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Rhetoric in industrial design

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Abstract

Based on some of the current proposals interpreting users as the centre of creation in design (Norman, Jordan or Krippendorff), this article raises the question as to what the author defines as the conceptual possibilities and impossibilities ('ponderables' and 'imponderables') of industrial design. It explores possible interpretations between the rhetoric world of increasingly competitive and economy-oriented markets and the rhetorical artifices that can be used by the industrial designer in order to accomplish the functional and emotional requirements of products (transformed into a dream come true for the user). In this approach (and through the visitation of some rhetorical phenomena of consumerism underlying the current social, economical and behavioural context of developed countries) the author underlines the intention behind actions of marketing, design, management and mainly economy-oriented policies that guide those countries responsible for the cyclical creation, in the user, of self-identification with a new necessity: attaining a greater happiness through the consumption of a given product. Linked to this phenomenon, there is the framing of several possible balance strategies, for example: the satisfaction of needs of companies/markets and the careful and sensitive suppression or super-suppression of user-consumer needs.

Within this issue, and by resorting to the general notion of rhetoric in design and specifically to the notion of biomorphological rhetoric applied to design, emphasis is drawn to the importance nature may have to industrial design as an inspiring entity of project methodological praxes, which are both efficient from a commercial standpoint and from a functional-emotional standpoint for the user.

In short, considering the above mentioned scope of limitation of different contexts where the new rhetorical-semantic dimension of design is established, this article proposes that the functional-emotional humanization of solutions developed by designers are a result of the harmonization between the subjectivity inherent to professional ethical deontological values, considering the human-user being, and the intrinsic objectivity of strategic-profitable values supporting producing companies, considering the human-user being. This is because (in the author's perspective), today, more than in the past, both actions must always function as a whole.

1. Introduction

Rhetoric, from the time of Aristotle, has caught the attention of authors across different areas of knowledge. Within the scope of design, there are new conceptual and operative interpretations of the term's meaning, which (based on the diversified growth phenomena of conception, production, communication and consumption) grew strong roots in the *functional-emotional* dimension of the effects produced by the object on the user. The technological leap witnessed during the aftermath of World War II, along with the Marshall Plan, generated a sudden growth in global large-scale production which, among other consequences, caused a greater awareness in industry of the importance of design as an actor, capable of commercially contributing towards the affirmation of companies and respective brands. That same race for market advantage, based on technological and stylistic differentiation and often to the detriment of actual product quality in operative-functional and functional-semantic terms, has legitimized a critical renovation of the act of creating design. Within this new paradigm of material culture, due to both ethical and strategic commercial motivations, the users' human and emotional dimension is recovered against the traditional dimension, which interprets the human being as a mere consumer.

According to Donald Norman, technology is a tool that should be exploited as a means and not as an end: that is, it should serve the user as far as its adaptation goes in accomplishing a given function. Regardless of its complexity, it should be communicated in a socialized and emotionally positive manner, by the provision of an efficient interface, which could be understood easily and/or with a more emotionally humanized aesthetics (Norman 2004). Patrick Jordan suggests that after living in eras of commercial economy (of production, of services and of information) we now face the new paradigms of the age of dream economy, in which the biggest commandment of design

should be the deep understanding of the user, regarding his hopes, fears, dreams, lifestyle and aspirations. As support for this analysis, the author underlines the pertinence of the proposal made by Canadian anthropologist Lionel Tiger on the characterization of the 'four pleasures' that may be experienced by human beings: physio-pleasure, psycho-pleasure, socio-pleasure and ideo-pleasure (Jordan 2000). In turn, Klaus Krippendorff explores the interpretations of different semantic domains of design, according to their framework across different social, cultural, technologically and evolutionary contexts. Within this scope, and as an agreed statement of a currently growing priority, the author defends the idea that design should pursue the subjective and objective needs of the user as the single means to provide a more practical, optimized, comfortable, pleasurable and intelligent daily life. Within the perspective that design is closely related to the construction of social practices, symbols and preferences, Krippendorff proposes a broad interpretation of the concept of user (regarding work, leisure or idleness), as well as its critical and proactive integration within the systemic process of design conception. Similarly to Norman, technology, for this author, comes forward as a means of exploring functionality, but always, ultimately, to potentiate a sensitive and meaningful design (Krippendorff 2006).

