied to design or to objects of nature. Stecker's reasons for pursuing the notion of artistic value are two-fold. First, he notes that some artworks, especially those of "anti-art" movements such as Dada or conceptual art "lack aesthetic value, or lack sufficient aesthetic value to explain their value as art",[1] yet they do have significant value as works of art. Few, for example, would claim that a Francis Bacon was beautiful, or that Duchamp's "In Advance of a Broken Arm" had aesthetic value, being nothing more than a snow shovel suspended from the ceiling. Yet we do value Bacon's and Duchamp's works as art. "It follows", writes Stecker, "that there is nonaesthetic artistic value".[2] Second, Stecker notes that typically when interacting with artworks as viewers or critics, we value more than their aesthetic value, even if the works have it to a high degree. A Botticelli or Matisse may be beautiful, and we may respond to the aesthetic value of these paintings, but for Stecker this is not all we do, nor all we value in our appreciation of them. There is something more to them, and this "something more" can best be understood as artistic rather than merely aesthetic value.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 356, and see "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aestheic Heteronomy", p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

Of course, for similar reasons, there is clearly "something more" to design as well: my computer cover, I would say, has little perceptible aesthetic value – it is a horrid shade of brown, has no ornament or decoration, and is made of some synthetic material with no tactile reward. Even so, I would say that it has some kind of design value. Similarly, some designs, such as that Saunier desk, may have great aesthetic value, but in our assessments of them *as* designed objects, we frequently assert that their value consists in more than this, or that their aesthetic value is not sufficient to explain their value as objects of design. It follows in the same way, then, that there is also some particular design value that it is our job to identify. Stecker's description of artistic value may provide a model for our purposes.

Artistic value, he claims, is "a type of value not identical with, but that may include, aesthetic value".[1] And valuing artworks in this further way just is "responding to them *as art*".[2] Stecker is cautious about attempts to define artistic value in strict terms but does go some way towards specifiying its characteristics. First, artistic value is not autonomous or of a special kind but is heteronymous in that it is "derived from a plurality of more basic values"[3] such as cognitive, moral, art-historical and aesthetic values. Artistic value is therefore not singular: Stecker notes that there is "absolutely no reason to suppose … that there is one valuable property or one sort of value that artworks possess 'as art'".[4] Artistic value is an amalgam. So, second, while a number of values can thus be combined in it, "what is an artistic value will not be uniform across all artworks".[5] Some works will have little or no aesthetic value but great cognitive or political force, for example. Stecker seeks to keep the notion of artistic value fluid enough to account for changes across time, across cultures and across diverse artistic practices and traditions. Nevertheless, this heteronomy of various values does determine what we value in art and the ways that we value it. And these ways are broader and more complex than our appreciation of a singular aesthetic value.

Finally, how we determine the artistic value of a given work is central to Stecker's position. It "requires understanding what the artist who

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[1]*Ibid.*, p. 355.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. 356.
[3]Stecker, "Aesthethic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy", p. 4.
[4]Robert Stecker, "Two Conceptions of Artistic Value", *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 46 (1997): 51-62, p. 51.
[5]Stecker, "Artistic Value Defended", p. 359.

makes the work is intending to do in it".[1] Art, for Stecker, "is valued as an object of interpretation";[2] artworks are "objects capable of delivering aesthetic experience to those who understand them"[3] but understanding them is essential to our appreciation and to our judgements of their value as art.

By understanding a work, Stecker is clear that he means interpreting it for its meaning. This is a key method for distinguishing artistic value from the other, more incidental values that a work might have. For instance, a painting may have great financial value, it might cover a hole in the wall or it might match the sofa. But these are not artistic values of the work itself, and to see why, Stecker devises a simple test: "does one need to understand the work to appreciate its being valuable in that way? If so, it is an artistic value"[4] – if not, then not. The revelation of aesthetic value does not require interpretation or understanding as part of our judgements; neither does the determination of a work's marketability or physical characteristics. It is only when we seek to determine what is relevant to a work's value as art that we need to attend to its meaning in particular.

Stecker's notion of artistic value is one of many ways of saying that art has significance and that our aesthetic experiences of art involve attempts to grasp this significance. He notes that "imbuing the work with such a value is part of the artist's project in making the work and appreciating the value requires understanding the work".[5] In a different context, Noël Carroll Carroll has likened this experience to an "I/Thou" relation[6] where our interaction with art "is also a matter of a conversation between the artist and us – a human encounter – in which we have a desire to know what the artist intends" in part because we wish to be a "capable respondent" in this conversation.[7] This is not to suggest that understanding always implies success. Aesthetic experience can be positive or negative, as Stecker has noted. We may understand the artist's intentions but decide she has failed to achieve them, or we may remain uncertain of what those intentions were. In both cases, though, we are approaching the object as a work of art when we

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[1]Stecker, "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy", p. 4.
[2]Stecker, "Artistic Value Defended", p. 356.
[3]Stecker, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value", p. 5; and see "Aesthetic Autonomy and Aesthetic Heteronomy" p. 1.
[4]Stecker, Artistic Value Defended", p. 357.
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 360.
[6]Noël Carroll, "Art, Intention and Conversation", Eileen John and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds) *Philosophy of Literature: Contemporary and Classic Readings*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 280-290, p. 285.
[7]*Ibid.*, p. 287.

attempt to understand it; aesthetic experience is here the expectation of artistic value rather than its guaranteed reception. Works of art can fail, and we as viewers can also fail if we do not take up the invitation to interpretation that an I/Thou relation implies.

What Stecker offers here is a more complex form of aesthetic experience than his earlier minimal account: while with no understanding and with largely visual perception, we can judge any object to be simply beautiful, art requires more from us. In order to yield an aesthetic judgement, (and its attendant pleasure) our experience must be directed towards the meaning of a work, and respond to the plurality of values that it possesses. The experience of art engages our cognitive faculties more fully than the experience of, for instance, natural beauty, but such engagement does not alter the aesthetic tenor of our responses.

Let me return to Duchamp's "In Advance of a Broken Arm" as an example. It is particularly interesting because it is also a designed object – a snow shovel – and one not unlike the shovel on my front porch at home. The perceptible difference between the two is negligible; their physical characteristics are almost identical; and their aesthetic value is minimal. But my shovel is not a work of art, and I do not approach it as though it were. When we encounter Duchamp's work, however, we do not ask why it is a snow shovel, or what value it has *as* a shovel, but why it is art, and what value it has *as* art.[1] We are thus entering into a communicative relation with the work as we try to understand it, and what Duchamp may have intended in offering it to us in the way that he did. Artworks thus point *beyond* themselves; we are not invited to merely dwell on their perceptible features, but to search for something more that they intend to say to us.

Stecker is certainly not alone in his view of artistic value. Roger Seamon writes that "the identity and value of works of art lie in their meanings, and thus their status as art objects depends upon interpretations".[2] Duchamp's shovel, he notes, is "understood to be *saying something* by implication";[3] Duchamp opens what Seamon calls a "communicative gap"[4] that he does not fill but that we as the audience are invited to, by way of interpretation. In this, Seamon follows Arthur Danto's theory that artworks can be construed as metaphors, and that in our encounters with art "the gap

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[1]"Aesthetic Value Defended", p. 360.
[2]Roger Seamon, "The Conceptual Dimension in Art and the Modern Theory of Artistic Value", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol 59 (2001): 139-151, p. 139.
[3]*Ibid.*, p. 144.
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 142.

has to be filled in, the mind moved to action".[1] Danto contrasts works of art with what he calls "mere real things"[2] which we do not encounter in the same way, and which do not – indeed cannot – have the same value.

My snow shovel is just that – a mere real thing. And were I to approach it as significant, or attempt to "read" it for its meaning, I would be treating it as something that it is not: designed objects are not works of art, and the activity of design is not a communicative practice in the way that art is. As such, while my shovel may potentially have aesthetic value, it can have no artistic value, and our model for the appreciation of design cannot be that of our appreciation of fine art. This is not to suggest that interpreting designed objects for meaning is impossible: we entertain ourselves by "seeing" cloud formations as animals, for instance, and one could indeed view my snow shovel as a meditation on futility, as I often have. But in such cases, Noël Carroll would suggest that we are being "willfully silly"[3] for the sake of aesthetic amusement; we are not mistaking clouds for works of art, nor are we asserting that an appropriate aesthetic experience of them *requires* such interpretation.

An aesthetic experience of a designed object does not require interpretation because desks and chairs and shovels do not point beyond themselves to some other meaning that they have, nor do they invite us to fill in a communicative gap in order to assess their value. Claims to the contrary amount to what I would call the "artification" of designed objects, often undertaken to increase sales and prestige. But, I do not have to 'understand' Yves Behar's "Sayl" chair to have an aesthetic experience of it because there is nothing there to understand. Artification is an artificial attempt to provide 'added value' to designs that would be irrelevant if they were simply assessed on their own merits.

But what then are these merits and what is the value of design? There are two key notions in this discussion of artistic value that I seek to eliminate from that of design: the meaning that artworks are said to possess, and the interpretation required of a viewer in the aesthetic experience of them. And I would suggest that we replace these notions with function on the one hand, and use on the other. Stecker's model for artistic value is helpful: we have seen that design value is not reducible to aesthetic value alone; we can also say that design value is heteronomous in that it is an

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[1] Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 171.
[2] *Ibid.*, Chapter One.
[3] Carroll, "Art, Intention and Conversation", p. 286.

amalgam of more than one value that may, but need not always, include aesthetic value. And, as with art, we also need to distinguish between other incidental values a design might have, and to focus on those which are relevant to its value *as* a designed object in our aesthetic appraisals. I think function and use can help us here, and I will take each in turn.

Following Stecker's model, we can suggest that the guiding category in appreciating a designed object is the category of *design* rather than that of art. If so, function must be central to this category. By function I mean that designed objects are made to serve a specific purpose, and indeed that these objects can be defined by their functions as being things of a certain kind. What makes something a hammer, for instance, is that it was made to serve the function of hammering nails – it was meant to *do* something in particular. While on occasion a pair of vice grips or a rock will also drive in a nail, neither of these is *therefore* a hammer, even though it is being used in a similar way. With designed objects, function is part of what defines them as the kinds of things they are: it is not merely the use to which they can be put. An office chair *is* a thing meant to be sat on; a shovel *is* a thing meant to move snow. Part of the cleverness of Duchamp is that he negated the function – and hence the defining characteristic – of the shovel when he exhibited it as art, effectively moving it from one category of thing to another; from doing something to saying something.

This notion of function is important to our aesthetic evaluations of design in a number of ways. First, a pair of vice grips or a rock cannot be acclaimed for being a well-designed hammer even if they also drive in nails because they were not designed to do this, or designed with this function in mind (and rocks, I would claim, are not designed at all). If we say of a pair of vice grips that they are a well-designed hammer, we are also being 'willfully silly' because we are not attending to the object in the appropriate way. The function of an object thus directs our assessments as surely as the significance of art directs how we respond to it. A designed object cannot have value *as* a design unless we approach it as something that was made to serve a particular purpose (and, as we will see, unless we know what that purpose is).

