POETIC FEATURES
BEYOND
FUNCTIONS
CONTENTS

LANGUAGE 7-8
FUNCTION 9-11
EMOTION 12-13
THE EXISTING PRODUCTS 14-17
ABOUT MY WORK 18-37
“Everything you can imagine is real.”

—Pablo Picasso
Languages are the media of human communication. Different geographical and cultural backgrounds bred the diversity of language and context. People invented words—the written language after the appearance of language. Written words helps us to record various informations and to make the communication more extensive and can be passed on from generation to generation.

The technique of word expression is also full of diversity. By using words to describe the size, weight, material, color and other features of an object, we can match the facts of this object with the impression it made on our minds. Just as when we are reading a legal provision or product specification, actually the words are connected to the correspondent facts of specified aspects through a direct and precise way of narration. Those word expressions used in description of an object are like scissors or pencils, is a kind of tool we use for a purpose, so it’s understandable that “easy to use” should be the essential measure of its expressional value.
On the other hand, we can use words to write abstract things like drama, poetry or scripture. In the world of poetry, the “scissor” can become a “dancer”, the “pencil” can become a “sword” in the author’s hand. Words are no longer objective descriptions to things, but are given senses of meanings and feelings which can provide richer imaginations to readers. And as long as the words struck a chord with readers, the subjectivity of the object- the readers had been stimulated. Then the “pencil” wouldn’t only be a tool, but a comrade-in-arms.

We can make the communication both reliable and vivid through the words combining reason and sensibility. As I consider designing is a kind of language, so it’s a similar situation when referred to designing. Design language is the media of communication to product users. Starting from the product function level, if the physical features of the product such as size, material, color and so on are clearly served to its functions, then the users can easily understand the use method of the product. The goal of “Easy to use” and “Good to use” are fulfilled on this level.

The functional rationality can be an important factor, but it is certainly not the only factor. I believe that the language of design should have the ability to show the sensitive side of the product, to make the connotation of product richer and more touching. When people use a product, they will feel it and fiddle with it. And I hope they can appreciate it and understand it.
As Dieter Rams mentioned in his Ten principles of Good Design, he considered useful, easy to understand, honest, durable, and unobtrusive the key features of a good design. These five features to my understanding are emphasizing on the significance of product’s functions. In one of his book called Less But Better, there’s a sentence goes “Tool stores have a magical attraction for me. Everything here fascinates me.” It would be no exaggeration to say that, for Rams, objects existed to be used. To Rams, it is only obvious that function should be the number one priority in product design. To help us to understand a product means to clarify the structure and function of the product, and unless a product is durable, it would be a waste of our planet’s limited resources. In the ten principles, Rams also present an item for aesthetic. The definition of aesthetic is not regarding beauty or decoration. He used the word “well-executed” to explain what can be beautiful.

Ten principles of Good design by Dieter Rams

1. Good design is innovative.
   — The possibilities for innovation are not, by any means, exhausted. Technological development is always offering new opportunities for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in tandem with innovative technology, and can never be an end in itself.

2. Good design makes a product useful.
   — A product is bought to be used. It has to satisfy not only functional, but also psychological and aesthetic criteria. Good design emphasizes the usefulness of a product whilst disregarding anything that could detract from it.

3. Good design is aesthetic.
   — The aesthetic quality of a product is integral to its usefulness because products are used every day and have an effect on people and their well-being. Only well-executed objects can be beautiful.

4. Good design helps to understand a product.
   — It clarifies the product’s structure. Better still, it can make the product clearly express its function by making use of the user’s intuition. At best, it is self-explanatory.

5. Good design is unobtrusive.
   — Products fulfilling a purpose are like tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained, to leave room for the user’s self-expression.

6. Good design is honest.
   — It does not make a product more innovative, powerful or valuable than it really is. It does not attempt to manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept.

7. Good design is durable.
   — It avoids being fashionable and therefore never appears antiquated. Unlike fashionable design, it lasts many years – even in today’s throwaway society.

8. Good design is consequent to the last detail.
   — Nothing must be arbitrary or left to chance. Care and accuracy in the design process show respect towards the consumer.

9. Good design is concerned with environment.
   — Design makes an important contribution to the preservation of the environment. It conserves resources and minimises physical and visual pollution throughout the lifecycle of the product.