Within industrial design, beyond the product's rhetorical dimension we have its emotional level (Norman's *Visceral Level*/Aristotle's *Pathos*), its significant and contemplative level (Norman's *Reflexive Level*/Aristotle's *Ethos*), and the construction of a functional rhetoric (Norman's *Behavioural Level*/Aristotle's *Logos*), with the generator of the sense of existence being a product in itself. Considering the latter, one can frame an ergonomic, safe and ecologic rhetoric of the product. To illuminate this we will introduce the 'reflexive-behavioural level', as described by this article's author, which defines the product's productive-technological and economically profitable characteristics, pragmatically translated into the rhetoric of price (a determining factor for the self-identification of potential users as a target audience). Within the theme of 'rhetoric in design', the current article will also approach one of the phenomena that has most strongly contributed towards the limitation of production lines for new industrial products: what is called 'functionality-organicity-ergonomics', which has its phenomenological origin within the interpretation of nature as the inspiration for projects centred on the user.

According to the assumption of applying possible methodologies capable of addressing all of the above-mentioned levels, it is quite pertinent to recall *La Société du Spectacle/The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1967), in which, at the end of 1960s, Debord fiercely criticizes the premise over which the consumption society is constructed. Thus, the following question surfaces: within a rhetorical panorama of increasingly more competitive and economy-oriented markets, which strategies can serve the industrial designer to accomplish, on a large scale, the requirements of a functional, emotional and significant efficiency in industrial design products; transforming them into a dream come true for the user?

2. Behind the rhetoric of user as recipient

According to the perspective of this article's author – as referred to and developed in her Ph.D., thesis – in order to obtain an answer to this question one must separate research and development of theoretical models of cause and effect in industrial design, and the practical evolution of industrial design within industries (Secca Ruivo 2008, p. 170). If indeed industrial design is a distant relative of art (one must not forget that the first industrial designers were called 'industrial artists'), it has, since its genesis, occupied, and desirably so, an area deeply marked by conceptual notions characteristic of the humanities (aesthetics and ethics, for instance). On the other hand, it was born and raised side by side with industry itself, which, from the beginning, was motivated by everything but human-sensitive concerns.

Considering that the function of an industrial designer is to conceive of industrial products for daily use by human beings, its practice was, from the start, interpreted by authors and critics with different backgrounds as being responsible for the mediation between industry's pragmatic and commercial vision (economic factor of prosperity) and the different needs of human beings encountering the product (functionally, emotionally, cognitively, etc.). In this sense, parallel to the practical performance of the industrial designer in industry – and to increase industrial production – several theories were developed, originating from multiple interpretative visions of the theme of industrial design and its consequences. Both methodologically and practically these theories are based on: analysis of the aesthetic evolution of industrial products; assessment of the changes in social and individual behaviour; evolution of market conceptions; applicative evolution of different technologies and materials; the discipline's didactic component; and the social, ethical and environmental consequences and responsibilities inherent to design, among many other factors.

It is quite common to find predictions of possible and/or likely collateral consequences. In the medium and long terms, these predictions result from interpretation of the assumptions in force in industrial design, which at any given time stem from new theoretical interpretations – interpretations that are aimed at preventing, adapting and downplaying such consequences. Sometimes industry itself equates such proposals with being caused by the affirmation of a given political will.

In the particular case of industrial production and due to associated factors – mainly of an economic nature – political will has mostly been motivated by the need to change a given path. A path, which in ignoring theoretical advice was in retrospect, shown to be inappropriate. This creates a space of time between the forecast of the benefits to be gained through implementing a given process (socially, culturally, economically and environmentally) and the effective application of processes; which has often proven to be the same space of time which exposes the proliferation of the damage caused to the user-individual, in general society, in the environment or in a country's economy.

Within this descriptive context, it is important to emphasize that by evoking political will (as if it was possible for technology to be neutral) as the main basis for the strategic alterations performed by companies – dictated by market and national laws – the author is not, in any way, stating that these strategic decisions are never dependent on the industrial designer's output.