Second, we can see that our aesthetic experiences of design need not be positive: we may know what a thing was intended to be but if it fails in its function, we will find it wanting. Aesthetic experience in this case is also the expectation of value but not its guaranteed success; all hammers may have the same function but not all are equally successful in their execution of that function. Function, again, tells us what *kind* of thing an object is

but allows for variety between individual instances of that kind that can have differing design values. A particular hammer may be made of inferior materials, for example, or be poorly balanced, thus affecting its ability to perform its function. It may be recognizably a hammer (instead of a rock) but our assessment of whether it is any good is in part determined by how well it does what is was meant to do – whether it is a good thing of its kind.

Third, function helps us to distinguish between the design value of an object and other incidental values it might have. A hammer may have political force when raised aloft in protest but this is not relevant to its design value as a functional hammer. For some designs, such as sofas or perhaps tableware and china, aesthetic value is important to our evaluations because these things are also meant to decorate our homes. For others, like surgical instruments or Scud missiles, their beauty or grace has little or no impact on their ability to mend the heart or deliver their payload. The values relevant to the design value of a given object will thus be those that are integral to its fulfilling its function with success. A recent trend in Canada has been the marketing of tools that are pink, presumably to appeal to women consumers. But the colour of a hammer is surely incidental to its being a good hammer– or even a good women's hammer – while the fact that it is made of a lighter material may well be important. The centrality of function allows us to make these discriminations in our assessments.

Design value is thus also an amalgam of heteronomous values, here tied to what an object is meant to be, or meant to do, rather than what it is supposed to *mean*. And in our assessments of design, we can also devise a test, like Stecker's test for art. We can ask, "does one need to use the object in the appropriate way to appreciate its value"? If so, it is a design value – if not, then not. For the correlative notion to the function an object possesses lies in our use of it. If a shovel functions to remove snow, we cannot assess its value as a shovel unless and until we also determine that it performs the function it was intended to. And this determination cannot be made by merely looking at the shovel, or attending to its perceptual features alone. Our aesthetic experience of design also enters us into a relation with the object of that experience, one that I would characterize as "I/it" rather than "I/Thou". But this relation does make certain demands upon us and requires our active engagement, albeit in different ways.

The 'test' of design value, for instance, suggests that we need to use the object in the *appropriate* manner to evaluate it, and this requires a certain amount of familiarity and knowledge on our part, that we bring with us to our evaluations. Designs can fail if they do not perform their intended

functions but we can also fail if we do not engage in the "I/it" relation as it is offered to us. If someone has never lived in a cold climate, or perhaps even seen snow, they will not be able to assess the design value of a shovel. If I come upon them and they are using it to prop open their garage door, their declaration that this is a well-designed shovel will be misguided because they have not used it properly, or attended to the function it was meant to fulfill.

Of course shovels can prop open doors just as works of art can cover holes in the wall. But this is not the point of either of them, and if we evaluate them for these incidental reasons, we are not having aesthetic experiences that reveal the values they possess. Designs are intended to fulfill certain very human and often quotidian purposes, and their design value lies in how well they achieve these. Our assessments of them cannot be complete unless we test these functions, and testing them requires us to use them as they are meant to be used. An aesthetic experience of design will thus be active in a way that is different from our encounters with art: it is not enough that we look at designs in museums and galleries, that we contemplate them or consider their perceptible features. We do not 'read' them for their meaning or interpret what they mean to say. There is no communicative gap that must be filled but there *is* a gap between function and use and a truly aesthetic experience of design must close this gap by our active engagement with the object given to us.

This is why displays in design museums offer only partial, if not alienating, aesthetic experiences. Viewing a Saunier desk behind glass may allow me to appreciate its aesthetic value, but not its design value. Even though I know what its function is, I cannot properly assess that function unless I can also sit at it, judge its height, the depth of its drawers, and so on. By being prevented from using the desk, my relation to it is attenuated, and it becomes simply an aesthetic object like a seashell or a sunset, to be appreciated for its beauty alone. This is not the artification of design, if I am not being pressed to interpret the desk, or being told that it is somehow meaningful. But it is the *aestheticization* of design, whereby its aesthetic value becomes paramount, and perhaps its only, relevant feature. Beauty alone, or even beauty and function, are not sufficient for aesthetic experiences of design value without the addition of active use and engagement. But taken all together, these do account for the value(s) of design.

Let me conclude this discussion by anticipating a few questions that might arise. First, I do not know if Stecker – or Danto or Carroll, for that matter – mean to suggest that the significance of art is universal or

universally accessible. That is for philosophers of art to decide. But design value certainly is not: to have an aesthetic experience of a given design requires culturally and historically specific knowledge about what the object in question is, and this also requires that we use it – and know how to use it – in the appropriate way. It might be the case that some of us are also not able to appreciate the artistic value of a given work, such as when I – with no knowledge of Islamic culture or religion – approach a Persian mosaic. Again, though, I will leave this question to other philosophers. But it is the case that we will not be able to adequately assess the design value of a given object if we do not have the appropriate knowledge, or if we cannot in fact use the object as it was meant to be used. The ways that we can fail can be quite subtle: people in the 21st century may be simply too big to evaluate the height and scale of an 18th century piece of furniture, for instance, even when they recognize the piece for what it is meant to be. In other cases, the failure may be almost total, as when the function of an artifact is completely mysterious to its audience. Whether we can say this for art or not, there are indeed a number of factors which impede our ability to evaluate design. This, I would suggest, just is part of the nature of purposive objects that are meant to be integrated into our lives and activities.

Second, I want to stress that any object can have aesthetic value, including those which are very alien to our understanding, and we can certainly prize them for their beauty. This is the case with design as well. Aesthetic value is *one* of the values that design possesses and, as it requires no knowledge of function and no ability to use the object in question, it is open to all of us. Prizing a design for its aesthetic value is not a lesser form of aesthetic experience, merely a different one. But design value is something more than aesthetic value, which is also open to us if we engage with design in the ways I have described.

Third, I maintain that attending to the function of a design object through our active engagement with it yields an aesthetic rather than merely instrumental judgement. We are making assertions about the value (or excellence) of these objects (and the potential pleasure such valuations afford us) as they are in themselves, rather than what use they have for us at any given moment, or what particular needs or desires they may fulfill. Here again we are describing a more complex form of aesthetic experience than Stecker's minimal account offers: the amalgam of design value engages our cognitive and practical faculties but it yields an aesthetic response if we attend to the objects in the appropriate way.

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Finally, my emphasis on function and use, rather than meaning and interpretation, is not meant to make design a 'poor cousin' to works of art, or to suggest that it is inferior to them in any way. There is no reason to suppose that the effort and talent required to design an object that fulfills its function with excellence is less than the effort and talent integral to the making of works of art. What I want to stress here is that they are different kinds of activities, and that the values of the objects produced are also importantly different. My reference to an "I/it" relation is thus not meant to devalue design. If we can have an aesthetic experience of other kinds of things, then surely we can have an aesthetic experience of design. And it is certainly well past time that we articulate clearly what that aesthetic experience involves. Such has been my goal today.

H-Sang Seung: Design is not Design

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (Gulf University)

As a philosopher, the architectural question that fascinates me most is to what extent does architecture impose a certain way of life on people? Some might answer that architecture should impose as little as possible on peoples' lives and that in the ideal case things will work in the converse: people impose *on architecture* the way of being that they believe to be most compatible with their lives. I guess that the leading thought underlying the latter scheme is that we cannot trust architecture, that all too often architecture has made peoples' lives difficult, inconvenient, and unaesthetic. Being led by motives of commerce or vanity, architects have often been deaf to the demands of "the people".

However, can we trust "the people"?How much does the average consumer of architecture know about – not architecture but – the "right way of living"? In many cases, "the people" ask architecture to work in the service of mere aestheticism, to reproduce certain images, and to build dream houses ... Functionalism has long appeared as an acceptable compromise because here the architect applies those functions to her buildings that she believes to be most desirable for those who are on the users' end. However, what is the basis for the assumption that the "functional" way is the right way of living?

Even the word "style", traditionally representing a bridge between ethics and aesthetics, can appear as an abstract intellectual hypothesis not necessarily leading to the "right way of living". In philosophical terms, the question thus is whether it is it possible to find a way of living that is "right" without having been derived from either aesthetics or functionalism but simply because it is – "right"? In other words, is there a right way of living that will be imposed upon us neither by the architect nor by "the people" but *by architecture itself*?

For the larger public, the dichotomy of functionalism *vs.* aesthetics does not seem to leave any space for a third option. In the summer of 2010, millions of people watched the film *Inception* in which Cobb the architect (Leonardo DiCaprio) declares that he does not want to engage in "attic conversions and gas stations" but wants to let his creativity run freely. Cobb's fellow architect Ariadne (Ellen Page) points out that architecture is most fun when it is "pure creation" looking for perfection, uniqueness, and aestheticism without being bound by functional imperatives and practicality. This interpretation of architecture probably remains fascinating for most people, though in the "real world" functionalism will also find enough supporters.

Within the context of popular conceptions of architecture our question seems odd: is there a right way of building and living that is a matter neither of beauty nor of practicality but simply of architecture itself?

The Japanese architect Tadao Ando has been experimenting with such questions in the early years of his career claiming that "life patterns can be extracted and developed from living under severe conditions."[1] As the main principles of his architecture, Ando promotes sobriety, purity, and simplicity; but he does so *not* because he believes that these principles make architecture more functional or more aesthetically pleasing. Instead, these principles are flowing out of his architecture's own logic. In other words, they create a purity exceeding both function and style.

One of Ando's early creations, his small Row House in Sumiyoshi, has a courtyard in the middle, which the inhabitants need to cross in order to move from one part of the house to the other. This is "impractical" especially during Osaka's cold winters, but it is justified because this architecture has created its own form of rationality. This does not mean that consumers of architecture have to obey any of the architect's whims. On the contrary, Ando once criticized students because for most "why-questions"

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[1] Quoted in Kenneth Frampton, ed., *Tadao Ando: Buildings Projects Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), p. 8.

they could not provide more than the bland answer "because I wanted to,"[1] which is indeed no more than a whim. In the ideal case, the architect should not "want" anything. Instead, she should merely listen to those imperatives that flow out of the architecture itself. Louis Kahn's advice to find out "what the window wants to be" should probably be understood in this sense.

