

RESEARCH ON THE CONTEXT OF AESTHETICS PLEASURES SHARED IN FASHION COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

In recent years, aesthetics has become a commonly studied subject in different major fields and has even been defined as an important enzyme in brand strategies, experience economy, emotion designing, and taste and style shaping, which has influenced not only the product contents and forms but also the role of designers. Therefore, from the designer's point of view, these changes are no doubt examples of shifting design paradigms. The recent extensively-discussed subjects, such as civil aesthetics, stylish societies, aesthetics economies, and aesthetics experiences, have not only involved the discussions of material culture, such as formal aesthetics, functional aesthetics, and communicative aesthetics about product, but have also been shifted to the angle of immaterial culture, meaning that the subject has shifted from the objective beauty to that between users and products. This is what the German scholar Böhme called the "atmospheric aesthetics," which means, "The physical beauty of products can be extended and connected to surrounding environment to create a sense of amenity, and such amenity can give people within the environment a sense of pleasure and provide functions of personal expression and social communication." The so called "aesthetics pleasure" is defined herein as "the pleasure generating from aesthetics and as the shared fun with one another in response to the purpose and meaning expressed by objectives." Therefore, this research discusses about the realization and the thread of thought of aesthetics pleasures in fashion communities through literature discussion in the hope of providing the preliminary structure of aesthetics pleasures and initially clarifying the fact that the so-called aesthetics has shifted from emotional subject to the index of harmony. It is not only an individual sense of pleasure but also a shared enjoyment with others. In a way, aesthetics has become an important bridge of communication and a significant key index in the leap of different fields in future.

Keywords: aesthetics pleasure, design, fashion communities

Introduction

Nowadays, broad attentions and discussions have been devoted to the study of aesthetics. Many reports or researches specifically pointed out the value and future prospects of aesthetics; some attempted to figure out the phenomena and tendency toward "return to beauty." (Postrel, 2003) Even Norman (2004), the cognitive scientist who had been promoting "utility", suggested that without emotional factors such as fun, pleasure, joy, or desire, life becomes incomplete. In retrospect to viewpoints on product functionality proposed in his books "The Design of Everyday Things" written in the 1980's, he couldn't deny but acknowledge the importance of emotion under the changes of today's society and lifestyle. To Norman, emotion is equal to aesthetics, attractiveness, and beauty. Therefore, as aesthetics becomes an essential target of design value, it also becomes an important issue. This study collected different concepts about aesthetics from relevant literatures. The major theories include Norman's "emotion design", Jordon's modification on Tiger's four pleasure conceptual frameworks to connect with designing, and Böhme's "atmosphere aesthetics." A novel aesthetics framework is induced and analyzed to serve

the observation on the aesthetic pleasure shared by fashion communities, so as to picture the relevance and factors with the prevalence of fashion issues in Asia.

Emotional aesthetics

Aesthetics is an index of pleasure and meaning, by which objective beauty and atmosphere influences the senses of the “livers” (referring the collective image of daily labor and integrity of life). This sense of beauty is appreciated in emotional terms. Similarity can be found in “Qualia” proposed by Nobuyuki Idei (2002) – the quality of feelings as separated from quality itself, so as to shape the particular touch of human emotions. “Qualia” is not yet possessed by the livers; instead, it longs to be possessed. Therefore aesthetics has to explore, brew or even become a communication interface. It aspires to express the livers’ dissatisfaction in real life, as well as their craving for a certain lifestyle, further creating the demand for improvement in status quo. However, such dissatisfaction cannot be solely resolved by any individual, for aesthetics style becomes an emotional connection of a group through belongingness to the group, experience sharing and exchange within a community.

