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Dissertation Proposal

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Introduction

In this dissertation proposal, there will be a discussion about three key words that will help to create a foundation for my dissertation research. These three key words are Function, Form and Existential Absurdism. This essay will be split into three sections to deconstruct about each key word and see how those words integrate with each other. The first section will introduce each key word with two contrasting definitions, this will give me the platform to discuss each key word and its differing connotations. This will then generate a discussion to show the complexity of the key words. The aim for this exploration is to examine the relationship between the three key words, present how the key words correlate with each other or how they can oppose each other entirely. The world could interpret as absurd; everything is chaos and to understand this chaos humans need some constructs like form and function to find structure and meaning within chaos. "Without order there is chaos, without structure there is instability, without discipline there is lack of personal growth". Irish Titan (2017) Whilst looking at the importance of form, we will evaluate the usefulness of aesthetics, classify what is purely functional, or find a combination of both.

Firstly, I will analyse the concept of Existential Absurdism, what gives life meaning? Is it god? Love? Family? Or even work? Finding a sense of meaning is something everybody wants and craves. The existentialist philosophers have a dialectic discussion as to what can give your life meaning or purpose. Both Plato and Aristotle believed that everything had an essence or a purpose. "The essence of a thing is that which is distinctive about it and makes it what it is". Buckingham, W. (2011

For example, the essence of a unicorn is that it is a horse with a single horn on its head. Unicorns do not exist therefore essence does not imply existence. Additionally, a knife could have a wooden handle or a metal handle it does not matter. , if the knife did not have the blade it would not be a knife anymore this is because if the knife did not have a blade it would not be a knife anymore. A blade is the essential property of the knife because it gives it the defining function.



Fig. 1: *Unicorn*



Fig. 2: *Knife*

Plato and Aristotle believed that our essence was given to us before we were even born, by God. This means that to be a good person that we must follow our essence, this gives us a purpose to live as we were born to be a certain thing. Despite this, in the 1800s key thinkers challenged this idea of existentialism. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed in the idea of Nihilism, the idea that life is meaningless. This led to the ideas created by philosopher John Paul Sartre who had different ideas on existentialism. Sartre said "Existence precedes essence" Paul, S (1946) this means that we are born with no meaning then it is up to us as individuals to determine who we are and what our purpose is. He believed that we did not have a predetermined path to follow. This was a turning point for philosophy because it meant that God did not have to exist for us to have a purpose. Contrary to this, there were Theistic philosophers who believed in existentialism, like Kierkegaard. They didn't believe in the teleological and refused the idea that God made the world with a purpose, therefore we all live in a world where our actions do not have a purpose or an importance. This idea is called absurdism. 'Tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' Shakespeare, W (1609) People need meaning but we live in a world without meaning. If you take away the idea of teleology then the world was not created for a reason, we don't exist for a reason. Therefore, if there is no reason for this world then there are no absolutes to live by, so there is no order, rules or justice. After World War Two where many people lost their faith in an ordered world because of the devastation caused by the Nazis. Sartre thought that having our own freedom with no order or rules to live by was daunting. He believed that since there were no guidelines for our actions then each of us must design our own moral code to live by. He went on to extrapolate "Man is condemned to be free;

because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does." Mittal T (2017) Sartre believed that there was no authority to look to because all of them were fake because they are just people with no answers too. This is where the idea of living authentically came from, he believed that we must all accept the full weight of our freedom in light of the absurd and that any meaning in life is only given if it is from you.



Fig. 3: *Ai Chair*

Phillippe Starck and Kartell have co-designed this chair using artificial intelligence called A.I the chair was designed using a prototype generative design software by auto desk. Autodesk says it's the world's first production chair created in collaboration between a human and artificial intelligence. Starck told Dessen working with the software was like having a "conversation between two humans" Jordahn, S (2019) as he had to find ways to teach the system what he wanted. Autodesk believes that collaborating with artificial intelligence will unscrew a designer's capacity for innovation and productivity.) Can we find meaning in design or is design just meaningless?