H-SangSeung. The Korean architect H-Sang Seung (승효상, born in 1952) derives architectural necessities from two sources: the Korean tradition and the imperatives of territorial qualities he calls "landscripts". The latter can be traced back – as will be shown – to the Korean tradition of geomancy. Apart from this, many of Seung's principles about simplicity and purity come close to those of Tadao Ando, and they are explained in Seung's book *The Beauty of Poverty* (빈자의미학, 1996). Seung is one of the most prolific contemporary Korean architects and has most recently gained international recognition as the co-organizer of the 2011 Gwangju Design Biennale (South Korea) and through projects like the Chaowai SOHO Complex in Beijing and the Guggenheim Pavilion in Abu Dhabi called "Floating Weights". Being Korean puts Seung in a special position. Alain Delissen believes that "nothing is as lively and original, nothing as modern though rooted deep in the past as South Korean culture at the turn of the millennium."[2] As a young man, Seung worked under Korea's foremost architect, Kim Swoo-Geun (김수근, also "Kim Sugun", 1931-86), who approached questions of Korean identity and tradition in a very explicit fashion. In 1980, Kim's influential group Konggan (空間) staged "itself as a prominent actor in the field of 'national learning' (*kukhak*)" and called in its eponymous magazine for "more inner self-cultivation (*an-urochihyang*)" as well as for a "critical reception of foreign cultures".[3]

Korean architecture has had a hard time finding its identity. During the Japanese occupation, (1910-1945) public buildings such as railway stations, hotels, city halls, and police stations featured a mix of Japanese and Western style. Korean architects were required to train in Japan and encouraged to follow Japanese models when building in Korea. During that time, Korea had no direct contact with international modern developments such as Art Nouveau or Bauhaus. After the war, impersonal Modernist architecture was practiced on a large scale. In the 1980s, when the country

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[1] Tadao Ando, *Yale Studio and Current Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 15.
[2] Alain Delissen, "The Aesthetic Pasts of Space 1960-1990", *Korean Studies* 25:2 (2001), pp. 243-60, 243.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 247.

became a market-oriented democracy, the question of national identity could be discussed in a more sophisticated fashion to which Seung very much contributed.

So far, the most striking feature of many of Seung's buildings is the use of Cor-Ten steel which develops a stable rust-like appearance and makes the buildings reminiscent of sculptures by Richard Serra (though Seung is no longer using this material in more recent buildings but has switched to grey basalt lava as a cladding material). One of the purposes of using Cor-Ten steel is to give buildings supplementary weight, as Seung has explained with regard to the Lock Museum:

> I have decided to introduce some weight into this dense area, where buildings of so many numbers of styles, the confusing signboards, the electric cables and telegraph poles overhead are not offering one bit of feeling of stability. No windows, no adornments, but only the weight of the metal will be there. It is a negative void to create tension in this brawling scenery. [1]

The way the Lock Museum is wedged into the dense neighborhood is indeed reminiscent of Ando's early row houses. I would also contend that Cor-Ten steel makes buildings that are more fragile. It can easily be associated with the vernacular buildings of the North American South, for example those photographed by Walker Evans during the Great Depression.

H-Sang Seung's Lock Museum is wedged into the dense neighborhood of Jongro-gu, Seoul.

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[1] "Interview with Francisco Sanin", U.J. Lee, *Seung H-Sang* (Paju: C3 Publishing Co, 2003), p. 197.

Barn converted by the Auburn University Rural Studio in Greensboro, Alabama. Courtesy: *Rural SW Alabama.*

When seen from a distance these facades appear to be "totally flush" and "rid of any and all protrusions and additions".[1] The Welcomm Center (Seoul), for example, when approached more closely, is wearing sheets slightly transforming and coming off a little on the edges due to weathering, being thus reminiscent of some of Evan's Alabama barns. In this sense, the use of Cor-Ten steel as a transient, fragile material seems also to evoke the Japanese aesthetics of *wabi-sabi*, whose rust-like appearance on pottery signifies the aesthetic appreciation of poverty and whose casual irregularity also expresses the refusal of "progress" in its broadest (capitalist-economic) sense.

Welcomm Center by H-Sang Seung

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[1] Hyungmin Pai, *Sensuous Plan: The Architecture of Seung, H-Sang* (Paju: Dongnyok, 2007), p. 241.

With his conceptualization of the *madang*, the courtyard of the traditional Korean house (*hanok*), Seung might have found the most distinctly Korean architectural quality. While the Japanese see emptiness as a space of silence and meditation, the *madang* is a "space that you occupy".[1] While nothing can enter the Japanese garden and nothing inside can change its position, the *madang* is more plebeian. Seung sees the *madang* as an undefined communal space covering the meaning of "useless space," which is, in a Buddhist understanding, useful just for that purpose. According to Seock-Jae Yim, "Uselessness (無用) is, in effect, great Utility, and only Uselessness can be Great Utility".[2]

Seung and the "Right Way of Living". Seung's work is immediately related to the above thoughts on the "right way of living". To build means for him to "organize life" and archi-tecture builds ways of living.[3] Architects need more training in literature than in drawing because their trade requires conceptual imagination inspired by the reading of texts, logical thinking and knowledge of history. The profession of architecture is closer to poetry than to the fine arts and is a human science more than an art. Seung goes even as far as saying that any talent to draw or paint can only be a handicap for an architect.[4]

Seung's teacher Kim Swoo-Geun made a first step in the direction of an architecture looking for the right way of living, but he stayed too general when asking for a shift of architectural design from aesthetics to craft: "The conception of architecture not as an art but as a craft – that is, an expression not of the desire to create aesthetically from valid forms but rather of a response to practical, functional, and also traditional needs – is common to the whole Far East."[5] However, this is not radical enough as it still ends up citing "function" as the alternative of aesthetics.

In his prologue to "Architecture, Signs of Thought," Seung mentions the Hundertwasser House in Vienna and finds that it is merely a product of art, "not an architectural building. The apartment does not offer any suggestions for residents living in that co-op, while the architect failed

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[1] *Sensuous Plan*, p. 269.
[2] Seock-Jae Yim, *Stone, Walls and Paths: A Study of Korean Architecture* (Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press 2005), p. 22.
[3] H-Sang Seung, *Geonchuk, Sayu-ui, Giho* (Paju: Dolbegae, 2004); quoted from German trans.: *Bauen als Zeichen des Denkens: Seung Hyo-Sang über Klassiker der Architektur des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), p. 17.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[5] Swoo-Geun Kim, *A Collection of Architectural Works* (Seoul: Space Group, 1996), p. 139.

to create a new space for living within the building."[1] This way of building is artistic play and has nothing to do with architecture. A house should not simply be put somewhere but be "produced." Seung admires Adolf Loos because he was not one of those "artists" who imagine nice buildings and make sketches but he was a real revolutionary.[2] Architecture, Seung holds, is no tool of pleasure, but is supposed to "build our life". However, his rejection of aesthetic hedonism does not lead him to functionalism:

> Functionality does not always lead to a good way of living. Mankind really isn't very functional. As humans our feelings and emotions often govern us, not our rational minds. Dysfunction, it seems, is closer to how we live, so perhaps architecture should follow that. Maybe buildings should be uncomfortable, they should make us move around more than we like.[3]

Buddhists also believe that the "right way" of architecture can only be found through a simultaneous overcoming of aestheticism and functionalism. Seock-Jae Yim explains that the use of natural materials in temples is supposed to eschew symbolism *and* utilitarianism:

> Symbolism overstates the value, meaning and condition of the architecture through elaborate ornamentation. Symbolism tends to orient itself toward pretentiousness by resorting to an architectural language that aims too much to compliment and to flatter. Utility is based on monetarianism which perceives architecture as a materialistic tool. In this case, architecture is reduced to a means for further accumulation of wealth. Symbolism and utilitarianism are the two prominent ideas through which architecture eventually subjugates men to the material world.[4]

An anti-aestheticism that does not automatically switch to the rationality of functionalism but tries to look for its own "architectural" logic will have to redefine the meaning of design from scratch. It cannot be content with pushing architectural design from aesthetics towards craft. Seung is attempting such a radical redefinition. First, he identifies the very broad use of the word design as "design thinking" that seems "to mistake design for management and planning in general and favors business applications of

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[1] H-Sang Seung, "Do You Know Why You Write Poetry?" prologue to 'Architecture, Signs of Thought', *Dolbegae*, 2004. On the Iroje website http://iroje.com/essay/040801e.htm, no page numbers.

[2] *Bauen als Zeichen…*, p. 14.

[3] H-Sang Seung, "Seven Questions for H-Sang Seung" on Aaron Britt's blog *Dwell, at Home in the Modern World* 10/29/2008. http://www.dwell.com/articles/seven-questions-for-h-sang-seung.html, no page numbers.

[4] *Stone, Walls and Paths,* p. 20.

planning processes under the name 'design'".[1] Then he locates the aesthet-ico-creative conception of design as an artistic approach able to invent, for example, new shapes of cars. However, will the same approach be useful for the invention of the "right way of living?" Certainly not.

Seung and his organizing team of the Gwangju Design Biennale express the necessity to rethink the definition of design by launching the paradoxical theme "Design is Design is not Design" (*dogadobisangdo*). The theme, which can also be written by using only Chinese characters (圖可圖非常圖), is inspired by the first words of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*: "The way that is the way is not always the way. The name that is the name is not always the name."[2] The way (*tao*) is not a method that should be followed mindlessly. In this sense the *tao* is at the same time a non-*tao*. One commits a similar mistake if one believes that the name is actually the thing itself. A name is never the real name and the blind belief in concepts does not lead to understanding. The *tao* cannot be found by following the rules of the *tao* but it needs to be internalized until it has become a second nature. Only when the *tao* is followed in a natural way (without really following it word by word) has enlightenment been reached.

Submitting design to a fundamental scrutiny by involving it in such a paradoxical koan-like pattern of "Design is Design is not Design" is also strongly reminiscent of Martin Heidegger's reflections on technology and, finally, on design. Heidegger suggested that technology always functions within a "project" (conceptualized through his German neologism '*Gestell*') that has been set up by technology itself. Technology is only what technology thinks to be because its entire body of thought – including the one on itself – is technological. Being thus caught in a circle, technology will never find ways of defining or thinking itself in a new way. Technology is a "self-contained system" because technology is "stipulated in advance as what is already-known".[3] In Taoist terms, the technologist is blinded by a concept. Technologists might believe that they are producing something new, but this is merely their "*fantasia*" that comes to pass: "But man as a

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[1] Seung in *And Design* URL: http://anddesignmagazine.blogspot.com/2011/05/what-is-design.html, no page numbers.
[2] One of the most important English translation of this sentence goes like this: "The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name", (trans. James Legge, 1891).
[3] Martin Heidegger, "*Zeit des Weltbildes*" (1938) in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2003). Quoted from Engl. trans: "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland, 1977), p. 119.

representing subject 'fantasizes' i.e., he moves in *imagination* in that his representing imagines, pictures forth, whatever is, as the objective into the world…"[1] Marxist philosophers like Louis Althusser might even say that design is the typical example of an ideology. Ideologies are characterized by the fact that they move within closed circles, producing instead of knowledge only those things that we already knew, taking as already established facts exactly those premises that we were actually supposed to question.[2]

      Glenn Hill has suggested that Heidegger's concept of "*Gestell*" (project) should be understood as "design".[3] The problem with design is that it works within the limits it has set up through its own designing process: the aforementioned qualities of 'beauty' (criticized by Seung) or 'function' are typical components of such a *Gestell*. Hill uses the example of the environmental crisis that has been produced by design or technology. It is useless to look for solutions within an "improved design" because even the improvements take place within their own *Gestell*. Design itself has been the cause of the crisis and as long as we stick to design, even if we turn it into "sustainable design", we remain trapped within our own *Gestell*. The circular model of design thinking can only be fractured through the paradoxical assumption that design is design and simultaneously not design. But how can this be done precisely? We get some ideas from Seung.