Today, more than ever, the industrial designer may be an essential element in the struggle to raise awareness of a particular problem. The designer should, nevertheless, automatically present their proposals through a global and integrated vision of the company's problems and interests. That is, if they identify that the brand products fail in a particular aspect (operational, ergonomic, aesthetic, emotional, cognitive, environmental, etc.), they can and should develop solutions to solve the identified problem. But they would also have to develop the capacity for framing these solutions; taking into account the company's technological, organizational reality and identity, the competitive advantages (in the short, medium and long run) caused by investment in this proposal. On the other hand – and due to the successful interventions across time of so many sociologists, psychologists, engineers, marketers, designers, etc. – this task is made easier by the dissemination of the concept of 'quality', which identifies problems not only in the product itself, but also in the production process and the services rendered by the company. In short, it is important to bear in mind, in the spirit of competitiveness, that certain production and quality objectives are present which are aimed at increasing sales and at satisfying the consumer's hidden and explicit needs.

Generally speaking, quality (or lack of quality) indexes for products consumed are dictated according to the competitive strategies (or lack of strategies) outlined by production companies and not necessarily according to the consumer's actual needs. Better yet, the qualitative level of suppressed needs is already so great that in order for a company to ensure its survival – which is the same as saying in order for it to continue producing new products that are acceptable to the market – it is forced to continue to cyclically generate the illusion of new needs and dreams in the consumer. This has been one of the main functions of 'product research and development' departments, in which industrial design is crucially integrated.

Bearing this in mind, one should also add that a design proposal only makes the transition from project to industrial design when those ethically and professionally identified project requirements coincide with the needs dictated by the very structure to which they contribute. This is also true in relation to the production and sale of the greatest number of products with the largest profit margin possible. This leads to the question: to what extent can one really alleviate or stop the collateral consequences of our own production?

If one takes a broad view of the evolution of industrial design, it is possible to identify an obvious behaviour: every turning point of the discipline is closely linked to a time of crisis. According to the industrial perspective, economical-financial crises; according to the designers'

perspectives, cultural and social crises; and according to the planetary perspective, environmental crises (Secca Ruivo 2008: 174).

3. Rhetoric in design: the user as an interpreter

Design is matter transformed into function, interface, aesthetic, price and symbol. When the design has an industrial character, some collective symbolic values are added, which appeal to the consumption of a determined group of beings-in-the-world, according to the Heideggerian perspective. Consciously or unconsciously, and framed by imagery appropriated from diverse visual languages, personal ownership of a heterogeneous set of objects is perceived by consumers as being synonymous with possessing the power to determine the props of their world. Often underlying the desire to own the design piece, one finds a symbolic sense in the term 'design'.

Up until a few years ago, the word 'design' was commonly associated with the production of devices different from their peers, expensive and therefore difficult to access. In the 1980s and even more clearly during the 1990s, with the spread of design as a propaganda slogan used by producing companies from several industries, the word 'design' became a significant constituent of a number of products hitherto only vaguely commercially exploited as such. This phenomenon forced the word 'design' to enter into the house of generality of the beings-in-the-world within consumption societies. Through different media supports, increasingly more sophisticated and appealing images are associated with the term and even the product. The identification, made by the public, of the reputed design product is an apparently natural process, in which the understanding of the difference lies mainly within aesthetic and sensible attributes. The maxim 'the product speaks for itself', previously associated with the object's quality and reliability, acquires a new meaning. The new products, perceived by the public as design items, speak for themselves as messengers of an aesthetic and symbolic language that cyclically communicates new messages that entice us to own them. But behind the signs apprehended by the consumption culture societies, intentionally dictated by the meaningful objectives of the producing culture, the real meanings of design are hidden, quite different, in their genesis, from the underlying meanings in gadgets and kitsch objects. It is the objects that frequently cause some confusion. The use of the term 'design' by a growing number of companies, associated with the conceptual deception that design is a synonym of contemporaneous or beautiful (along with the subjectivity inherent in the interpretation of both concepts) caused both the trivialization of the word and, on too many situations, a disconnection from the real meaning. In parallel, this use also caused a growing number of companies to force its real implementation as a concept that cannot be dissociated with the quality factor and, as a consequence, of the sales/commercial factor. This phenomenon has contributed to the spread of various products in the market, equally accessible, carrying functional,

aesthetic, emotional and symbolic characteristics, organized in a balanced whole of performances. Brands such as Zara and Ikea were responsible for bringing the democratization of design to the people's body and homes, imprinting sophistication as an 'asset' accessible to almost everyone. But with these new products, regardless of their variety, the homogenization of tastes and the accession to fewer aged trends were substantially strengthened. The object of design has become a most ephemeral entity, maintaining the relationship between the being-in-the-world and the inherent lure of novelty in the matter transformed by humans.

