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Design and the Question of Contemporary Aesthetic Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The article raises the question of the historical relativism of aesthetic experiences and argues that aesthetic experiences have changed according to new conditions in the contemporary age of globalization, mediatization and consumer culture. In this context, design gains attention as a primary case for aesthetic evaluation as design objects are, more than ever, framed and staged to be experienced aesthetically. Basing on this starting point, the article argues that an understanding of contemporary aesthetic experiences requires a meeting of cultural theory and philosophical approaches. On the one hand, cultural theory is required to understand the changed conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of aesthetic meaning in cultural forms of art and design. On the other, philosophical aesthetics gives access to understanding the mechanisms of aesthetic judgments and how they base on specific categories. It is a central argument of the article that aesthetic judgments are not only operators of ahistorical epistemology, but are culturally produced as well. The article discusses the question of contemporary aesthetic experiences through three questions: the role of aesthetic judgments, the role of aesthetic categories and the role of design in the case of a pair of TMA-2 headphones.

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Introduction

What characterizes contemporary aesthetic experiences? What makes experiences specifically aesthetic in the age of globalization and dominant consumer culture, where almost everything is for sale, even the most autonomous works of art, and when even what seem to be the most insignificant uses objects are being aestheticized in retail and media?

New conditions for the distribution of cultural meaning are being created, which may also affect the constitution of aesthetic experiences. As the sociologists Celia Lury and Scott Lash point out, all levels of cultural meaning are now, more than ever before, part of the circuit of production, commercialization and consumption. Culture today becomes *'thingified'*, and may take form as merchandise or arrive in new ways in the pervasive *'media environment'*, which, in turn, radically destabilizes the entity of things (Lash and Lury 2007, 15). The rise of virtual spaces in digital media in the last 15 years, e.g. in the visual platforms of

social media, has nurtured and intensified the development of the 'media environment,' which, in turn, has taken new forms.

In this article, we will pose two questions. Firstly, we will consider contemporary conditions for the production and articulation of aesthetic meaning and ask how aesthetic experiences are dependent on contexts that frame and locate them in specific situations. Embedded in this is the question of whether aesthetic experiences change per se, given the changed conditions. Secondly, we will ask how aesthetic experiences are dependent on the new object culture that has developed in consumer culture. Art as a classic topic for aesthetic theory may today seem a marginal phenomenon, whereas *design* has a much larger impact in terms of the way it affects people's lives.

In the following, we will discuss the question of contemporary aesthetic experiences in the light of changed conditions and design as a marker of a changed object culture. We will do so in three steps. Firstly, we will discuss the new conditions for circulating aesthetic meaning, especially through the concept of 'aesthetic economics.' Secondly, we will contest the concept of 'aesthetic experience' and discuss how it has altered according to new aesthetic categories. Finally, we will relate this to a concrete example of design – a pair of TMA-2 headphones. In our opinion, design is not only important as an expansion of the field of aesthetic appearances, but also because design puts at stake what character aesthetic experiences may have in the contemporary age of globalization, mediatization and transformed objects.

Contemporary Conditions for Aesthetic Experiences

To address the question of what characterizes contemporary aesthetic experiences requires a meeting of philosophical approaches and cultural theory. On the one hand, when we enter a discussion of aesthetics, philosophical discourse is unavoidable. Following Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), the discipline of philosophical aesthetics has developed around questions about the role and character of aesthetic judgments. Philosophical aesthetics provides a framework for describing central concepts such as beauty, the ontology of aesthetic objects and the location of the aesthetic in an interchange of objective reality and subjective response.

On the other hand, an element of cultural theory is required to understand the changed conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of aesthetic meaning, whether in the form of artworks, design objects or commercial settings in, e.g., advertising. What is regarded to be 'aesthetic' and to be the location of aesthetic experience has changed during the last 150 years from being intimately attached to art to entering the sphere of everyday life and mass culture. As a part of this process, media plays an increasing role in creating and circulating meaning content as aesthetic, as already noted by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s (Benjamin 1991). For instance, visual media are omnipresent in forms such as ads, posters, internet platforms, social media and computer games (Sturken and Cartwright 2009), and more people experience the art of Monet or a chair by Verner Panton through visual media than in a close encounter or physical interaction with the actual objects. Objects and appearances to be aesthetically evaluated are not just 'there,' but are staged and reflected in media, where they are culturally produced as objects for specific experiences: Through images of, say, the Panton chair (1960), the viewer is steered towards focusing on the formal and visual qualities of the chair.