10. Good design is as little design as possible.
    — Less, but better – because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials. Back to purity, back to simplicity.

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1 H.C. Dieter Rams (born 20 May 1932 in Wiesbaden, Hesse) is a German industrial designer and retired academic closely associated with the consumer products company Braun and the Functionalist school of industrial design.
That explanation remind me that Louis Henry Sullivan (an American architect who has been called the “father of skyscrapers” and “father of modernism”). said “It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human, and all things super-human, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.”¹ In the mid-1930s, This statement started that the Functionalism began to be discussed as an aesthetic approach rather than a matter of design integrity.

Function in my works is like the foundation of a building. The foundation is created through accurate calculation and a mathematical model to consider the rationality of a structure. Any existing forms born for functionality that will be easier to understand and more acceptable that the forms exist for itself. That is why functionality has the power to bring rationality and emotion together.

孔德之容，惟道是从。
道之为物，惟恍惟惚。
惚兮恍兮，其中有象；
恍兮惚兮，其中有物；
窈兮冥兮，其中有精，其精甚真，其中有信，自今及古，其名不去，以曰众甫。
吾何以知众甫之状哉？以此。

Harmony is only in following the Way.
The Way is without form or quality, But expresses all forms and qualities;
The Way is hidden and implicate, But expresses all of nature;
The Way is unchanging, But expresses all motion.
Beneath sensation and memory. The Way is the source of all the world.
How can I understand the source of the world?
By accepting. ¹
Poetry uses forms and conventions to suggest different interpretation to words or to evoke emotive responses. Even if the poet just stands behind the poem to express them emotion. The responses generate a relationship between the poem and reader, and the connection is unique for each single reader. At the best, design - writing, art, music, architecture, or cooking, for example - contains within is some kind of elusive poetry. This poetry is only felt. Its radiance is palpable and yet to transpose it beyond the realm of feeling is to make it entirely ungraspable. It resonates at a different frequency within each of us. This could be part of its beauty. It remains us we are not all the same.

Design is a process in which the poetry that is injected into the making process engage the emotions of the person using the product. The personality of the product will be involuntary pouring emotion between individuals and objects which have an emotional connection, that product is not just a product.
Our imagination is hungry. That why we see an organic form. A form so powerful it shapes our perception of the world. In it, we see the whole cascade of Finnish nature-lakes, trees, archipelagos. Transforming, nourishing our imagination. A delicate shape that does not push us. It moves us. A shape that moves, Alvar Aalto called his design “Eskimo Woman’s Leather Breeches.” Whether he modeled his design after them remains a mystery.

A Dutch Design, Aldo Bakker, designed this water bottle which to me has a great impact. When thinking about a jug, we expect it to have certain qualities: it should be able to hold and protect its content, it should be able to pour out whatever is inside, and it should be refillable. The jug is a thing of containing and pouring. Receiving and giving; it unites two opposites at once. By playing with the container, the Spout and the handle in his designs, Bakker questions the prototypical characteristics of the jug as an object that pours. The results in pouring vessels that are often unrecognizable as such at first sight.
As they may only allude to the action of pouring, each of his pouring vessels is an innovative container representing a sensory experience about the way in which its content, liquid, behaves. By focusing on the underlying logic of pouring, Bakker's jugs are the embodiments of an act. The way it's most appealing to me is its way of using it. As you can see in the picture 1, the shape of the bottle led you to hold it with your two hands. The process of this seemingly irregular shape, in fact, the use of the user guide has played an important role. Hands are holding up that the action itself is respectable, whether it is for your guests, or for the water itself is virtually embodies a sign of respect. This little design point, perhaps the designer himself did not deliberately to emphasize, but from the sociological perspective, it brings innovation and change behind a deeper meaning.
Another example is the salt cellar that also design be Aldo Bakker. I like that: you pick it up, tip it forward and tap it to shake out the salt, which is slowed down by the small bump in the bowl. The edges of the bowl are turned inwards at the front, stopping the salt from spilling out, while the sides have gentle curves, enabling the salt to be shaken from there. The purpose of this change is not for changing the way that we are used to doing things. There are further influences in terms of our living condition. The design of salt cellar shifts the user experience and guides people’s behavior to be gentle and slower to enjoy every moment even for the minimum details in our life.