As we move into the early twenty-first century, despite predictions of the greatest global economic crisis since World War II, children and young people in developed countries grow increasingly self-informed on aspects that distinguish brands and 'trendy products' from others products, which, by being the goal to own, are increasingly 'demanded' by children and teens. The awareness parents have about the influence of trends on the acceptance of an individual within a determined group (by communing with the exhibition of specific material symbols that act as an identifier) forces them, even when financially struggling, to fulfil, as far as possible, the children's material 'needs'. Pricy brand sneakers, state-of-the-art mobile phones, MP3 and MP3 players or even laptops and cars become luxury objects apparently democratized for younger people. And often, the word 'design' is associated with the criteria that determine the choice of such products: not for the meaning of inherent professional variables, but rather by the meaning given to their significance – economic power, sophistication, innovation, being trendy. As a paradox, the factor of quality, particularly regarding functionality or reliability, is not put into the equation by the user when considering whether or not to purchase the object; particularly since, and often surreptitiously, the buyer usually imagines the product's high price or commercial stature naturally embodies these attributes.

Many different expressions have been used, more or less satirically, to characterize the evolution of the behaviour of the new generations of beings-in-the-world. In Portugal and in the early 1990s, there was talk of a 'sleazy generation'; some years later, of a 'Coca-Cola generation' or '*aight* generation'; currently, the term used is 'It could be, couldn't it?' Any of these generations is the sum total of the way modern people experience their social phenomena. Any one of them is referenced by the fact of expressing interests and behaviours that have emerged from an amalgamation of discrete factors; factors which were unobserved at that immediate time but which form an accretion of behaviours that clash with existing social habits. These emergent generational codes were, and continue to be the driving force for development and progress. The adaptation of the world to these new codes is as decisive as the adaptation of new generations to already established codes. Today, by talking about the 'It could be, couldn't it?' generation, the reference involves a group of millions of young people (worldwide) whose behaviour is directly related to the above-mentioned factors. As if it was heredity, the growing speed with

which, over the last thirty years, new proxies replace products is one of the phenomena responsible for the behaviour of today's youngsters. But currently, the 'It could be, couldn't it?' generation also includes parents, friends, acquaintances and strangers. This generation is associated with slogan propaganda that promises, through consumption, to make every dream true and/or make easy credit available (forging prosperity for families). Similarly contributing to a vicious cycle, these same economy-orientated strategies of needs' management and generation are made legitimate by their own success, which resides in the consumer's craving to get closer, whenever possible, to artefacts capable of providing some degree of happiness (whether it is conquered during the individual's moment of self-identification with the image he sees in the mirror, or during the moment of social inter-identification of image expressing him as a communicant being within the world).

However, more important than evoking expressions such as 'It could be, couldn't it?' to metaphorically characterize a generation (whose satisfaction is more and more difficult to obtain thanks to a widely diversified excess of options) it is vital that we identify that this same generation is also currently studying tomorrow's marketing, production and design, supported by the information technology revolution. Closely linking these three areas is the word 'strategy', which, regardless of the teaching models in use, is behind the professional praxis of different areas and it seems to always objectively point in one direction: ensuring the product sale and economic prosperity of companies and countries. However, the strategic analysis of development models taught in universities, within the context of consumer goods' production and promotion, shows the consequential factors of the growth itself are rarely addressed, considering the emotional, social, anthropological, ecological and economic contexts of consumers (Secca Ruivo 2008: 295). And, in fact, the rhetorical myth of production-consumption as the driving force behind the wealth of a country can no longer be excluded from consideration of the economic and behavioural realities of current societies, as this is increasingly stated as one of main causes of populations' gradual impoverishment, financially, emotionally and symbolically.