In this sense, during the 1980s the sociologist Mike Featherstone pointed out that in the context of cultural analysis, aesthetics could be seen as culturally produced and dependent

on different societal settings in the 'aestheticization of everyday life' (Featherstone 1991).¹ Preceding Featherstone's reflections, Wolfgang Fritz Haug had also pointed out in his seminal 1971 *Kritik der Warenästhetik* that aesthetic parameters may be in the service of manufacturers and retailers in order to persuade consumers to buy commodities. In Haug's conception, an aesthetic abstraction is performed in relation to the commodities when the focus is on their seductive surface in styling and packaging (Haug 2009). This kind of cultural-contextual analysis contributes to an understanding of aesthetics – and aesthetic judgments – as produced, bound and framed by factors external to the objects themselves.

A recent proposal about aesthetics, which combines philosophical insights and a cultural understanding of the role of aesthetics at different times, is the philosopher Gernot Böhme's notion of aesthetic economics (Böhme 2016). Following on from Haug's position, Böhme's point is that the exchange value of commodities in contemporary capitalism has gained 'an own quality, an aesthetic quality' (100), and that this basic condition has led to a new kind of use value, which he calls *Inszenierungswert*, 'stage value.' Contrary to the Marxist notion of use value as the basic value of purpose in a context of use, the new use value is based on the exchange value and gains its use function in the staging of life, *Inszenierung des Lebens* (100). Böhme argues that the aesthetic qualities of commodities:

create a new kind of use value which is derived from the exchange value as they make use of their attractiveness, radiation and atmosphere: they serve to stage, to fit out and to intensify life. (27)

Böhme aims to demonstrate a new condition in capitalism, the aesthetic economics, where values are produced that, to a large degree, 'in reality are not needed' (28). Consequently, production is organized in a new way. Instead of just meeting needs that can be fulfilled, production meets *desires* that, paradoxically, intensify when they are met (28). For Böhme, this characterizes the phase 'where a large part of the production in society becomes an aesthetic production, which no longer serves use values but even more stage values' (39). On this point, Böhme stands in clear opposition to Haug. Whereas Haug in his Marxist-influenced analysis aims to criticize the seductiveness of the surface in order to get 'back' to the original core of the use value, Böhme points to the contemporary fact that the 'aesthetics of the commodity [*Warenästhetik*] satisfy a need in the buyer which is *not* directed at the use value' (34), that is, the need for staging life and exploring desires.

Böhme combines cultural analysis and philosophical reflection, and the concept of aesthetics makes the connection. Böhme raises the question of the ontology of the aesthetic appearance when it is produced, due to production shifting from fulfilling needs to meeting endless desires. When the aesthetic appearances encourage, so to speak, consumers to continuously explore new desires, new modes and means of addressing these desires may arise in consumer culture, e.g. in ways of appealing to consumers: the aesthetic appearances may change character and open-endedly aim at a fulfillment that can never be gained. Böhme may be criticized for being too focused on the sensual, pleasure-oriented elements of aesthetic experience, but his theory can nevertheless help us ask how aesthetic experiences are framed and staged by contemporary conditions in society, culture and media.

Framed Aesthetic Experiences

The concept of 'aesthetic experience' is by no means simple and uncontested. On the contrary, it refers to different understandings in different philosophical contexts. As recently demonstrated by philosopher Harry Lehmann, a particular way of understanding the concept

of aesthetic *experience* began to evolve at the beginning of the 1970s in German aesthetic theory (Lehmann 2016, 15). He argues that this more recent coining of the concept of *ästhetische Erfahrung* aims at a dichotomy of subject and object, in which, on the basis of certain objects, primarily objects of art, subjects may be affected, experience the world in new ways or even have a feeling of emancipation (22). Often, Anglo-American and German-Continental approaches stand in total disconnection with each other, even though attempts to connect them exist in discussions of the subject–object dichotomy and the ‘evaluative, phenomenological and transformational’ role of aesthetic experience (Tomlin 2008, 4). What we will do is propose an approach to the concept of ‘aesthetic experience’ that (1) questions its epistemological role and (2) questions how it is being produced in a cultural context.