1 Aldo Bakker  NAi010 Publishers, Mid edition (August 23, 2016) P 89
Tapio Wirkkala rose to world fame in the early 1950s following the breakthrough of Finnish industrial design at the triennial fairs of 1951 and 1954 in Milan. He is best known as a glass designer although his artistry ranged from postage stamps to a fell-sized landscape memorial, and from a tumbler to a futuristic cityscape. Wirkkala’s themes often derived from nature: from leaves, from the swirls of seashells, from the shapes of birds or fish, or more distant observations such as ice formations or the movements of water. Usually, his primal emotion is so deeply ingrained in the object created that its origin can no longer be identified or analyzed. He also sought inspiration from his travels abroad and early Renaissance act.¹ He combined art and craft in the serial manufacture when artistic form met anonymous industrial production methods. He bonded Finnish rural simplicity to universal elegance, sensitivity, and discernment. He wedded light-hearted experimentation to a sense of high seriousness. His objects feature both a sculptural theme and a scientifically researched functionalism.

¹ TAPIO WIRKKALA: APPLYING THE FINNISH APPROACH TO DESIGN Web
ABOUT MY WORK

Water Mirror
We need mirrors to organize our appearance, and we need self-visual privacy too. We probably do not want to look at our reflection all the time. The idea, a mirror with a cover, appeared in my mind. Why not design a mirror when you try to hide from it that it presented in another posture.

A pool of calm water was to be seen as a reflection by the ancients. Even today, when we walk into nature, into the forest and stand beside a lake behind a mountain. We clearly see the reflection of the environment on the lake. The water surface can be as calm as a mirror attracts us to take a look for ourselves. When the fresh wind generates the light ripples, all reflections in the water become illusory and fuzzy. The beautiful ripples mist the image, and it gives us a visual sense of an increasing layer of mystery. The quickly changing landscape is turning out to be a pleasant memory in our mind, and it is the marriage between clear and vague that we need for images. Dynamic and static changes are awakening our subtleties with nature. The function of the mirror requires the form of it to be there. Correspondingly, there is an emotional attachment beyond the function. The emotional appeal needs to be responded by our imagination. After that, the connection between the mirror and its audience is generated.
Walking along a clear lake
The wind is gentle and trees are swaying
Rain drops begin to fall from the gray sky
Storm clouds have started to form

I can hear thunder filling the air
And lightning trying to hide behind the clouds
Fog is spreading all around the sky
Making the clear scene hard to see through

As rain falls from the thick rain clouds
I can see ripples expand throughout the water
With each drop of water that hit the surface
I gaze into the water and try to see what’s looking at me

—Sarah Pesta
This serving Spoon for risotto, designed by Inga Sempé, was designed for a competition organised with the magazine “Domus” to celebrate the anniversary of the “Cucchiaio d’Argento” (in English “Silver Spoon”) - the historic recipe book which, with its 3 million copies sold in Italy and world-wide, and its 12,000 recipes, has been the star of Italian kitchen for the past 50 years.
Spoon chair

Sit is the very usual pose of human, you can see people sitting everywhere, in the office or dining, or talking to friends. A chair provides a better feeling of sitting is a great invention to improve life itself. To me, chair is like a container, a thing to hold our body, like spoon holding soup. The curves of our body are the result of organic formation, different angle will create different curves. Despite of its seemingly irregular forms, the inner organic mechanical principle is the key. How to make a chair to perfectly support our body is all about the best designed supporting points and the comfort it brings. This is the focus of my design.

Like all other tools and things, chair is designed to meet the needs of our body. It should be made like a extension of our body. All the forms and structures of the design are seeking the purpose of function and comfort of using it in the end. In another word, I didn’t design the form and the shape, I focused on the demand of the function, and then the understanding of demand created my design into its final form.
Parts of spoon chair has been cut out by CNC during the design process.
The design of Spoon chair is the exploration of the possibility of combination of modern production technology and traditional handmaking woodcraft.

The overall design language is created from the point of function, and in the premise of “form follows the function”, the product design removes all unnecessary elements. This chair has only three legs to support it, the overall weight is reduced, while by applying CNC carving technology to make its perfect tenon-mortise joints, the whole structure and the durability of the chair are enhanced.