4. The designer as an agent of 'Ponderable' and 'Imponderable' rhetoric models

The association and proliferation of the above-mentioned phenomena have unmistakably direct implications for the way praxis is conducted in industrial design. The increase in consumption associated with the rapid replacement of often fully functioning products requires, on the one hand, the increasing flexibility of production processes and, in addition, investments in appropriate conception infrastructure (design) framed in strict generation and/or trends-monitoring systems. Within this context, functional factors, such as operative performances, safety or ergonomics, are, alongside the product price, what this article calls 'design ponderables' ('behavioural level and reflexive-behavioural

level'), i.e., they correspond to the objective and measurable factors contributing to the product's qualitative and quantitative analysis. The factors considered design '*imponderables*' ('visceral level and reflexive level') include those that, while not jeopardizing '*ponderable factors*', are associated with aesthetics, emotions, symbols or the sensible and useful selection of materials. In other words, they include those attributes most readily perceived by the public and, as such, more prone to variations in taste, sensitivity and trends. Therefore, and despite developed strategies to quantify and qualify them, they are the subjective and often immeasurable factors of design (Secca Ruivo 2008: 299). The case of Renault Twingo comes to mind: first launched in 1993 and developed according to the opinions of numerous experts and consultants from different areas, including groups of potential users, it initially proved a huge commercial failure, regardless of the fact that it served as an inspiration for other conceptually similar models later released by competitors.

Despite the fact that the '*ponderable factors*' often offer a greater sense of security to companies and despite being, on the other hand, the factors that require a greater technological investment; the '*imponderable factors*' represent, in the vast majority of cases, the biggest opportunities for a product's commercial differentiation. In this context, and with the goal to minimize the imponderability rate of the product's success, its conception must be balanced by considering the existing research studies exploring; the emotional and cognitive (explored by Norman), the semantic (proposed by Krippendorff) and dream-inducing attributes (developed by Jordan). In particular because, in addition to the '*visceral level*' factor as a determinant of the product's first commercial impact, the integration of proposals designed to reduce the imponderable in the methodological praxis of design (either on the higher levels of education or the professionals' activities) can favourably contribute to the further humanization of both use and enjoyment of the product (during which the '*constructive level*' is allied to the '*visceral and reflexive levels*').

5. Nature as inspiration of biomorphological rhetoric

The construction process of artefacts has an ancient origin in the observation, reproduction and reinterpretation of natural visual and functional systems. This reality can be illustrated by numerous human creations of which one can emphasize, for instance: cave paintings (inspired by observing the physiognomy and behaviour of animals during hunting sprees), the chopper (inspired by the shape and cutting action of a sharp stone), fire (possible inspiration attributed to lightning), the wheel (inspiration associated with the dynamic behaviour of stones or berries), the boat (inspiration in the shape of leaves or floating logs), the airplane (inspiration in the aerodynamic structure and behaviour of birds during flights). But the compilation, study, characterization and systematization of knowledge applied to the research of nature as a model to create artificial systems, according to an innovation producing scientific technological trend, is a relatively recent process. The development

of biotechnical and biomorphic (Parra 2007) methodologies as a strategy to construct artefacts applicable to several areas (engineering and medicine, for instance) has, since the 1960s, been invested within industrial design. Within this context, one can highlight the proposals of bionic design (Papanek 1971), of bio-design (Colani 1978) and of symbiotic design (Parra 1995). With different conceptual and operative visions, these authors (the study cases for my Ph.D. thesis) focus their works on a common perspective: the 'artificialization' that occurs in a learning and an understanding process of what is biological as a fundamental structure of the material world. Through observing nature, and particularly its strategies, the three designers learn how to create/reinvent the proposed projects in which the artefact emerges as a second nature.

Within the specific scope of this article (despite recognizing the enormous interest in the future detailed exploration of the rhetorics inscribed within these three proposals), the core subject will be the effects produced by the rhetoric of the shapes of biological inspiration, e.g., bio-design. Among these three concepts, bio-design allows for a more immediate understanding of the effects that the organicity-ergonomics imprints on objects; with its effects being immediately perceived by the user and, therefore, becoming a contributing factor to the products' commercial success (*bio-rhetoric* in the public sphere).