The aesthetic pleasures shared by a group via emotional connection, specifically, is “sensory stimulation generated by the sense of beauty in the product, connecting with the environment, evoking delightful moods in a person, and serving as a media for personal expression and social communication.” Basically, since culture can be viewed as a kind of ritual, popular culture can be regarded as a “fashion ritual” leading the contemporary trend. Such ritual encourages the livers to communicate with others by revealing signs for personality. That is because the so-called “popularity”, on the one hand, refers to the form and style of existence commonly recognized by the public in a period of time, such as costumes, music, and design, meaning “fashion”. On the other hand, popularity refers to the preference and pursuit for a certain style by a society or community in a period of time, meaning “fad”. Whether fashion is concerned with style or preference, it is related to the collective behavior of a community. However, the phenomenon of fashion has its anthropologic background, in which people’s pursuit and infatuation for fashion is not only derived from the natural instinct to imitate but also from the curiosity for the game of creativity played with changeable styles of fashion. Basically, origin of fashion can be traced back to our desire to communicate with community; hence the integration of fashion community serves in a mutual way—conveying personal messages and facilitating communication with the community or the society. Generally speaking, the pursuit for fashion not only symbolizes wealth and taste but also satisfies the desire for a sense of belongingness to the contemporary society. The similarity of aesthetic experiences prolongs the shared aesthetic pleasures, and further forms a specific aesthetic atmosphere.

Identity of Fashion Communities

Community is an organization in which experiences can be shared. Lifestyle shared whether in physical or virtual communities have become a factor in a liver’s attempt to achieve identification, individual expression, and social communication. Many communities have been extended from virtual network into physical activities, making community activity a good business. As a platform for people sharing similar interests to exchange opinions, also with supports from opinion leaders, such activities are connected with a series of aesthetic and pleasant experiences. Sensory pleasures ensued from physical objects, as well as that between people or between human and the environment, all together shape a collective aesthetic atmosphere in correspondence with the “atmosphere aesthetics” proposed by Böhme. As the community

explores the aesthetic experience, what comes along is "affiliation" proposed by Anne Hollander (1994) ---the psychological tendency to get close to others, or a sense of recognition or belongingness. Furthermore, members of such communities usually possess identifications in more than one community; they are the "multi-performer" proposed by Niki Mari (1988). In other words, members themselves have interests in a plurality of aspects, enhancing the interaction and interrelation between different communities, so that shared aesthetic themes can inspire various aesthetic echoes.

The chase for stylish taste by fashion community is in fact driven by "herd instinct", which is demonstrated in the public's tendency toward longing, desiring, and worshipping. Therefore fashion can rapidly nucleate crowds of people, leading them toward any direction just like the religious "shepherd" who guides sheep herds. Also, members also feature a psychological desire for "being similar to others", which infuses the flood of fashion. According to relevant surveys and studies, although members have adequate intelligence and capability to fight against the public for the manifestation of their own uniqueness, most of them would rather choose "similarity", because the latter is the crux of community's solidity. As Bourdieu (1984) said, consumers obtain objects via consumption behaviors in order to appreciate the messages that designers of popular culture intend to convey, as well as to express their pursuit and craving for such favor, taste, and social status. Participation in the atmosphere of popular culture, on the one hand, reveals their curiosity toward popular culture; on the other, the play with these objects in daily life demonstrates one's style, so as to pronounce the member's identity and recognition.

Aesthetics pleasures

The aesthetics discussed here adopts different perspectives from philosophy and psychology. Aesthetics is no longer a metaphysical literature but integration with the social functionality of daily life. This beautification of everyday life can also be called as the amenity of the environment. This amenity, however, is not only perceived by individuals in secret but also imbued by the overall environmental atmosphere. Only by the mutual penetration between object, people, and environment could a unique stylistic aesthetics be shaped. And fashion community is the group of people who vividly reflect these phenomena. The "atmosphere aesthetics" proposed by Böhme is also the interface between people and objects or even the scenes, making the object, people, or environment ooze a certain kind of atmosphere. This emotional reaction occurs when one really attends in the scene, appreciates the atmosphere, and experiences the vibrating delight. This inspiring touch of the mind leads to the pleasure of happiness via feelings, experiences, memories, and sharing.

Aesthetic pleasures can be stated in a hierarchy. Jordan (2000) once modified Maslow's theory to propose the need hierarchy of design: functionality→ ability→ pleasure. The aesthetic pleasure of fashion community pleases for desire, not basic needs. Therefore, functionality and usability are critical requirements while pleasure is the cement that congregates a fashion community. Hence Jordan connected objects with the framework of four kinds of pleasures proposed by anthropologist Tiger (2005):

(1) Physio-pleasure: perception in the physical level, such as contact, taste, touch, and so on. Chocolate, for example, produces pleasure by gustatory sense. Another example of the object is the cookie box of "Mary Biscuit", a product of Alessi. It is molded in the shape of a cookie, exuding the flavor of the cookie and conveying the physio-pleasure by visual and scent approaches.