      Landscript. Seung promotes the concept of "landscript" (*teomune*) as a necessity able to lead us towards the "right" way of building and living. Seung does not simply design a building on a piece of land, but he "needs to be in it, be over it, touch it, walk around it before he ever draws the first plan."[4] Land is different from 'area' because within the latter one can functionally or aesthetically design anything one wants while the land provides "stories of land", sceneries, and townscapes.[5] In other words, land provides a logic of its own, a logic flowing out of its nature and history. Seung explains that in Korea "what we conserve is the space that forms a building, rather than the building itself."[6] Historical buildings are rarely

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[1] Heidegger, "Zeit des Weltbildes", p. 106; "The Age of the World Picture", p. 147.

[2] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 173.

[3] Glen Hill, "Is Design the Danger? Theorizing Heidegger's Distrust of Design in Modernity", *Architectural Theory Review* 8: 2 (2003), pp. 71-95.

[4] Pai, *Sensuous Plan*, p. 323.

[5] H-Sang Seung, *Landscipt* (Paju: Yeol Hwa, 2009), p. 85.

[6] H-Sang Seung, "Interview", *Space Magazine* (Seoul) 507, (Feb. 2010), p. 102.

intact because wood was the primary building material. However, the preparation of an empty space on which the building used to stand can function as an act of conservation: "More important is that the layers of time surrounding the building should be conserved. Rather than size and shape, content is more important, as it holds the space where life has unfolded. Again, the space embraced by a construction and the traces located in the surroundings are more important than the building itself."[1] A design process considering "landscript" disengages the notion of landscape from its strict association with earth and interprets it in terms of urban development. With his concept of landscript, Seung goes beyond the "naturalistic interpretation of the traces in the landscape" and considers "the social and political history that has shaped and inscribed these practices into that landscape."[2]

Tadao Ando has had similar ideas in mind when discussing his *Times I* building in Kyoto: "One cannot speak about architecture without mentioning where it is to belong. I sought to create a building which I should call the 'architecture of the landscape', where the building and the site are mutually dependent."[3] "Designed" architecture might be beautiful or functional but it lacks, in the words of Ando, a "logical vision".[4]

Seung has observed this logic (which does not flow out of design or *Gestell*) in the Seoul slums of Geumho-dong where he found "an architecture molded from the land" and "the wisdom of sharing".[5] For Seung, "landscript implies [that] the natural site is to be inscribed by the architectural presence. This mixture of landform, terracing, rooftop gardens, punctured walls, and framed views … is inseparable from landscape."[6] Our ancestors did not understand architecture as determined by aesthetics and function, but instead they saw it as inseparable from the history inscribed onto the land. If we take this vision seriously, we will be able to lift design out of the *Gestell* limited by the dichotomy opposing aesthetics and functionalism.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[2] Francisco Sanin, "Interview", Lee, U.J.: *Seung H-Sang* (Paju: C3 Publishing Co, 2003), p. 23.
[3] Tadao Ando, *Yale Studio and Current Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 57.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[5] *Landscript*, p. 59.
[6] Richard Ingersoll, "Reverse Orientalism: The Work of Seung, H-Sang", Lee, U.J.: *Seung H-Sang* (Paju: C3 Publishing Co, 2003), p. 23 and 15.

Geumho-dong (Seoul) in 1969.

If we look at the two principal options offered by design, *aesthetics* (imagination, expression of the self) and *ethics* (consideration of others and moral necessities), the concept of landscript appears indeed as a third way. Landscript suggests neither mere beauty nor abstract, functional, social imperatives but manifests itself in the form of traces of culture through the land. Seung quotes Heidegger who insisted that "dwelling leaves traces on the land."[1] This means that the ethics-aesthetics of landscript does not produce a *Gestell* of beauty or certain functions, but formulates itself "between land and building, building and building, man and man."[2] This is what differentiates landscript from the conventional notion of design: it appears as a concrete necessity similar to the necessities of nature.

Seung's philosophy of landscript joins basic principles of geomancy (*pungsu* in Korean, *fengshui* in Chinese), which was very important in Korea during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) and remains important even in modern times. During the Japanese occupation, the Japanese government studied Korean geomancy when placing their government building next to the site of the Korean Gyeongbokgung palace and "attempted to cut off the vein to the main building of the palace to nullify the geomantic benefits of the palace."[3] Also Kim Swoo-Geun referred to the importance of geomancy.[4] Traditionally, geomancy sees topography as celestially charged: Heaven, Earth, and Man converge at exact time-space coordinates.[5] Most important for the development of this organic philosophy were the works of Sung dynasty Neo-Confucian philosopher Chu Hsi (1131-1200) who held that not only is social order placed in nature, but that nature also has certain

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[1] *Landscript*, p. 70.
[2] "Interview with Sanin", p. 51.
[3] Hong-Key Yoon, *The Culture of FengShui in Korea: An Exploration of East Asian Geomancy* (Lanham: Lexington, 2006), p. 278.
[4] Swoo-Geun Kim, *A Collection of Architectural Works* (Seoul: Space Group, 1996), Preface, p. 27.
[5] David J. Nemeth, *The Architecture of Ideology: Neo-Confucian Imprinting on Cheju Island, Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 101.

aspects of social order: **"**In the view of Chu Hsi, the vast 'pattern' of Nature was normal because it was inevitable that moral values and moral behavior would appear when the Universe had developed sufficiently far."[1] The basis of geomancy is the Neo-Confucian vision of "a heavenly and terrestrial microcosm within one macrocosm".[2] The fact that this tradition has also been used for locating ideal family gravesites gives the project a historical dimension. However, the important geomantic principles serve more for choosing a person's residence than for choosing gravesites.[3]

  Geomancy has a relatively practical dimension that has often been eclipsed by certain mystical penchants. According to Hong-Key Yoon, originally geomancy "was probably studied by cave dwellers in search for ideal cave sites in the Loess Plateau."[4] Geomancy attempted to establish which landscape would manifest better benefits.[5] Auspicious sites were supposed to back toward the hill with an open front[6] and a city should be built within a "topically flat basin with protective hills in the background. A useful watercourse such as a river, stream or lake is situated in the front. The watercourse should not be a straight line but flow slowly in a meandering shape."[7] Sometimes one "planted trees on mountains that were auspicious but lacked lush vegetation."[8]

  In spite of these practical aspects, geomancy was not a form of "design" striving to establish a maximum of beauty or functionality, but its theories were based on observations of "energy flows" through landscapes. It was found that humanity's modifications "such as cutting off mountain ridges or changing the direction of water courses, can harm its flow. Nature is vulnerable since its vital energy stays only in a place with auspicious geomantic harmony, which can be disturbed easily by slight human modification of the natural landform."[9]

  Seung describes landscript in a similar vein as "an ever-changing organism and a life force that demands that something be added to it."[10] The

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[1] John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 96.
[2] *The Architecture of Ideology,* p. 97.
[3] *The Culture of FengShui,* p. 10.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[9] *The Culture of FengShui*, p. 141.
[10] "Interview with Sanin", p. 23.

basic premises of geomancy as well as the use Seung makes of it are in perfect keeping with the philosophy of Heidegger. As noted above, Heidegger held design to be responsible for the consumption of the Earth and that "designed" solutions to our environmental crisis will remain inefficient. In his essay "Poetically Man Dwells", Heidegger explains that dwelling takes place between earth and sky, but that dwelling does not consist of a realistic measuring of the space that extends itself between both. The event of dwelling that "takes place" between earth and sky is not a mere *extentio,* but it is the landscape as a poetic event.[1] In this case, the earth is not understood as a geological phenomenon, but it has become cultural (or spiritual) through the dwelling of the people. This is why human existence is grounded in dwelling. In his famous essay devoted to architecture and build-ing, Heidegger introduces dwelling in a way that brings it very close to geomantic conceptions, explaining that the task of dwelling is to mind the "Fourfold" (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, mortals, and gods.[2] Buildings should not merely be designed in a technological fashion in the sense of the Greek *technè*. The task of buildings is not to express or symbolize something,[3] nor are they merely functional objects. Buildings reunite (*versammeln*) in themselves (that is, within a place of dwelling) earth, sky, gods, and mortals. The activity of building should not be determined by a *Gestell* projecting us *beyond* the Fourfold, but by the act of dwelling taking place *within* the Fourfold.

  Landscript and the Culture of Writing. Geomancy is, according to Hong-Key Yoon, "reading landscape as a text".[4] "In most cases, cultural landscapes, which are transformations of nature by different cultural groups, have textual qualities and can reflect certain social and political ideologies, cultural values, or even social structures."[5] Similarly, Seung describes *teomune* (landscript) as "a pattern inscribed on the ground. When one says that 'there is no *teomune*,' it means that there is no basis or reason for something."[6] Richard Ingersoll believes that Seung is acting like a calligrapher composing characters on a page when designing.[7]

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[1] Martin Heidegger, ". . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .", *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), p. 18.
[2] Martin Heidegger, "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken", *ibid*., p. 151.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
[4] *The Culture of FengShui*, p. 10.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 279.
[6] "Interview with Sanin", p. 22.
[7] Ingersoll, "Reverse Orientalism", p. 15.

Yoon points to resemblances between geomancy and Christian hexameral literature that interprets nature as a text through the concept of the "book of nature".[1] These ancient sources are also important for those branches of modern cultural geography that treat landscape as text. The method has been initiated by James Duncan with his book *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*[2] in which the author delivers a dense analysis of landscape symbolism in a remote kingdom of the Sri Lankan highlands. Duncan uses concepts from literary theory such as textuality and intertextuality and explains why land-scapes can be seen as ideologies made concrete, that is – natural.