In 1978, the first issue of Japanese magazine *Car Styling* was dedicated to the work of Luigi Colani precisely because he explicitly announced the grounding assumption behind bio-design:

Through my stereo-microscope, I often dive into nature's microcosmos. The close observation teaches me that, apart from crystals, nothing in the natural world admits the concept of a straight line. Thus, [...] we should, first of all, become fully aware of the rotundity of our planet. Everything, both in the microcosmos and in the macrocosmic plan, is made of curves which are of an intrinsically different nature from straight lines. The universe itself is built by curves. I can only obey to the rules and laws of nature.

(Colani 1978: 31)

Similarly to what takes place in bionic design and symbiotic design, in bio-design the shape already aspires to become function, considering that the entire structure of the created object is inspired by the formal structures and functional and behavioural systems of nature. But while in bionic design this principle is applied after considering the systems' structures and behaviour according to a functional and structural perspective, in symbiotic design rather than a formal perspective (objects, even if inspired in nature, do not mandatorily share their organic shapes) the shape-function tends to be born from the energetic symbiosis between theological and biological components (objects, particularly those inspired by nature's energetic efficiency strategies, may or may not acquire organic shapes). In bio-design the notion shape as function is



Figure 1: Colani Bresser Binoculars (1991), Luigi Colani – Copyright: Paulo Parra (Parra 2009: 150).

closely related to the notions of organicity in form, hydro- or aerodynamics and ergonomics. This means that in bio-design the organic shape becomes dissociated from the ergonomic and dynamic-behavioural function of objects. Thus and according to Colani, organic shape – in its structural and aesthetic side – and function tend to be a single unit: an unseverable and autonomous entity (Secca Ruivo 2008: 201). In short and according to Colani, organic shape as a function is a unit responsible for the object's approximation to nature and mankind, not only for its structural and behavioural dimension, but also (and strongly) for opposing the notion of hi-tech in its organic-morphological dimension (concept defined by the author in 1978 as human-tech, 'high-touch' or 'human-friendly').

Without going against his critical posture towards 'commercial logics', the German designer not only developed a series of award-winning projects produced and marketed by several corporations across the globe (in which the principles stated on his concepts could be found in full force as, for instance, through an expansion process of his work), but he also was an influence on the aesthetical conception of the market trends of electronic products throughout the 1980s and particularly the 1990s. For the spread of a new formal/functional bio-conception of the industrial product, the Golden Camera award (won in 1986 with a camera designed by Colani and Canon design team, T-90) was quite determinant. From then on, Colani's recognition was extended to different continents and across several sectors of industrial production. As a direct consequence of the dissemination of his work, the trend to accentuate the organicity of the shape of industrial products – making the functional-organic-ergonomic aspect visible as an apparently natural extension of the object – spread to numerous production sectors across the entire world.

By exploring, defending and materializing the concept of bio-design, Luigi Colani effectively contributed to gradually transforming industrial objects into more organic entities. He made this realm more aware of the laws and the formal rules of the natural world, which is the same as saying of the formal rules of men's natural organism ('human-friendly').

According to the vision of this article's author, the widely spread success of the application of the assumptions within this concept was amply triggered by the positive exploration of what Norman calls the 'visceral level' of the emotion/cognition produced by the object in the user: the individual's self-identification with shapes closer to the human body's organic nature and the consequent induction of the idea of a greater comfort.

As far as the behavioural level goes, according to a proper exploration of the concept by the design, the bio-design product will be operatively and ergonomically more efficient since both facts are equated as a unit.

The reflexive level, in bio-design, is demonstrated by the expansion of *biomorphological* products into the public domain: products more integrated and in tune with the rules and laws of the morphological construction of the natural world.



Figure 2: Walkhand (1989), Paulo Parra and José Viana – Mention of Honour by Sony Japan in the ‘Sony International Competition’; project prior to the proposal of symbiotic design – Copyright: Paulo Parra (Parra 2007: 266).