In so doing, we will build on Kant’s initial approach in *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, as in this work he lays out the basis for an epistemological understanding of how aesthetic experiences are produced as an act of judgment.² Our basic point is that aesthetic experiences evolve in a relationship between a subject with an intention to see and judge something as aesthetic and thereby have aesthetic experiences, and an object with certain aesthetically coded features that may encourage judgment of the object as aesthetic, whereby the objects may be said to contain an ‘intentional aesthetic function’ (Genette 1999, 2).

On this basis, we will enter the discussion of the aesthetic experience through three questions (Figure 1): (1) How can the aesthetic *judgment* be conceived of as a starting point for understanding aesthetic experiences? This question relates aesthetics to epistemology, as overall it deals with conditions for human experience. Kant is informative on this point in his discussion about how the aesthetic judgment can be seen as a reflective judgment that operates as a reflection of sensual matter without the determination of a pre-given concept. How the aesthetic judgment operates is conditioned by the relevant categories and objects in question, which leads to the next questions: (2) According to which *categories* are aesthetic judgments made? Kant talks about beauty and the sublime, *but are aesthetic experiences framed differently today due to changed conditions in culture?* This is a core question for us. (3) How might aesthetic experience be influenced by contemporary (Western) *object* culture, that is, the objects we are surrounded by today? What does it mean to have aesthetic

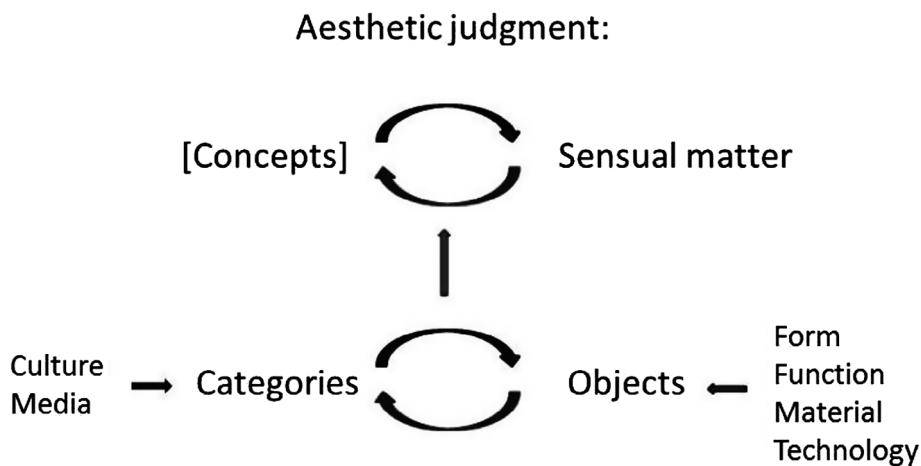


Figure 1. Illustration of the operation of aesthetic judgment.

experiences of the kind of trivial (and, hence, not extraordinary), mass-manufactured objects that we may know under the heading of 'design,' which initially may not have been intended for aesthetic evaluation, but in recent years have been submitted to being aestheticized in media and retail?

In the remainder of this section, we will raise the question of the role of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic categories, and in the next section, we will turn our attention to the case of the new object culture of design.

Aesthetic Judgment

Aesthetic judgment can be conceived as being a starting point for understanding aesthetic experiences, in the sense that it can be seen as a mental operation that produces the aesthetic experience. This conception of aesthetic judgment is founded by Kant and, among others, reactualized in Forsey's book *The Aesthetics of Design*.³ In this context, this approach seems productive as it points to the kind of meaning construction taking place in aesthetic experiences, instead of just speaking of, e.g., 'pleasure' as the only aesthetic parameter.⁴

Forsey precisely describes aesthetic judgment as a 'certain mental activity, rather than a set of properties or qualities that we call aesthetic' (Forsey 2013, 118). The aesthetic is neither given in the things themselves as an objective element, nor is it solely a subjective, and thus arbitrary, judgment, as the faculty of judgment operates according to objective principles in a play in the human mind.⁵ The point is that our finding something 'beautiful is a product of the *form* of our aesthetic judgments' (128, our italics). Thus, aesthetic judgment may be seen in a constructivist light to produce the aesthetic experience in different ways, due to its constitution and aims.