(2) Socio-pleasure: the pleasure related to the relationship with others. The object facilitates the interaction in the society or serves as a symbol for communication and demonstration within communities. This intercommunication is achieved by signs. The recent most popular product, i-Pod, for instance, has become the symbol of one's aesthetic taste with its significance in a sense of beauty.

(3) Psycho-pleasure: the pleasure associated with human reaction in terms of both cognition and emotion. Emotional response is aroused by the operational experience of an object. The plea is the usability of an object, i.e., the functional experience generated while one uses this object.

(4) Ideo-pleasure: the pleasure in relation to human values. The object connects and integrates aesthetics with values, with particular emphasis on the harmony with the environment. A fable can best explain this kind of pleasure. When a rose appears in the messy room of a frowsy man, the incongruence becomes so obvious that this man's life order and aesthetic experience has changed.

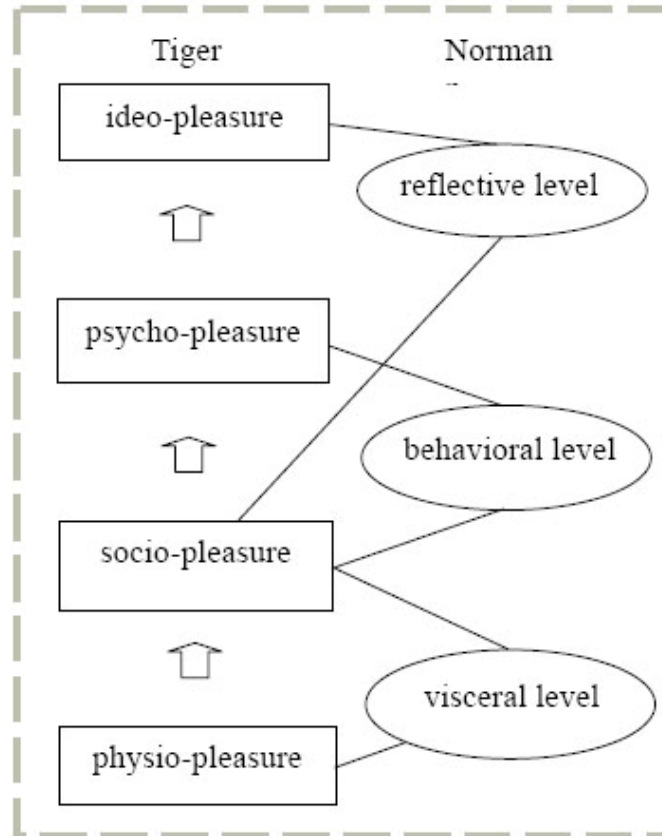


FIGURE 1: The Connection about aesthetics pleasures of Tiger and Norman

Similarly, Tiger's framework for the exploration of emotion is also modified by Norman who proposed the three designing hierarchy of visceral, behavioral and reflective level as the correspondence. Norman's interpretation for "visceral design" refers to the appearance of a product, while "behavioral design" refers to the performance and fun in the operation, and "reflective design" refers to personal image, memory, and satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the

comparison between the viewpoints of Tiger and Norman. Whether it is the interpretation of Tiger or Norman, the levels of emotional pleasure are within the compass of physio-pleasure (object), psycho-pleasure (person), and socio-pleasure (interpersonal), and further enhanced to the themes of environmental aesthetics. In other words, it starts from the simple reflection on an object to the relationship between human and object, the connection between people, and the contextual evolution between human and environment. Therefore, this process can be defined as the hierarchical evolution of aesthetic pleasures.