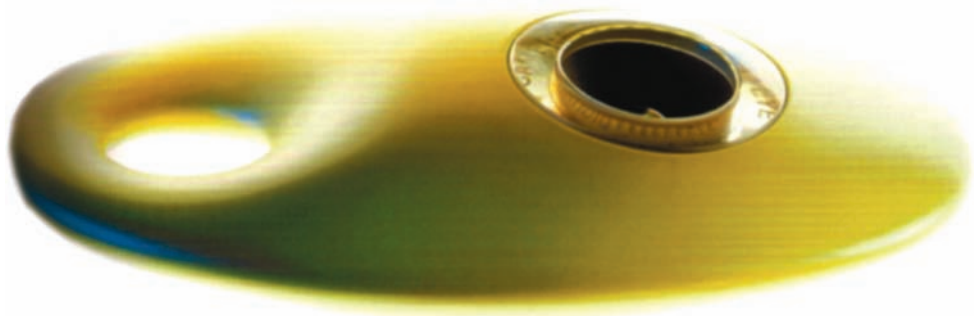


Figure 3: Prototype of digital camera in elastometer (1989–93), Ross Lovegrove – Copyright: Ross Lovegrove/Studio X, photo: John Ross (Fiell and Fiell 2002: 299).

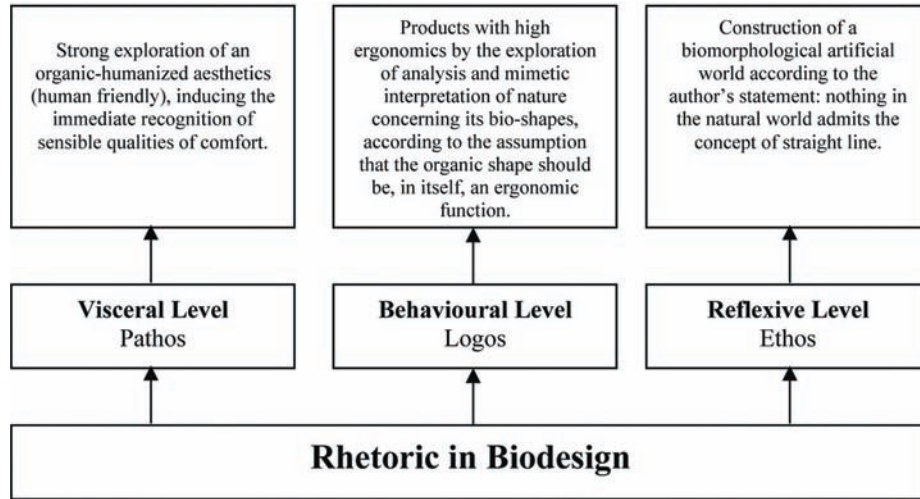


Figure 4: Rhetoric in bio-design – Copyright: Inês Secca Ruivo.

6. Conclusions

According to the author's perspective, the rhetorical-emotional factor of the industrial design product, formed as the result of a conception procession that places the user as a beginning and end of its construction, does not exist. What, in fact, exists is the possibility of constructing a common branch which, according to the methodological praxis experienced, reconciles available corporate goals, technologies, materials and market studies with the ultimate goal of guaranteeing sales that can be translated into sales for the company. In this global construct of the definition of strategic action hypotheses, the *ponderable* and *imponderable* factors of design are outlined in order to become a whole capable of bewitching the user, who recognizes some difference, and is likely to outperform competitors; whether on an immediate level (visceral), on a customer loyalty level by acknowledging the brand's helpful qualities (behavioural), on the self-identification with a given significant that it suggests or detains (reflexive), or on the equation of all these factors in the product/price ration (reflexive-behavioural). The facts are that the designer must continually gather up-to-date knowledge which allows him not only to objectively answer to a company's needs by applying complex methodologies which reconcile technological, organizational and human assumptions, but also to effectively seduce the consumer. On the other hand, according to an ethical-deontological perspective, they should also be able to pursue this knowledge in a sensitive and careful manner, uncovering the real needs of the human being-user.

Within this context, it seems important to underline that the aesthetical-emotional attributes of a given product are always closely dependent on the company's technological skills in materializing them. This means that, in order to be successful, the conception in industrial design has to be mandatorily focused on a balanced commitment between the needs and the capacities of the producing company, and careful and sensitive comprehension of the user-consumer's needs. Specifically because, apart from the human desires found in this type of creative strategy (defended throughout this article), this path may be and is in fact increasingly being objectively explored as a powerful commercial tool. But regardless of motivation, it is quite unquestionable that, within this new rhetorical-semantic dimension of design, the human-user being must recover their centrality.

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