In Kant's conception, aesthetic experience evolves when the cognitive faculties are put at play in a certain way. Aesthetic judgment evolves when we meet an appearance with pleasure, without being able to comprehend it with a given concept. The cognitive faculties of mind, e.g., imagination and understanding, are put into play in a search for concepts that fit the appearances. Kant speaks of a 'reflective judgment' in opposition to 'determining judgment;' the latter functions to make sensual appearances and concepts symmetrically fit, whereas the former describes an asymmetrical relationship and open reflection of the sensual without the determination of a pre-given concept. Furthermore, Kant coins a notion of 'aesthetic ideas,' which he sees as 'that kind of apprehension of the imagination that entails much to think about, without some definite thought, that is, concept, being able to be adequate for it, and which, consequently, cannot be comprehended or made comprehensible by any language' (Kant 1995, 198). The aesthetic ideas do not have concepts as their starting point and they may be a means of relating to a meaning beyond the given, to *Vernunftideen*, by which Kant means transsensuous ideas of reason. In this kind of approach, the aesthetic is *serious business* as it plays an epistemological role in the way humans engage with the world and (through cognition) reach beyond it.

Aiming to develop an aesthetics of design, Forsey analyzes how elements of design and art, such as function and content, are constructed as 'forms our judgment takes when we are confronted with the appearance of things' (Forsey 2013, 177). In the case of design, aesthetic judgments not only take the form of the free play of imagination and understanding in the search for concepts, but also require 'some amount of conceptual knowledge of the purposes we attribute to the objects we encounter,' which Forsey connects to 'dependent

beauty' in opposition to 'free beauty' (148). In relation to design, Forsey points out that aesthetic judgments are not only 'synchronic' in the Kantian sense of being of a general nature; all judgments of dependent beauty also contain a 'diachronic' element, due to the 'shifting conceptual knowledge of form and function that is presupposed in our appreciation of the things that are integral to our lives' (188). Hereby, Forsey stresses the relativist character of the kind of aesthetic judgments that are not related to free beauty.

In our approach to aesthetic judgment as the central vehicle in producing aesthetic experiences, we will continue to employ the Kantian dynamics of relating sensual matter with more or less defined concepts. But we will also question the constitution of aesthetic judgment; that is, ask not only how aesthetic judgments produce aesthetic experiences, *but also how aesthetic judgment itself is produced*. Kant may himself give us a hint in his concept of schematization, which suggests flexibility in how concepts and sensual matter are related (Kant 1990). Schematization conditions our ability to construct meaning through synthesis and, as a product of human imagination, is itself a structure of the human mind that is open to alteration and new configurations (Folkmann 2013). However, Kant's reflection is bound to an 'internal' investigation of the powers and abilities of the human mind, and we can ask how external factors could also affect the production of aesthetic judgment. So, on the one hand, we can argue for a continuous, internal constituent of aesthetic judgment to create a free play of cognitive forces in relating concepts and sensual matter; on the other hand, we can contest which sensual matter aesthetic judgment is aiming at and which concepts might be evoked in the creation of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic judgments are not only operators of epistemology, but are culturally produced.

In our view, this means contesting how aesthetic judgment operates in contemporary terms and what role it might play in our interaction with our surroundings. In addition, this means questioning the role of aesthetic experiences in contemporary culture of pervasive design and contesting the aesthetic categories as a framework for the kind of conceptual constructions taking place in aesthetic judgment.

Aesthetic categories

In the tradition from Kant, and, further back, to the British Empiricists of the eighteenth century, it has been pointed out that *beauty* is a central category for aesthetic experiences. Beauty also plays a central role for Forsey, which is natural due to the Kantian perspective in her approach. Beauty is central to aesthetic experiences, but, as suggested by Gernot Böhme, may also have changed its character according to new 'technical conditions,' which have enabled new 'perceptual pleasure' as well as a new 'generation of practically unlimited aesthetic effects' (Böhme 2010, 29). So, for Böhme, beauty can exist everywhere as a 'quality of impression,' which could have the effect of 'intensifying our existence' (30). In Böhme's analysis, beauty as a notion of symmetry and harmony may be antiquated, but it is still relevant as a category produced by contemporary culture in advertising and design; that is, due to the cultural process of aestheticization (Featherstone) and the mechanisms of aesthetic capitalism.

However, the dominance of beauty as a central aesthetic category has been contested, especially in the light of developments in art and culture. In his seminal work *Ästhetische Theorie*, the critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno severely criticizes beauty to be deceptive of the real conditions of modern society (Adorno 1970). Recently, cultural theorist Sianne Ngai

stated in her book *Our Aesthetic Categories* that 'aesthetic experience has been transformed by the hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism,' whereby new aesthetic categories have developed (Ngai 2012, 1). In Ngai's analysis, the major aesthetic categories of the late eighteenth century, such as beauty and the sublime, are in part replaced with the new, minor and more 'trivial' categories of the *cute*, the *zany* and the *interesting*. She actually does away with beauty, which she regards as bound to the aesthetic discussions of the 18th and nineteenth century, whereas the sublime, also a category deriving from Kant and the British Empiricists, might still be relevant in her perspective.