Aesthetics Pleasures Shared in Fashion Communities

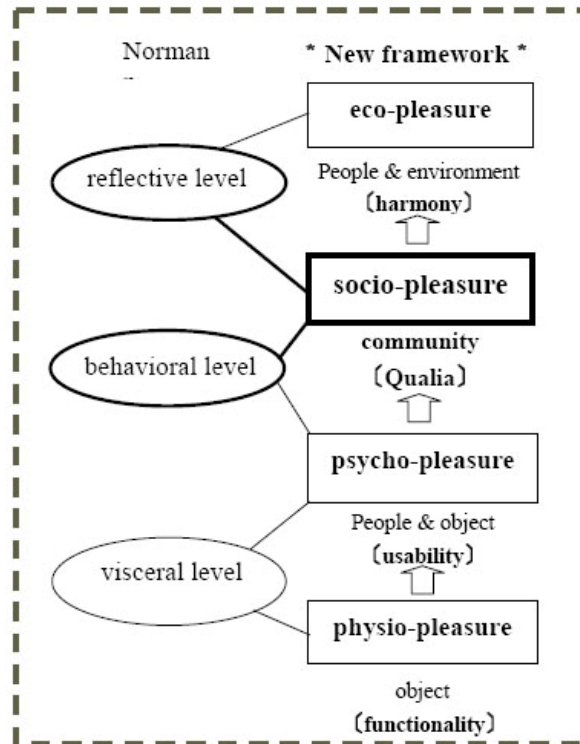


FIGURE 2: According to the concepts in Figure 1, a new conceptual framework in correspondence with the hierarchy of aesthetic themes is proposed and connected with Norman's viewpoint.

Yet this framework can be modified with regard to Böhme's "atmosphere aesthetics" and Jordon's "need hierarchy of design" as follows:

1. Physio-pleasure: concerns the object itself with emphasis on the functionality of the object.
2. Psycho-pleasure: concerns the interface between the product and human with emphasis on the usability of the object.
3. Socio-pleasure: concerns the correlation between individuals. When an object carries reference, it brings about the pleasance in relationship with others and further achieves the functions of personal expression, identity, and social expression. In this level, the focus is on Qualia, which transcends material and psychological levels to generate the inspiring joy.
4. Eco-pleasure: concerns the ambience of the overall environment. It also is the indicative level for the shaping of stylistic aesthetics. The shaping of an identifiable style induces a harmonious environmental aesthetics.

Observation on fashion community within this framework reveals that popular culture signifies the style of a certain period of time as a series of dynamic, vagrant changes, satisfying people in the level of desire. Therefore, it belongs to social pleasure. The eco-pleasure, on the other hand, have a specific, and also more stable, stylistic aesthetics shaped. In correspondence with Norman's "emotion design" concept, both behavioral and reflective levels are concerned, because the former refers to the utility and pleasure for use while the later refers to personal image, identity, and satisfaction. Since social pleasure refers to the correlation between individual people, all the communities share similar pleasure. Wills (1990) applied the concept of "proto-communities" to separate them from the traditional "organic communities". Specifically speaking, a community is not formed for a certain purpose; instead, it's established by the desire for fun, interest, or sharing. People become associated by sharing lifestyle, aesthetic pleasures, interests, and opinions, and feature the characteristics of organic communities. Moreover, in fashion communities, personality is externally signified and hence particularly connected with aesthetics pleasure. Daily life is hued with aesthetics, because a strong sense of belongingness to the society is characteristic in human beings. Gathering in the community makes the value and meaning of existence more sensible.

Conclusions

This paper first proposed a basic framework to describe fashion community in the hierarchy levels of aesthetic pleasures. Further, the focus was turned to the quality combinations of themes in aesthetic pleasures, which are definitely constructed by single one factor but involved with other combinations of factors, such as "system of attributes" (Schmitt & Simonson, 1999) "association attribute" (Findeli, 1994), and "combination of qualities" (Walker, 1995). Regardless of the phrasing, most researchers agreed that aesthetic pleasures are systematic frameworks composed of multiple factors. Such concept is similar to "synesthesia" (Schmitt, B. & Simonson, A., 1999), the ambience composed of many feelings. And with depths from micro to macro, the resonance of each sensory perception generates an emotional harmony. This can be referred as "total beauty." In the future, this aesthetic pleasures framework will be tested for verification. Further, the composing factors will be examined to facilitate the mapping and observation on aesthetic pleasures in various cultures, communities, or need hierarchies.

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