Seung renders "landscript" in Chinese as *diwen* (地文), which is also the Chinese word for "physiography". It is impossible in this context to not discuss the Chinese notion of *wen* (文) which means pattern, structure, writing, and literature in Chinese. In Chinese history *wen* is a "pattern of interrelating structures that emerge out of concrete situations and reflexively organize and regulate human life in the world."[3] "*Wenhua*" (文华) is gener-ally translated as "culture". The root meaning of *wen* is "lines" or "design" as they appear in the decoration on pottery. However, this "design" is based on Confucianist cosmological interpretations related to the "belief that heaven and earth had not been 'created' at all but have 'evolved' in the course of a natural process of polarization and diversification."[4]

The pattern of *wen* is not a symbol that has been "designed" in order to overcome nature and to become culture. It is not a mute sign that needs to be read aloud in order to become real nor is it a script in the form of a plan that needs to be materialized (for example, by architecture). *Wen* is an inscription or a form of writing that produces patterns of civilization that are not distinct from nature but are understood as having overcome the distinction between nature and civilization. In other words, *wen* is a cultural script integrated into the nature-ness of *all* reality. We cannot perceive nature as such, but nature becomes manifest through forms, figurations, or

[1] *The Culture of FengShui*, p. 279.
[2] James S. Duncan *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[3] Roger Ames and David Hall, *Thinking Through Confucius* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 322.
[4] Eric Zürcher, "'In the Beginning': 17th Century Chinese Reactions to Christian Creationism", E. Zürcher and Chun-Chieh Huang, eds., *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 134.

patterns. Taoists interpret *wen* as a spontaneous manifestation of the natural and cosmic Dao.[1]

In the Chinese tradition, writing and literature are seen as simultaneously natural and cultural phenomena. For the Chinese, writing and literature are not, as explains Zhang Longxi, "a human invention [whose purpose is] to imitate nature but [are] part of nature or of the cosmos itself",[2] (Zhang 1996). According to the classical theory of Liu Xie (465-522), the coming into the world of *wen* is simultaneous with the genesis of the world.[3] Stephen Owen defines *wen* as a realization through which the natural order of things becomes visible because "all phenomena have an inherent tendency to become manifest in *wen*, and their manifestations for the sake of being known and felt."[4]

Remarkably, Pai Hyungming explains Seung's landscript in a very similar way:

> The key idea here is that the plan is an inscription: an inscription of not only structure, form, material, texture but also of life. The peculiarity of Seung's writing surface thus arises from the nature of the architectural plan. Whereas in painting, calligraphy, and land art, the inscription itself is the object, in architecture the plan stands as the cognitive boundary between concept and sense. We generally think that the architectural plan is the medium between concept and object, between ideas of the design and the actual building. … we think that the ideas of the architect are inscribed into the plan, and it is the plan that becomes the instrument used by the construction company to build the house.[5]

In this sense, Seung's "plan" is not the *design* of a civilizational project to be built, but rather the realization of a natural pattern that becomes indistinct from civilization once it is recognized as a sort of *wen*. A strict separation of nature and culture does not apply to *wen*, which is one of the reasons why culture (*wenhua*) remains dynamic. In this Eastern worldview, "the natural

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[1] In the 12th to 9th centuries BC, the *dao* had been related to *wen*. See Chow 1979, p. 28.
[2] Longxi Zhang, "What is *Wen* and Why is it Made so Terribly Strange?", *College Literature* (Feb. 1996). The internet version had no page numbers.
[3] Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature*. Trans. Vincent Yu-chuno Shih (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983), p. 13.
[4] Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: An Omen of the World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 20.
[5] *Sensuous Plan*, p. 371.

world and human world are continuous".[1] It is clear that the saying to be "in accord with nature" adopts here a much deeper meaning than in "sustainable design" because the search for the cultural pattern of landscript does not strive for scientific materialism but is supposed to foster an aesthetic approach *towards the universe*.

This is exactly what Seung suggests with the notion of landscript. Landscript "has a soul, a spirit, and it even speaks"[2] and architecture is "the visualization of the character of a place". Architecture listens to the demands of the land. It is a land that has experienced the great expanse of history and "architecture is the respectful act of revealing its fascinating language. It is the act of thinking deeply and then humbly adding to the land by building on to it a new poetic language."[3] Seung wants to extend the metaphor of "writing" to any architectural plan: "The plan is not a drawing to be seen. It is a drawing to be *read*. That is, we admire a plan not because it is a figure made of lines but because we have to read the thought of the architect written in it in order that we may know the organization of life inscribed in that plan."[4]

The mentioned Christian hexameral literature interpreting nature as a text in the form of the "Book of Nature" (Liber Mundi) is also of importance in the context of comparative studies of *wen* because Christian theology solved the nature/culture problem in a way similar to Confucianism. In early Christian doctrine, God was seen as the author of the Bible as well as of the "Book of Nature". Reading the "Book of Nature" was meant to recover the meaning that God had laid into it. The "Book of Nature" represents a totality through which the Christian tradition attempts to make sense of nature and reality. The parallel with the phenomenon of *wen* exists in the fact that nature is seen as being able to generate writing and writing is seen as a form of nature. For both Christian theology and Confucianism, nature is not simply "out there" and eternally opposed to culture, but it can be brought in line with cultural thoughts about either Biblical revelation or Confucianist cosmology.

Both currents conclude that culture cannot be "designed", but that certain patterns arise inside a realm within which nature and culture have never been distinct. What is created is a cultural-natural space. Conventional

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[1] Roger Ames and David L. Hall, *Thinking from the Han* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 241.
[2] "Interview with Sanin", p. 23.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Sensuous Plan*, p. 369.

design, on the other hand, introduces, in an empirical fashion, objective elements into an abstract space that Heidegger has defined as a three-dimensional *abstractum* with extensions and algebraic relations.[1] Seock Jae Yim, in his book on traditional Korean architecture, explains that it is a simple void in which "only [the] simple placement of objects is possible."[2] Buddhists believe that these physical objects that are merely "designed" have not been created within an existential space of emptiness but within a mere cultural/natural void. When this is the case, walls become mere objects. In reality, walls should not be simply designed but they are supposed to establish meaning within a cultural space. Or, in Confucian terms, to take the walls for walls is like taking the way for the way and the name for the name. In the end, within this space we will never encounter cultural selves, but only designed objects composed of sequences of encoded information.

Conclusion. When Korean newspapers reported in 2011 that the Gwangju Biennale searches for "new definitions of design" it probably did not anticipate the radical character of those measures. Seung's principles are not limited to the reinstatement of architecture as craft. Seung introduces landart as an alternative plan based on inscription and suggests the purposeless *madang* as a central theme for architectural design. His non-design establishes a particular ethical relationship between land and building, puts forward the place as a spirit of the age and not of society, and rediscovers ethnic influence as well as architectural and social wisdoms such as sharing as eternal architectural principles.

Seung's landscript approach appears at a time when a Google search for *fengshui* yields millions of results, clearly indicating the general public's desire to create architectural space in more meaningful ways. At the same time, the gadget and fetish character of architecture has never been as extreme as in our times and where cultural, economic and legal conditions have destroyed our logical vision of buildings. Taoists believed technologists to be blinded by concepts and this is truer today than ever before. Only a clearer and more essentialist definition of design can help us to overcome concepts of architecture as mere tools of pleasure or of sophistry and help us to use design in order to rebuild our lives.

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[1] "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken", 154.
[2] Seock-Jae Yim, *The Traditional Space: A Study of Korean Architecture* (Seoul: EwhaWomans University Press, 2005), p. 181.

How is Design 'Aesthetic'?
Processes of Meaning Formulation and Cultural Framing in Design

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The aesthetics of design seems to be a tricky matter. The discussion of aesthetics in design is often founded on a series of paradoxes. The concept of aesthetics is integrated into the common discourse on design and often set in relation to design, while at the same time, what is meant by the concept is rarely clarified. Furthermore, there is a strong philosophical tradition for the discussion of aesthetics, especially in relation to art, while this is rarely related to design.

Although the aesthetics of design has been a neglected area of research, attempts have been made to conceptualize the specific field of 'design aesthetics'. Roughly speaking, these attempts take their starting point in either design, often in issues of design practice, or the philosophical understanding of aesthetics. In relation to design, a dominant concern has been to understand the aesthetic qualities of the non-functional, emotionally appealing factors in design and how they affect the process of designing. With a number of approaches seeking to make the often psychologically biased field of emotions applicable to design practice (Jordan 2000; Norman 2004; Desmet and Hekkert 2007; Desmet 2010), the interest in emotions has contributed to setting the agenda for research into the sensual-cognitive aesthetic impact of design. In a paradigmatic expression, Sabine Döring states how the aesthetic is connected to the emotional, as "to experience something aesthetically is to give it emotional value", (2000, p. 67). Here she also points to a key element in the discussion of aesthetics, namely, where it should be located: in a specific perception or apprehension in the subject, who then attributes aesthetic value to the design object, or as an inherent aspect of the object itself.

In relation to the philosophical interest in aesthetics, the field has expanded from an interest in art and taste toward an interest in design. This is reflected in the recent book by Forsey (2013) but also in the German context by the anthology *Ästhetische Werte und Design* (2010) with a number of essays written by philosophers. In the context of philosophy, it makes good sense to deal with design because a certain branch of philosophical aesthetics deals with the role of sensual appeal for cognition

and with the prevalent 'aestheticization' of ordinary, everyday life as the world of late modern capitalism has been dominated by an overwhelming visualization and search for sensual appeal through all types of products and dreamscapes. Aesthetics is no longer the exclusive domain of art but is also applied to our immediate, sensuous experience of the world (see, e.g., Saito 2010; Leddy 2012).

We will begin by looking at how aesthetic meaning is articulated by design and framed by contextual factors around design. We will thus present a dual perspective on aesthetics in design.

First, we consider levels of aesthetic meaning in design. This is a question of the aesthetic communication and coding of design. We can point to aesthetic meaning as something that evolves in a dynamic relationship between a subject with an intention to see and perceive something as aesthetic and an object with certain aesthetically coded features (Genette 1999). On this point, we present an interpretive framework for investigating the formation and articulation of aesthetic meaning in design (Folkmann 2013), whereby, aesthetic meaning can be seen to evolve on a sensual-phenomenological level, a conceptual-critical level, and a contextual-discursive level.

Next, we take an external view of design and look at the formation of aesthetic meaning in design in a close analysis of a design object within the above framework. By this, we will engage in a cultural-critical perspective of the analysis, where the focus is on the contextual factors surrounding the design and attributing it with meaning. Looking at design as part of a larger system of "design culture" where conditions of production, motifs and ideologies of designers and patterns of consumption play central roles (Julier 2008), we can look at aesthetic meaning as something that is attributed to design objects, e.g. by devices of media and mediation. For this purpose we will analyze a concrete example of Danish design, the lamp series *Caravaggio* (2005) by Cecilia Manz for the company Light Years. Further, we will include other examples in the discussion. It is central to our account that aesthetic meaning in design evolves in a play between the actual design itself and its contextual factors, and that a complex logic of aesthetization is at play in the creation of aesthetic meaning in the design, when more and more objects are drawn into the field of aesthetic meaning.

Levels of Aesthetic Meaning in Design. We shall now present an approach to aesthetics in design as a general framework for examining the formation of meaning in design and its appeal to experience and understanding, that is, how design objects manage to frame and appeal to

modes of experience, engage processes of understanding, and affect its context. Here, we can point to three dimensions of aesthetics and aesthetic theory: (i) a sensual-phenomenological dimension, (ii) a conceptual-hermeneutical dimension, and (iii) a discursive-contextual dimension. Or, more directly put, we can point to aspects of sensual meaning, conceptual meaning and cultural meaning, where especially the latter points to the discussion of the modes of aestheticization that follows.