Ngai has a principal point in questioning specific categories. However, we can contest her specific choice of categories. They appear heuristic when attached to her discussion of contemporary art. Furthermore, we can state that tradition is full of proposals of different aesthetic categories. In tradition, aesthetic experience can be articulated in accordance with categories such as 'beauty,' the 'sublime,' the 'comic' or the 'uncanny' (Schweppenhäuser 2007). As an example, Jean Paul's 1804 work, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, explores many different kinds of aesthetic expressions. Also, the sheer opposite of beauty is investigated in Karl Rosenkranz' 1853 work, *Ästhetik des Häßlichen*, with an interest in all possible expressions of the ugly, the unformed and the deformed (Rosenkranz 2015).⁶

Aesthetic categories function as ways of articulating what is regarded as aesthetic; that is, how 'our way of relating to the [aesthetic] idea [Vorstellung] of an object comes to expression' (Gottschlich 2017, 27). Our point is that *the category in question frames what is in focus in the aesthetic experience and, furthermore, which kind of conceptual constructions might be at stake*. Hence, the category can influence how the aesthetic judgment operates in its linking of concepts and sensual meaning. Also, when aesthetics no longer deal with a specific domain of objects, for example 'art,' but with experiences in general, as propagated in relation to 'everyday aesthetics' (Oldemeyer 2008; Saito 2010; Leddy 2012), we can openly reflect upon the aesthetic categories as entries to aesthetic experiences. As the aesthetic categories change, so do the experiences they give access to; vice versa, we can ask whether there still exists an aesthetic experience per se, or an essence of aesthetic experience if the categories leading to it might prove to be historically contingent.

Design: New Objects and New Categories

Taking design as a starting point for reflecting contemporary aesthetic experiences, traditional aesthetic categories can be challenged. In their formal expression, design objects may appear as objects for visual appreciation and contemplation in a traditional sense, but they are mostly objects of function and use meant for 'material interaction' (Dant 2008). Whether in formal expression or through material interaction, design objects relate to 'cultural frames,' which enable meaning attribution to design objects (Folkmann and Jensen 2015). Furthermore, as Forsey precisely points out, design objects can be seen as 'functional, immanent, mass-produced and mute' (Forsey 2013, 68). They do not necessarily present themselves to us as objects of aesthetic appreciation and judgment. Instead, they may be *culturally produced* as such objects in the age of aesthetic capitalism with its focus on stage value.

Also, design objects may relate to different kinds of aesthetic categories; that is, ways of being appreciated aesthetically, that at the same time are evoked or produced as a part of the mediated communication that often surrounds the design object. We can state, in the

words of philosopher Jakob Steinbrenner, that design can be defined aesthetically by being a part of an 'aesthetic system of signs' (Steinbrenner 2010, 16), but also point to the historical relativity of these sign systems (as Forsey also does), as well as to their status as being produced in a cultural context.

Contemporary design represents a transformed object culture, which calls for new aesthetic categories to frame new kinds of aesthetic experiences. We will illustrate this with the example of a pair of headphones, a seemingly simple product.

Formal Expression

The TMA-2 headphones were first marketed in 2010 as model TMA-1 and modified and relaunched in 2015 as model TMA-2. The headphones are designed by the Danish design collaboration KiBiSi and marketed by the Danish company AiAiAi, which primarily bases its business on this product. The headphones have a simplified and monochrome expression by consisting of a few elements in (almost) the same black color (Figure 2). Furthermore, they are designed based on a modular system design principle; that is, different headbands, speaker units, earpads and cables can be combined and configured in multiple ways (Figure 3).

As an object of function and use, we may question how the appearance of the pair of headphones reflects its function and communicates this to the user. In Forsey's words, 'while we can aesthetically appreciate the function of an object, we can also appreciate the *way* it fulfills that function by considering its style' (Forsey 2013, 166; her italics). To support this approach to the aesthetics of function, philosopher Jakob Steinbrenner states that design objects have to be evaluated aesthetically due to their 'practical function and not alone their outer appearance' (Steinbrenner 2010, 19). Furthermore, we can refer to this as *aesthetic*



Figure 2. TMA-2 headphones.