The second key word in my dissertation will be Form. Form can be described in several ways. "Form refers to objects that are three dimensional in nature. A form has: height, width and depth. We readily recognise the forms around us – from a

pencil to the form of the human body.” Visual Communication Design (2013). This essence of this quote is that anything with a three-dimensional structure is a form, this can be in nature or virtual technology. Despite this, form can also be described as “Form is one of the seven elements of art and connotes a three-dimensional object in space. A formal analysis of a work of art describes how the elements and principles of artwork together independent of their meaning and the feelings or thoughts they may evoke in the viewer.” Marder, L (2020). This takes the concept of form further and shows that form is not just a three-dimensional object, it is something that must entice and evoke emotions in the user to create a connection with it.

Conversely, form can be useful because it can create an experience and an emotional connection between person and design. “Art exists and has existed in every known human culture and consists of objects, performances, and experiences that are intentionally endowed by their makers with a high degree of aesthetic interest.” Sandford’s encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2018).

The pictures below are here to demonstrate a typical Dyson design which includes the pure functionality and user experience in the essence of his designs.



Fig. 4: *Dyson Pure Cool*



Fig. 5: *Dyson Hoover*

"Dyson's design philosophy takes both form and function into account".

PlasticsleMag (2014).

Dyson is an engineering company where its main concern is developing products that are more effective than ones that are already on the market. Dyson questions things that exist and work out ways to improve them. He believes that technology comes ahead of design and that his desire to create beautiful objects is not essential, guided by the idea of practicality not appearance.



Fig. 6: Juicy Salif.

With the opposing ideology, Designer Philippe Starck created the iconic design Juicy Salif, which is a lemon squeezer that is made of polished aluminium, 29 centimetres high and is completely useless. “Post-modern design captures our cultural moment's yearning for unique and inspiring objects, even if they are of little use. The French master pours it all into his legendarily inefficient lemon juice squeezer.” Jurado, M (2018). Proof of its non-functionality is that Italian firm Alessi produced a limited, gold-plated edition that would be irredeemably spoiled if anyone thought of squeezing lemon on it. Starck himself said his design wasn't meant to yield juice, but conversations. Juicy Salif has become an iconic piece of art in the word of contemporary design and is placed in New York's museum of modern art and is considered on the borders of high art. Phillipe Starck even admitted that “Everything I have designed is absolutely unnecessary” Leberecht, Tim (2008)

The pictures below show other designers that have embraced this philosophy.



Fig. 7: *The Unconformable Watering Can*



Fig. 8: *The Unconformable Rain Boots*



Fig. 9: *The Uncomfortable Cutlery*

The architect and 3D modeler Katerina Kamprani created a series of unusual items called 'The uncomfortable'. Where instead of being the usual product designer who creates sustainable and beautiful objects, she has created completely useless products. For each product she considered the function of each product and completely flipped it, so it does not fulfil its purpose. For example, she has redesigned kitchen utensils, such as forks and spoons, to be completely unusable as we are used to. She created aesthetically beautiful yet absurd objects.

The third key word in my dissertation will be Function. The definitions of function can be both specific and general, there is no clear definitions of function because function depends of the designer's intuition. "Function is the consideration of the

main objective for a piece of graphic work and how well a design is explored and executed to meet that end.” David, G (2018) This means that function is unique to a design and practice and there is no way to give it a single definition. However, some people describe function in a less personal and a more direct way “A function is a task or activity to be performed by people, equipment, hardware or software”. Hamann, R (1998).

Lots of products are designed with function as their most important goal. As technological advances begin to develop, the lines between product and function begin to blur. Often the balance between function and form is very difficult because, if a products main goal is to be purely functional it can lack appeal to consumers, emphasizing that function without aesthetics can be unappealing to consumers. People are often drawn to aesthetically pleasing products with form as its main goal, this is because the human psyche appreciates beauty. Where does the line lie between how functional a product needs to be and its aesthetic qualities?