The Sensual-Phenomenological Dimension of Aesthetics. In recent years there has been a tendency to loosen the connection between art and aesthetic theory and to revisit, from various perspectives, Baumgarten's original idea of applying aesthetics to sensual matter in the work *Aesthetica* (1750-58; in classical Greek, *aisthetá* means "that which can be sensed"). Notably, this has been developed in works by the philosophers Martin Seel (2000, 2007), Gernot Böhme (2001, 2013), and, drawing on John Dewey's Pragmatist aesthetics (2005), Richard Shusterman (2000). These inquiries deal with aspects of sensual appeal and the question of appearance, that is, on the one hand, how people respond to certain kinds and structures of appearance, and, on the other hand, how these are constituted in order to evoke a response.

The term "phenomenological" can be used, as this view in aesthetics deals with the experience of things and, more importantly, with the ways in which objects influence and condition experience. Key concepts here are "pure presence", a term that was introduced by Seel (see also Bohrer 1994; Gumbrecht 2003), which designates special attention to and attraction from appearance, and "ambience", introduced by Böhme as a term for the influence on perception from our surroundings on perception. Even if these concepts are only briefly related to design by the authors, they are nevertheless powerful means of examining how design objects specifically have a sensual impact, operate as appearance, and contribute to the creation of ambience.

This aspect of aesthetics mainly concerns the sensual communication of the form and material dimension of the artifact, how it is staged as appearance, and a presence to be noticed or to slip more anonymously into the mainstream of products. Thus, this is a level of sensuous meaning in design regarding its degree of creating an appeal to a human subject who is prepared to receive the aesthetic intention of the product. With regard to industrial design, this aspect of aesthetics deals with the sensual meaning of the artifact: the look, the feel of its texture, the application of materials, the execution of detailing, for example in the

assembly and seamless fittings, as well as the sensual appeal of the overall physical presence and the immediate emotional stimulation of the user. Addressing the sensual-phenomenological dimension of aesthetics serves to acknowledge also the material element of all kinds of artifacts.

The Conceptual-Hermeneutical Dimension of Aesthetics. While the emphasis on sensual issues can be traced back to Baumgarten, the conceptual-hermeneutical dimension of aesthetics has mainly been developed in relation to art. The key concern here has not been to celebrate artistic creation but rather to analyze art as a medium for the construction of meaning and new patterns of understanding. This line of investigation was initiated in Kant's *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (1790), where aesthetics (albeit not in relation to art but to our experience of nature) was conceived as a basic aspect of epistemology: Kant's idea was to employ aesthetics in bridging sensual appearance and conceptually formulated meaning. Following this line of reflection, much of so-called philosophical aesthetics has been guided mainly by philosophical concerns about epistemology, the construction of meaning and – sometimes – less by an interest in the specific communicative abilities and conceptual strategies of the medium in question.

Design research has given little consideration to this tradition of aesthetics, perhaps because of its focus on works on art and its often abstract philosophical vocabulary. The reason for integrating it into the present discussion is its focus on the *enabling of meaning*: the construction, articulation, conveyance and understanding of meaning. Hence, when dealing with the enabling of meaning, hermeneutical questions gain in importance with regard to the staging of processes of understanding (on behalf of the aesthetic medium) and with regard to their operation (in the perceiver). A crucial aspect of this line of aesthetic theory has been an immense interest in the extra- and trans-communicative effects of the work of art, that is, its ability to contain or communicate something 'more', an 'added value', an aspect of meaning other than or beyond normal communicative abilities (cf. Adorno 1970), or a dimension of freedom (see recently Menke 2013).

The point of impossible communication that is only made possible in the closed space of the work of art has, for example, been the driving factor behind Adorno's aesthetic theory (1970) and the line of aesthetic inquiry that he inspired (e.g. Bubner 1989; Menke 1991; Seel 2000). In this context, the questions to be asked of design objects are, on the one hand, how and by what means the aesthetic media enables and constructs meaning, and, on the other hand, what is the nature of this meaning, i.e. whether it

transcends any limitations, and what its implications are. Further, it can be asked how the design reflects its relation to its meaning, that is, whether and how it is self-reflective with regard to its meaning (e.g. how does Philippe Starck's (in?)famous Juicy Salif reflect the idea of a lemon squeezer?).

Thus, we may ask a number of questions regarding the relationship of design to its meaning. It can be argued that aesthetics in design within this context concerns how design relates to meaning and modes of understanding. It is not enough to ask what the meaning of a specific design is on a conceptual level (its idea or meaning content); we must also ask how it performs or reflects this meaning in its physical form and how it relates to the kind of self-reflective aesthetic function where it displays a surplus of meaning. In this sense, discussing aesthetics in design is a way of consciously focusing on dimensions of meaning in design but also, on behalf of the designers, on the construction of meaning. How can a surplus of meaning be invested in design, and how can it be reflected in an actual design?

The Contextual-Discursive Dimension of Aesthetics. While the two previous dimensions of aesthetics deal with aspects of meaning of the given design object, the contextual-discursive dimension focuses on the wider implications of the circulation of objects on a cultural, social, and political level.

According to the cultural theorist Jacques Rancière, who has influenced this recent trend in aesthetic theory, aesthetics can be investigated as a political power issue in relation to the distribution of sensual material and the ability to determine "what presents itself to sensory experience": Thus, aesthetics can be seen as "a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (2004). Rancière seeks to discuss possibilities that are determined by aesthetic media; these not only behave as transmitters of new possible meanings but also produce possibilities by defining and conditioning domains of sensual experience. By pointing to new modes of experience, with acts of "distinguishing a sensual mode of being specific to artistic products" and of disseminating experiential knowledge, aesthetic media can promote a "recomposition of the landscape of the visible, a recomposition of the relationship between doing, making, being, seeing and saying". This means that aesthetic media have the capacity to radically reconfigure and transfigure the territories of "the visible, the conceivable, and the possible": They can propose possible models for accessing the world in new ways.

This approach to a delineation of what can be experienced and sensed relates to the cultural discussion of *aestheticization* and to the emerging field of Everyday Aesthetics (cf. e.g. Saito 2010). Today, aestheticization can be seen as a ubiquitous process of distributing sensual meaning (cf. e.g. Oldemeyer 2008); not only are we surrounded by things that strive for sensual appeal, even our knowledge society depends upon materially present objects. The world that we meet is presented to us as forms that run the risk of being de-materialized, at least in Konrad Paul Liessmann's analysis: "things lose their weight and materiality through modern production technology. [...] [I]t is as if all matter has changed into a sovereign play of forms" (2010). In this perspective, many objects of the contemporary urban scene can be seen as light and flashy objects that contribute to the overall ambience of e.g. an urban cityscape and may further be attributed symbolic meaning that plays a social and cultural role in people's construction of their identities. On this level, the artifacts form part of an exchange of value and symbolic meaning between people. The question of how people develop an attachment to objects is especially related to studies in consumption, to sociology, and to anthropologically informed material culture studies, but it should be acknowledged as part of the overall complex of various aesthetic effects of design objects.

We can regard aestheticization as a mode of distributing the sensual with an emphasis on the overall impact of aesthetic media on experience. In this conception, it is a concept with a high degree of sensual appeal and aesthetic coding in human surroundings and in the transmission of this process through specific media. Thus, to enter a discussion of aestheticization may be to examine how the *interface that we apply when we meet the world* is changing as a result of strategies of making objects and surfaces more sensually appealing, applying aesthetic coding, and asking how this process affects experience. In this sense, aestheticization is about an artificial and superficial creation of hyperreal meaning (as some suggest), which will always be at a distance to something more real or authentic, but which deals with the staging and distributing of meaning in a way that changes the conditions of experience.

Design is everywhere, "we swim in a pool of design" in Gert Selle's poetical formulation (2007), and the fact that it constantly enters and pervades new areas of our everyday surroundings – from the interiors of houses and staging of urban cityscapes, to small electronic devices such as smart phones and tablet computers, and the organization of services according to design principles of function and aesthetic appeal – is not only

evidence of the creation of a particular domain of artificial form and appearance in the realm of advertising and commercial goods, but rather a structural change in the general appearance of the world and its organization of meaning.

Aestheticization in the Cultural Framing of Design. The question of aesthetics in design is also a question of how a domain of 'aesthetic' meaning is strategically related to the design object by factors external to the concrete objects themselves. This opens the way for a discussion of design, not in terms of its ontology, but of its *cultural framing*, of the cultural factors surrounding and circumscribing design. Thus, the question is not only how design is aesthetic (as suggested in the three dimensions above) but also how it is being regarded and positioned as aesthetic, that is, created as 'aesthetic' in a process of aestheticization.

Here we enter a vast field of cultural theory and approaches to the cultural analysis of design which aims to analytically describe design in its relation to and dialogue with its formative contexts. These have be described in different, but still coherent ways as e.g. (i) contexts of production, mediation, and consumption as proposed by Dick Hebdige (1988) and Tony Fry (1988), as (ii) a whole "circuit of culture" of production, consumption, representation, identity and regulation, each affecting each other and all contributing to the overall production of cultural meaning as in the case study book *Doing Cultural Studies. The Story of the Sony Walkman* (du Gay et al. 1997), or (iii) under the label "Design Culture" as "the study of how design functions in all its manifestations economically, politically, socially and culturally" (Julier 2013) within the frame of production, design, and consumption (Julier 2008). In the latter perspective, each of the formative contexts of production, design, and consumption contributes to defining what the actual design object could be understood as in terms of its meaning.

Thus, our point is that we (also) have to look for the cultural construction of design as aesthetic, that is, of design as something that is attributed and imbued with a kind of meaning that can be labeled as 'aesthetic'. Designers, manufacturers, retailers, design magazines, blogs, etc., all the actors in the circuits of design, may employ the term 'aesthetic' in relation to the design object in question and instill a notion that the object in fact may be regarded as aesthetic. As an example, the Danish interior magazine *Bo Bedre* (1962-) has a systematic tendency to display, position, and verbalize Arne Jacobsen's chair *The Egg* (1958) as an object with qualities of form and expression, an object imbued with aesthetic meaning to be perceived across times. In photo shoots, the magazine even places the chair

in homes that it is not originally part of; the chair has visual appeal and operates as an indexical marker of Danish Modern, a high taste for classics, and aesthetic expression in furniture.

Aestheticizing Design. In this context, we will employ the term *aestheticization* for the process where design is positioned and *made* aesthetic. Overall, 'aestheticization' also describes the moment in cultural history where the boundaries of high culture break down and devices and forms of art enter the domain of everyday life and new, calculated surfaces of visual appeal and imaginary simulation appear (cf. Featherstone 1991). This process has been described as leading to "too much of the aesthetic", an an-aesthetics, where all surfaces are so calculated that the "elementary condition of the aesthetic, the ability to feel, has been negated" (Welsch 1990, p. 10). For us, the term aestheticization (perhaps 'design aestheticization'?) designates the cultural process of relating aesthetic meaning to design.

In the following we present the aesthetic strategies of the Caravaggio pendant lamp. Our main ambition is to point out the ways in which designs are being aestheticized by employing different kinds of aesthetics, that is, analysize strategies of positioning these different kinds of aesthetic meaning.