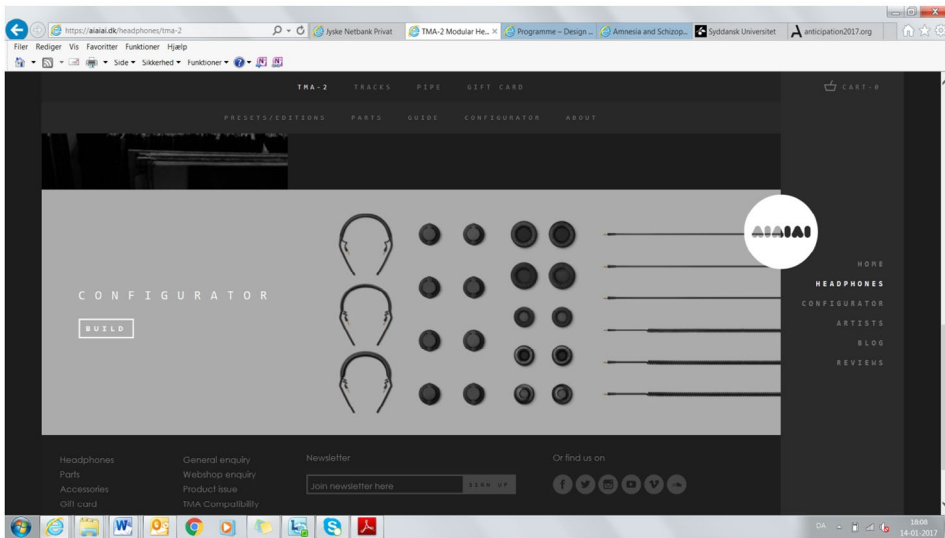


Figure 3. Configurator function on the AiAiAi webpage.

coding, as a way to describe the relationship between physical manifestation and meaning content as the idea or 'concept' of the object; that is, how the specific 'meaning content [can] be physically manifested and reflected in a variety of ways' (Folkmann 2013, 53).

So how are the TMA-2 headphones aesthetically coded in the specific way they fulfill or relate to their function? In the formal principles, they are carried by a reduction to core geometrical shapes, e.g. in the circular earpads, which seem to have priority, instead of a regard to ergonomics. On the one hand, the construction principles are visible; on the other, the object appears to have a seamless unity through its use of color, as well as the texture of the different materials, which are made scabrous through modulation. The TMA-2 are designed to appear simplistic, with unity via accentuation of the few, distinct parts used in their construction. In their construction and formal appearance, the TMA-2 aim to be perceived according to a convention of *formal minimalism*, which may seem to be an inherent quality of the object, but in the end is culturally and historically produced as a mode of developing and appreciating design. On this point, the aesthetic qualities of the headphones are not to be found in external, superficial qualities such as ornamentation (as there are none).

On a concrete level, the mediation of the headphones on the www.aiiai.dk webpage supports the minimalist gaze on the design. Graphically, the webpage is monochrome, simple and modular, in the same way as the headphones. On the formal level, the TMA-2 are aesthetically coded as a minimalist object, where the function may seem secondary to the formal expression. We can detect the function, which is also reflected in technical specifications on the webpage, but the TMA-2 are primarily staged to appear visually. They appeal to be aesthetically appreciated within a category of neo-modernist minimalism of simple and clear-cut appearance and obvious function.

Regarding the outer appearance and formal qualities, there may be several aesthetic categories in play; one, in opposition to neo-modernist minimalism, can be called *bling aesthetics*, with a focus on an abundance of superficial and even clearly fake elements in order to create a massive expression of the surface. These categories have in common that

they have to be learned within a cultural context: Modernism taught us to see and appreciate simplicity and reduced forms, and pop culture taught us to appreciate overwhelming expressions, much in line with the category of the grotesque in the nineteenth century.

Conceptual Meaning Content

Next, in their appearance, the headphones may themselves have a graphic effect, or, at least, be staged to have such an effect in visual mediations. The graphic effect supports the gaze on the minimalist form, but at the same time creates an affinity with the generic symbol or pictogram of professional earmuffs. Hereby, an association is established with *tools* and professional use of the TMA-2, which in part is confirmed by communication of the headphones as being aimed towards professional use by, e.g., D.J.s. In this way, the concept of 'headphones as a tool' is reinterpreted; instead of referring to blue-collar use, the TMA-2 find their target group among young urban creatives. In the association as a tool, the TMA-2 appeal to be appreciated not only for their formal qualities, but also for their performance and their conceptual value as a 'tool.' Or rather, the formal qualities evoke an impression of performance, while at the same time referring to headphones/earmuffs as a typology of objects.