For a product to be classical does it need to be aesthetically pleasing or can it purely just be functional? In the idea of classic design some products manage to remain up to date and timeless regardless of the creation date. Products can be considered as classic design if they have met the task that the product was made for. In other words, if the product purely meets its function.

The two images below are classical designs and they are iconic because they were purely made to be functional, yet they have a beauty that is very timeless.



Fig. 10: The Volkswagen (VW) Beetle



Fig. 11: First miniature motor car

In the beginning of the twentieth century, designers were mainly focused on the function of products rather than the form. Some of these designs are considered timeless. An example of this was an early mass product motor car, 'The Volkswagen (VW) Beetle, designed by Ferdinand Porsche in the 1930s. This car is now considered a classic and was mainly functional. The car was targeted at average people with a lower income and created many things that are now seem as a necessity today like the rear window. Furthermore, the first miniature motor car was designed by Alec Issigonis who designed the car to be functional, ergonomic and affordable to the lower class in the 1950s. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020)

The image below reiterates the argument of function over form.



Fig. 12: Anglepoise lamp

Practical function analyses the criteria related to the performance of a product, for example, the weight, dimensions and ease of use. These are quantifiable and as a result an objective evaluation can be carried out. The Anglepoise lamp design was designed by George Carwardine in 1947, that is an example of where practical function is of a primary concern over form.

In contrary to this, if a product is purely functional then it can be seen as a deterrent rather than an attraction. The idea of Psychological function is how a product can play on emotional reactions and attachments people have. It is how companies can attract their consumers because humans need to interact with objects.

The picture below shows the importance of form in objects being the same as the function.



Fig. 13: Knife

If form is taken away from the main function incorrectly then it can cause unwanted results. This can be shown in the example of a knife shown above, because of the materials and colour used in the knife it looks like a toy. The colour in the knife fails to express the dangerousness of the product, this allows for false decisions to be made about the materials in the product as the stainless steel looks more like plastic. This can be a danger to children and adults who use the product wrongly and eventually hurt themselves.

Moreover, medical products are designed with the function of doing their job alongside the ability of being easy to clean. However, the lack of form and aesthetics in medical products may be viewed as too clinical and therefore a deterrent for people. Health care is now being provided at home by caregivers or by patients themselves, Medical products used in home would have much more acceptance if they were more aesthetically pleasing and fitted into a home environment. People do not want to be reminded they are unwell or feel like they are living in a hospital.

Design could provide aesthetically pleasing medical equipment that could fit in with everyday life. When a person is carrying around a medical device with them in their everyday life, the aesthetics of the product is very important. Many people have negative feelings about medical products because it draws attention to them. If medical products were designed to understand people's needs, self-value and image then people would feel better about using them. People want to use products that they think are beautiful and the products may seem to function better because they are aesthetically pleasing.

Humans have an attractive bias and want things that are more attractive. Marketers know that when we make decisions that they are done mostly on emotions and we use logic to rationalize those decisions. Aesthetics can have an enormous influence on our perception of products, we may find something more effective due to their aesthetic value.

Steven P. Anderson speaks of the importance of aesthetics, drawing on an example in the book *Emotional Design*, he notes:

Researchers in Japan set up two ATMs, 'identical in function, the number of buttons, and how they worked.' The only difference was that one machine's buttons and screens were arranged more attractively than the other. In both Japan and Israel (where this study was repeated) researchers observed that subjects encountered fewer difficulties with the more attractive machine. The attractive machine actually worked better. Anderson, S (2009)

In conclusion, we have extrapolated the symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and functionality. Is design a way to challenge the absurd nature of

life? “his new vision of technology reminds me of the existential concept of embracing the absurd.” Ackermann, K (2018) Design and humanity are about to enter the third revolution embracing absurdity may be the answer to understand the future of design.

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