Caravaggio. The Caravaggio pendant lamp (Figure 1) was designed in 2005 by the then up and coming Danish designer Cecilie Manz. The design and product development were done in close collaboration with the newly formed Danish lightings company Lightyears A/S. The company was the result of a reorganization of a lighting manufacturing company surviving server crisis by outsourcing production to China and concentrating on management, administration and product development in Denmark. At the same time the business strategy was reoriented from the production of low priced lamps to the marketing of more expensive 'designer lamps'. These were, though, still considerably cheaper than high end lamps of Scandinavian or Italian origin, thus utilizing a gap in the market for well-designed middle range lighting of fair quality.

The lamp was an immediate success in the market and thus provided for the consolidation of the company which established several succeeding collaborations with younger or less known designers. Nonetheless it is still the Caravaggio pendant that provides the major part of turnover for Lightyears A/S and is the mainstay of the company. Due to its success, today Caravaggio is in widespread and common use in private homes, commercial settings and public buildings all over Denmark and is also doing well as an export product.

We will now present a step by step treatment of the Caravaggio pendant as an exemplary case. It needs to be stated that the above framework of three dimensions of aesthetic meaning is a strictly interpretive framework which systematizes and supports the mapping of possible aesthetic intentions, attributes and perceptions manifested within, or in relation to, a design artifact. What the resulting map reveals and points to is the *aesthetic potential* a given design entails. What aesthetic potential, if any, is actually realized as an aesthetic relation or aesthetic experience in a given context is an empirical question suitable for an ethnographic or anthropological approach which will not be pursued further here. The ontological difference between aesthetic potential and the possible, but not observed or documented, realized aesthetic relations, that most certainly appears in the consumption of the Caravaggio pendant, is acknowledged in the analysis by adhering to the distinction between aesthetic potential and actualized aesthetics.

Figure 1: Caravaggio pedant. Designer: Cecilie Manz.

First step: Description and analysis of the Sensual-Phenomenological dimension of Caravaggio. The first focus of our analysis is to identify the physical attributes of the artifact as aesthetic and to specify the particular constellation of the potential aesthetic relation as a correlation of the aesthetic intention on behalf of the designer or producer, the aesthetic

appeal of the designed artifact, and the aesthetic experience on behalf of the consumer.

The explicit questions in this step that need to be addressed are the following: Which attributes of the artifact could be said to be aesthetic? How is the designed object coded aesthetically? What is the cultural context of this coding? What characterizes the specific aesthetic relation posed by this particular design? First, however, a close description of the form and sensual qualities of the artifact in question is needed.

The overall appearance of Caravaggio is characterized by a clear division into three distinct parts: Cord, metal shade, and the fixture anchoring shade to cord. The shade is basically a truncated cone open in both top and bottom whereby light is directed both up and down. The ascending angle of the cone is steep and straight until it slides into an inward-bending S-curve which narrows the opening further and accentuates the transition to the anchoring fixture. The shade is attached to the fixture with three relatively thin metal brackets protruding in an arch of a quarter of a circle from a flat cylindrical attachment to the cord. The brackets grip into the shade from the outside into three holes in the narrow top. The clear division into shade, fixture and cord is further emphasized by the color scheme. The shade is white on the inside in contrast to the black surface on the outside. The fixture dissolves the contrast between white and black by being grey as an intermix of these. Yet again these three achromatic colors are altogether set in contrast to the cord which is in primary red. These divisions into separate parts by contrasts of color are even further accentuated in the choice of texture. The inside of the shade is matt, the outside is full gloss; the fixture is metallic and the cord appears as soft fabric. When lit the overall appearance of the pendant transforms somewhat. Due to the opening in the top of the shade the pendant illuminates itself or more accurately its cord as the shade could be said to dissolve as its contour is obliterated by suddenly being in the dark as opposed to the cord and the surfaces below and above the lamp. This of course is relative to the specific setting and the amount of overall light and other lighting equipment.

Now moving to the actual aesthetic analysis we first need to identify the attributes of the pendant which could be said to be aesthetic. It is by no means an easy or simple task to point out and separate aesthetic properties from properties of other kinds, such as functional, structural, material, and symbolical ones. They might not be particularly obvious, although they can be and sometimes are, and they might not be singled out in a discrete and singular entity since an aesthetic attribute in the case of design

might very well have another or even several other properties. An aesthetic attribute could be functional, structural, material and symbolical at the same time. So to get started in some instances it might be more expedient to pose the reverse question: Which attributes are not aesthetically motivated? Which attributes are determined by functional needs, structural issues, constraints in materials and symbolic aims?

In the case of Caravaggio a pendant with equal ability to direct lighting downwards and prevent glare by covering the source of light could have been attained with a simple cone of sheet metal or a material with similar qualities attached to the cord with a standard plastic fixture (as is often the case in less expensive pendants). The white coloring inside the shade increases reflection and thus the efficiency of the pendant, but the outer coloring did not have to be in the exact contrasting black and the cord might just as well have been a conventional black or white plastic cord. This imaginary comparison points to the closing S-curvature at the top of the shade, the quarter circle thin metal brackets gripping the shade, the opening at the top of the shade, the choice of contrasting colors and the coloring of the cord as aesthetic attributes and are thus of analytical interest.

We can now move to the question of how the Caravaggio pendant is aesthetically coded. The S-curvature at the top of the shade is the most complex of its aesthetic attributes. It could be argued that it to some extent is for structural reasons that the shade narrows and promotes the 'graspability' of the shade to its brackets. More importantly, though, the determination seems to be motivated by the wish to accentuate the transition from one part to the other and state these as two separate structural components. Concurrently these details could be said to have a third and fourth determination which both serve to point beyond the pendant itself to other objects and thus have potential symbolic function. The S-curvature suggests an association to bottles of all different kinds. Whether identified as a bottleneck shape or not, the S-curvature could simultaneously or alternatively be read as an index of an extraordinary interest in and will to form. The potential supposition of a designer intent or designer signature being at play would not depend on knowledge about the actual designer. The basic acknowledgement that a competent design capacity has been at work (whether completely anonymous or attributed to a specific person) will be sufficient to set the pendant off from a mere commodity and move it into the exclusive category of designer goods.

As already touched upon, the fixture appears to be a straightforward structural solution, yet, at the same time, to have symbolic determi-

nation. The three thin brackets could be said to be the minimal solution to the structural challenge of attaching the shade to the cord with a lightweight and only just sufficient anchoring which loosely hangs the shade onto the cord. Concurrently the half circular silhouette produced jointly by the three brackets gives the impression of the shade being grasped or gripped. Whether this is by high tech industrial equipment or zoomorphic images of birds of prey or insects could not be finally determined since both allusions could be made – although the first would arguably be the most immediate. The impression that the shade is loosely hung onto the cord has at least two additional potential meanings which point in different directions. Firstly, it adds a somewhat ad-hoc character to the structural solution. This way of hanging seems more improvised and low-tech than if it had been riveted, screwed or welded. Secondly, it makes the pendant appear fragile and exposed to damage if deliberately swung or bumped into by mistake. In reality the brackets not only hold the shade from the outside in a hook-like manner but protrude even further inside and fasten the mount as well. The construction is both considerably more stable and less simple than it immediately appears.

The opening at the top of the pendant is a simple choice but several advanced aesthetic codings are achieved in this way with the smallest of means possible. Firstly, this pendant not only creates focused and strong light downwards but also results in a diffused illumination of the ceiling where it is hung. Whereas an otherwise comparable pendant would only produce focused illumination downwards *this one also creates a wider ambience around itself*. Secondly, it also illuminates itself and specifically its red cord. In this way an element of pendant lamps which is commonly rendered invisible or at least not pointed to as something worthy of notice is emphasized and turned into a constituent part of the pendant.

Usually or up until now in lamp design – in low priced and middle range lighting anyway – the cord was comparable to the frame of a painting. It had to be there but without being noticeable. This is all changed by the opening at the top of the shade and results in a pendant with more con-stituent parts and it even points to and makes an effect of it. It results in a relatively more performative lighting object by the way it reacts and transforms when lit. This is only a relative difference because pendants in colored or frosted glass or a similar semi-translucent material will also transform, when turned on, by lighting up themselves. Yet the point with Caravaggio is not the shade itself which lights up when lit but the otherwise unacknowledged but fundamentally indispensable part of the pendant

namely the cord. The red cord and the illumination of it through the top opening directs our attention to the essence of pendant lamps as opposed to other types of lamps, such as table lamps, wall lamps or floor lamps, which is precisely that it is hung by its cord.

The first step of the aesthetic analysis – the particular constellation of the aesthetic relation in and around the artifact in question – can by now be specified thanks to the preceding description. Starting from the design object itself its aesthetic appeal is subtle and subdued. Hardly any of the identified aesthetic attributes were aesthetically motivated only; the sensory appeal was brought about by attributes that at the same time had also structural, functional or symbolic determinants. At first hand the aesthetic intentions on behalf of the designer seem few and reduced but at closer inspection the impression is that the aesthetic appeal seems less calculated than it actually must be. It is fair to conclude that on the one hand the aesthetic calculation is sufficiently subtle to not be offensive or appear manipulative and on the other the aesthetic attributes are not too few or too subdued to be unrecognizable to the consumer.

Second step: Description and analysis of the Conceptual-Herme-neutical dimension of Caravaggio. The focus of the second step of aesthetic design analysis moves from the sensual to the cognitive aspects and addresses aesthetic meaning potentially brought about by the con-templation of the design artifact. Central to this focus is the kind of aesthetic relation where interpretation is oriented towards the understanding of the designer's intention. The result on the behalf of the consumer will be the designer's intention as inferred, or differently put, the idea which could be said to be manifested in the design artifact. This implies the presence of qualities that come across as a surplus of meaning in the design and some degree of *self-reflective aesthetic function* intended for the design. Since this mode of interaction – more or less cognitive, more or less consciously or deliberately interpretive – at the outset seeks something to read off the design, it points to the fundamental polysemy of material objects and the basic condition that a material form does not necessarily point to its meaning in any straightforward or unambiguous way; the relation of aesthetic material form to meaning thus becomes a fundamental issue.

The explicit questions in this step of the analysis that need to be addressed are the following: What is the meaning or idea of the design, how is it conveyed, and by what means? How does the design present itself to our understanding? As something that is easily comprehended or as some-thing that resists comprehension? And, by extension, what are the aims of

positioning the design in this way? Why is the design aestheticized by these means?

At a first glance, the lamp is not difficult to comprehend: It presents itself as a lighting device, a lamp. In its lightening function, the lamp as an object is out of sight. But, following the above analysis of the form of the lamp, the lamp also draws attention to itself as the source of light. In opposition to the lamps of the Danish lamp designer Poul Henningsen whose lamps from the 1930's an onward create a pervasive light with an identity of the form of the light and the form of the lamp, that is, where the attention is drawn to the form of the illuminated shades, the Caravaggio pendant splits the appeal to attention in the vertically moving light and the horizontally effective, non-transparent shade.