In this way, the TMA-2 is aesthetically coded to have a strong focus on formal appearance, which reflects the function both as a professional tool and in relation to the specific product type. In general, all design objects also always carry with them a relationship to their product type or category, but they do not often reflect this conceptually. But what is specific for the TMA-2 (and affiliated 'conceptual' design) is their more direct reflection of themselves not only as a product, but also as a product type at the same time. This kind of conceptual self-reflexivity, where the object reflects its own code, has been labeled 'aesthetic function' within the context of formalism and linguistics in the 1930s (Mukarovsky 1979). On this point, the TMA-2 call for an appreciation within a 'conceptual-hermeneutical' framework of aesthetics, with a focus on the relationship of manifestation and concepts in the object and, subsequently, on how the objects might present themselves as coded objects to our understanding (Folkmann 2013). The category for this kind of appreciation may be called *interesting* or *modern-reflective*, in the sense that the design objects open for a reflection of their meaning potentials.

Of course, a product like this is not without context. In its operation, it is part of an object system (Krippendorff 1995), and in its aesthetic coding, it is a part of a system of similar objects. The TMA-2 have been displayed in Apple shops together with Apple products, which not only confirms their mutual submission to the same neo-minimalist category, but also demonstrates how the cultural-contextual setting may coconstruct the categories the objects are seen through: By being positioned together with Apple products, the TMA-2 are not only neo-minimalist per se, but are being constructed and staged as such, and this staging and construction of aesthetic categories contribute to our ability to have an aesthetic experience of them.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have posed the question of what characterizes contemporary aesthetic experiences in an age where more and more products are designed to appeal to consumer appreciation. Part of the answer comes through acknowledging the role of *cultural context*, e.g. in its effect on aesthetic capitalism and media culture, as most objects are framed and

staged in multiple ways. Also, the new kinds of *designed objects* that surround us may affect how we experience aesthetically. Therefore, design is, more than ever, a central case for aesthetic theory and aesthetic evaluation.

In relating back to Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment (and Forsey's adaptation of it) and its operation of relating sensual matter and defining concept, we have looked at the specificities of objects through a design example and some of the categories framing the conceptual constructions engaged in contemporary aesthetic experiences. We have not given a systematic account of contemporary aesthetic categories. This could be a project for further exploration.

Notes

1. Not to be confused with the more recent movement of 'Everyday Aesthetics.' This movement roughly aims to expand the field of the aesthetic from being limited to art to everyday appearances (e.g. Saito 2010; Leddy 2012), whereas Featherstone aims to understand the cultural logic of producing aesthetic perceptions through, e.g., the rise of commercials in Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century.
2. Even though, as clearly pointed out by Lehmann, Kant does not explicitly talk about 'ästhetische Erfahrung' (Lehmann 2016, 18).
3. In this way, Forsey's book can be read as an aesthetic theory on design, as well as a plea for the relevance of Kant's third critique.
4. In relation to design, psychologically oriented approaches have a tendency to focus on pleasure as the basic element of aesthetics. For this, see, e.g., Project UMA at the University of Delft, Holland (UMA 2017).
5. Forsey states (and celebrates, rightly) Kant's position: 'Kant's account is [...] unique in its attempt to make aesthetic judgments objective and necessary without reverting to an ontology of beautiful objects; to locate that objectivity within the faculty of judgment is a philosophical coup that has not been repeated or superseded' (Forsey 2013, 134).
6. Rosenkranz is a dialectical thinker in the tradition of G.W.F. Hegel (and a student of his) as he is interested in the ugly as a reversal of beauty. In accordance with his time, he states that beauty is absolute, whereas *das Häßliche*, the ugly and nasty, is relative to beauty.

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Hans-Christian Jensen is an associate professor of design theory, design culture and design history at the University of Southern Denmark, Department of Design and Communication. His publications include a coedited volume on the cultural criticism of Poul Henningsen, *Tradition og modernisme* (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2008), as well as book chapters and journal articles on design culture, design theory and Danish design.

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