The back and the seat surface of this solid wood chair adopt the organic form of curves which can better support the user’s body to provide optimum sitting comfort to users. At the joint of the chair leg and chair back, the design mimics the natural growth of trees, applying natural curves to generate a hanging hook for users to hang their scarfs, coats and handbags conveniently without sacrificing the comfortness of the chair.

The most unique feature of this chair is reflected in the fluidic sculpture like transitional connections of all parts, in the structure that of both reliability and aesthetic feeling, and in the beauty of those soft curves of the edge.
Lotus side table

“Lotus, the Virtue Lady in followers. Hollow as inside is, upright is the outside, With no creeper and branch served. Wafting its fragrance far and wide, It stands elegant and spotless, Only far in the distance to be observed, Yet not by close playing to be profaned.” These are the well-knows lines from poem “Ode to Louts” written by Zhou Dunyi, the great master of literature in Song Dynasty. Beside the descriptions of the shape and beauty of Lotus, he also wrote the following lines to conclude the virtue and spirit of Lotus - “And yet, on the lotus my crave showers, Which out of muck and mud grows unblemished, And out of clear waters shows pure and stainless.” His words are as beautiful as Lotus, shows the love for the beauty of the flower itself and the virtue of it as well.

I have this profound feeling for lotus for quite a long time, the most fascinating scene of lotus in my mind is a pond all covered with the leaves of lotus, and among which, there highly and elegantly outstands the lotus buds and bloomed flowers. They are waving gently, with crystal rain drops on their leaves. Every piece of lotus leave is a bowl containing the pearls. While underwater, it’s a completely different world. The branches are attached to their roots, and grow deep into the mud, and all the branches tangled into each other. These two very different scene is divided by the water surface, so departed in the vision while still connected to each other.
The feelings urges me to create something as beauty as they demonstrated to me. Lotus side table is inspired then. I use hard maple and walnut as the material for the table, applying their color to represent the flower and root of lotus. Through the strong contrast of color, I want to show the purity of the flower. The hardness of hard maple can enhance the overall structure of the table. The main body of the side table is made of three round table tops in different sizes, and composed in different heights. The design is not only focused on external shape but also fits for different usage occasions. These three table tops are organically connected to each other. The bottom table top is the largest to represent the water surface, thus divide the design into two parts – the up world and the under world.
The sun will rise
and set regardless.
What we choose to do with the light while it’s here is up to us.
Journey wisely.

——Alex Elle
Shutter Lighting

The first reaction in my mind regarding light is the sunlight which we see it every day, and I believe that most of us like a sunny day so that we can be full of energy to deal with the tough period. However, the light from the sun will not be bright every day. We also have the raining day, snowing day and other terrible weather around us. Just imagine a scene like that we wake up after a full sleep, and draw aside the curtains hoping to see a bright sunlight shining onto your face but only find overcast sky outside. You may feel a little bit disappointed at that moment. If the same scene lasts for a week, how will your mood be? I will feel depressed because I had this kind of experience before and I know that the weather can greatly affect our mood.

With this thought in mind, I asked myself why can’t I design a lighting that looks like the sunlight shining through the venetian blinds. Whenever you crank up the “blinds”, you will get a “sunny day” in your mind no matter what the weather looks like outside. The lighting hangs on a wall. It can be rotated, and the way of operation is the same as the real blinds which are the quite ordinary thing around our life. The conversion of the same transaction mode between a lighting and blinds connect with your emotional memory. Additionally, where the position you put it on the wall that there is no window in your space, you will gain a virtual stretch space. The combination of lighting and blind is a new thing to cognize a new experience in our daily life. It will be a kind of surprise for user cause the redesign the form of this two elements which you knew it well.
As a designer I am trying to find words to adequately describe concepts, processes, materials, contexts, characteristics and characters. The words do not come easily. I can recount the whole making process and material make-up. I can place it into a historical and cultural context. I can list the functions and features. But when a design is intuitive and inevitable, words can only give some slight whiff of the idea. A design just exists. It exists by communing with our senses; it exists by being done; it exists by somehow winding its way into our hearts and minds.
POETIC FEATURES BEYOND FUNCTIONS

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