The point is that the lighting strategy of the lamp is reflected in the name of the lamp, Caravaggio, after the Italian pre-baroque painter Amerighi da Caravaggio (approx. 1571-1610). The Caravaggio lamp in several ways employs elements known from the painter Caravaggio (or selects these): The paintings often work with contrasts and use a spectrum of white, grey, and black colors with a distinct red element; this can be seen reflected in the lamp in the contrast of light, shade and wire. Often, the paintings display a visible reflection of the position of the light source; in relation to the lamp, this goes to the core of what a pendant is: a light source aiming at a specific point.

Thus, the lamp both presents itself immediately to our understanding and reflects its own meaning. The lamp does not resist comprehension or question itself as a lamp but is positioned as a design that also contains the potential of self-reflection. By doing this, it places itself in a line of contemporary Danish design communicating on two levels. It is an object for consumption, renewing a tradition of Danish design, and it is an object for reflection, inscribing itself in a tradition of Western experimental design. In this way, the design gets doubly aestheticized: It is positioned as aesthetic both in terms of its form and its meaning, debating 'design' itself.

This point can be expanded with another example of contemporary Danish design, *Camping*, designed by Jesper K. Thomsen and launched by the retailer Normann Copenhagen in 2009. Camping is conceived as a set of furniture for the living room consisting of a chair (Figure 2), stool, table and daybed. In its references, Camping also employs a double strategy. On the one hand, it points to the tradition of Danish Modern through its organic form, its materials, its aesthetic and economic exclusivity, and its labor and handicraft-intensive serial production (as self-consciously testified in vide-

os); it consists of delicate and expensive materials. On the other hand, in many ways it does not fit in the paradigm of Danish Modern. It sets 'design' (i.e. the image of what 'design should look like') before craftsman-ship, its smooth construction is 'untrue' to the materials and there is a mimesis of other materials. Further, the focus is not on the manufacturer (in fact, we do not know who that is), but on the retailer. In the deliberate play on meaning, the series appears as an example of self-aware avant-gardism where experimentation is an end in itself.

Figure 2: Camping chair. Designer: Jesper K. Thomsen.

Figure 3: Promotion image of Do Hit Chair, 1999, design by Marijn van der Poll.

Thus, in Camping, as well as in Caravaggio, some of the breaks from the Danish tradition are in continuity with the international idiom so

pronounced within high design and pieces for international fairs and trade exhibitions which first came to the fore with the neo-modernism of Dutch Droog Design of the 90s. Here, the agenda of combining humor and reform, aesthetics and ethics, play, critique and self-conscious design experimentation was set. The design of Droog Design entails a kind of aesthetic position in which the design points to itself as a site of meaning production reflecting its own idea as object and as 'design'. This can be seen in examples such as the Do Hit Chair (1999, design by Marijn van der Poll, Figure 3) and Soft Vase Urn (1994, design by Hella Jongerius, Figure 4). In the Do Hit Chair, at the outset it is conceptual as the – indeed uncomfortable – chair only comes into its individual form as the user uses a sledgehammer to transform the open structure of the cube into a chair. Instead of having 'just' a chair, we get a complex play and reflection of meaning at the intersection of form, material, purpose and user involvement. Whereas the Do Hit Chair is a design object openly reflecting its content (the user unfolds the idea of the chair while hitting at it), the vase is more discreet. It looks like a vase, but employs the unusual material of rubber to create an object that can equally function as a vase and encourage the user to engage with it and reflect its idea.

Figure 4: Soft Vase Urn, 1994, design by Hella Jongerius.

In the play on meaning, the two Danish cases can be seen to have the same kind of meaning structure and self-conscious meaning reflection. They are, however, a downplayed version of Droog as the idea of the design is less obviously reflected. Considering the aesthetics of the design, we can point to different strategies of reflection on the idea of the design – how directly displayed or indirectly mediated the idea is – but still point to the reflection of the idea as a decisive aspect of the design. Further, we often meet the directly displayed ideas in concept design (as Droog) whereas the

indirectly mediated ideas (with a high surplus of appearance) can be met in design objects appealing for a 'high design' lifestyle market. On this point, Camping and Caravaggio seem to be the latter, high design products aiming at high design consumption (cf. also Julier 2008), but at the same time also aiming at making a conceptual design statement.

Third step: Description and analysis of the Contextual-Discursive dimension of Caravaggio. The focus of the third and last step of our aesthetic analysis of design concerns the prerequisites and conditions which render aesthetic experience possible. Thus attention is directed towards contextual and discursive circumstances since time, place, settings, and previous and present frames of mental and cultural kinds are central in describing and explaining how an aesthetic experience can occur and might develop. In relation to design in particular this also entails the important issue of how the designed object itself contributes to the situation. Designed objects are never just in a context, they are part of and contribute to the context themselves. In this sense they could also be said to partake in an ongoing process of aestheticization – just as the means of aestheticization posits design as aesthetic in its core.

The explicit questions in this step of our analysis are thus the following: What are the prerequisites and conditions for the aesthetic potential of a designed object in a given context? How might the design partake in and contribute to aestheticization itself? And, by what means is it being aestheticized?

Regarding Caravaggio, this presents itself as a double question: What is the meaning potential of the lamp that contributes to the pool of aesthetic material of the world – and what is done to promote it by actors in the circuit of design? The first question can be answered by referring to the form, its work on contrast and color and the deliberate play on the meaning potential of being a 'design' object. The second question requires a broader frame of analysis of, e.g., the strategies of mediation.

The play on meaning in Caravaggio is carried through by the mediation that often is an integral part of this kind of both commercial and self-positioning design. In his analysis of the phenomenon of 'high design', Guy Julier even states that the frame of mediation surrounding the design can be so effective that it defines the context of meaning appreciation for the consumer; in the context of high design mediation, interpretation may be "self-generated, articulated and disseminated as a pre-emptive strike on the consumer before he or she makes his or her own mind up" (Julier 2008, p. 80). The mediation is indeed so actively deployed that it effectively may

determine the meaning of the design. Also beyond the phenomenon of high design, mediation is pivotal: Even as the 'global culture industry' is defined by a flow of media turning into things and things turning into media (cf. Lash & Lury 2007), so contemporary design culture is characterized by design objects being only present through its mediation. Compared with Camping, which is a high-end product rarely sold (at a visit at the Normann Copenhagen flagship store in Copenhagen (2013-10-18), the quite expensive furniture of Camping was not even present), Caravaggio is, though, a lamp in widespread use.
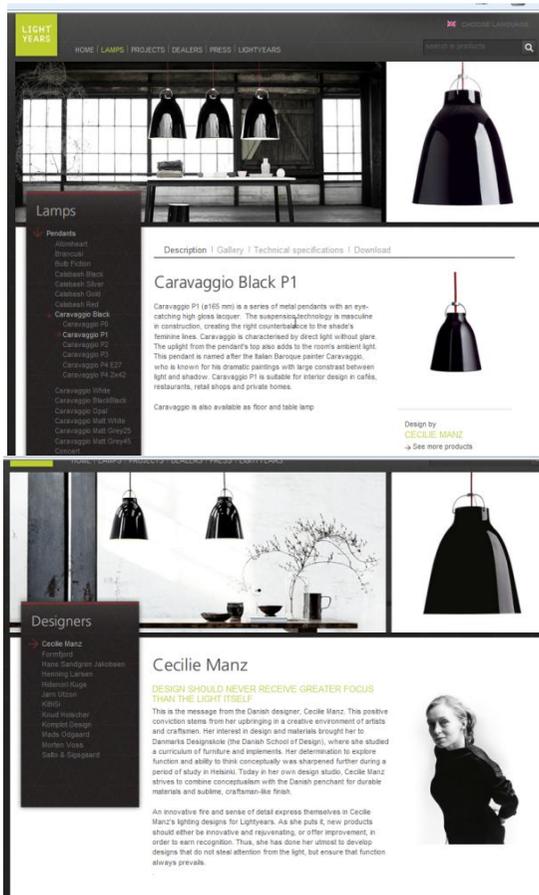

Figure 5 & 6. Screen dumps from Lightyears.dk

The mediation of Caravaggio communicates its meaning. Especially, the mediation is enacted in the media setting of the product, e.g. the website for Light Years. The lamps are displayed in settings underlining the light effect and the play on black-and-white-contrasts (Figure 5). Further, the setting is based on a synthesis of opposite meanings: The setting points to both design (in the lamp) and art (in the non-naturalistic tone), it evokes an effect of being in time/being a design of contemporary age and of transgressing time, it is raw and modern while also being pre-industrial and rural, etc. The mediations create a frame around the design that articulates it *as both an ordinary and an extra-ordinary object*; it is aestheticized as a such.

On the website, not only are the products in focus, but also the designer, Cecilie Manz. The designer is in focus, thus confirming the somewhat obsolete notion of sole "authorship" as an explanatory power over the product (Figure 6). The designer is staged as a privileged entry into understanding what the product is about: She is the creator and she has placed intention into the product. By staging the designer as a focal point, she gets positioned as a central cultural resource for our entry to the product; she contributes to claiming an aesthetic meaning potential of the lamp.

Conclusion. So how is design 'aesthetic'? It is aesthetic by means of coding in relation to sensual appeal, framing of understanding, and cultural impact, as discussed in the first section of the paper. Next, design may have an *aesthetic potential* that can be developed by chance but in meaning processes, the design can be promoted and exploited. In the process of aestheticization, the design can be positioned as aesthetic with the contribution of many factors and actors. Manufacturers have a strategic interest in positioning their products as imbued with aesthetic qualities as this resonates with high quality and high culture. Often, mediation plays a central role in this. By this, the game about aesthetic meaning is a dual one. The object may have a potential for aesthetic meaning. This can then be actualized in and through the contexts the object is a part of and engages with.

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Theories and Practices of Aesthetics in Design
(abstract)

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Design Practice and Aesthetics. In an on going project we explore how and if an aesthetic experience can create awareness of the quality of textile materials as an important part of garments.

As resources are getting scarcer we have to find ways to change the current patterns of fashion consumption. This requires serious adjustments in textile production, the fashion system, the use phase as well as in the education of designers.

In this pilot project we explore ways to raise young users' and design students' awareness of textiles as a valuable material in garments. We also investigate what kinds of situations and experiences might further emotional bonds between user and garment to prolong its active lifetime. By staging unexpected experiences of tactility and garment construction, we test participatory design methods that are not so prevalent in fashion- and textile design.

The aim of our research is to develop new dialogue tools for teaching fashion and textile students in order to stimulate new ways of thinking and engaging with users. On a longer term the aim is to develop alternative transformational strategies that may further the design of products and services for a more sustainable future in collaboration with researchers from various disciplines in our international network.

At present our main research questions are:
- Can dialogue tools that challenge tactile competencies support the development of more sustainable fashion and textile design?
- Can an aesthetic experience further awareness related to textile quality, garments and the importance of one's actions in the use phase?

In this presentation we especially want to focus on the following sub-questions:
- How can we stage and evaluate the outcome of an aesthetic experience?
- How can we create awareness about the lifetime of textiles and garments through an aesthetic experience?

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