



## **Experiencing Design “Pleasures”: Framework for Pleasurable Experiences On Designed Objects**

**Achmad Syarief**

Industrial Design Section, Faculty of Arts and Design  
Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB),  
Email: asyarief@fsrd.itb.ac.id

**Abstract.** This paper explores the importance of human perceptual experiences toward objects, an effort to understand how human (as users of object) experiencing pleasures when interacting with a designed object. Having the purpose to explore the theoretical structure of human and object interaction, the paper contextualizes the concept of pleasurable experience in product use by (1) understanding the conceptual traces of “pleasure in design” in the history of design thinking (e.g. modernism and post-modernism), (2) correlating the identified traces with research results from other related field (e.g. cognitive psychology) to clarify the conceptual mechanism of human pleasurable experience, and (3) synthesizing results to define the theoretical framework in assessing pleasurable experience when human interact with a designed object. Following the path of Patrick Jordan’s theory on the pleasure in human factors, the study indicates that there are four identified functions of pleasure in product use: pleasure of using, pleasure of interacting, pleasure of understanding, and pleasure of owning. Those dimensions represent the experiential aspect of arousal (on the continuum of temporal – perpetual) and interactivity (on the continuum of individual – group).

**Keywords:** *designed object; pleasurable experience; product use.*

### **1 Introduction**

For a long period of time, design is associated as merely the practice of creating and “beautifying” objects—focusing only on the importance of the visuals, and therefore limiting the complete experience of human senses as users of designed objects. Recent technological advancement coupled with “new” psychological understandings in the interaction of human with artifacts have brought us (read: designer in practice) to realize that human senses are so complete that expression of interaction and pleasure do not need to be limited only on the visuals. Most of popular sophisticated objects that are in the market today have already integrated the concept of “heightening” object-users interactions, which resulted not only to the appreciation of the physical element but also other elements as well. For example, the Apple I-Pod design entices our minds to appreciate its simple and beautiful shape (visual pleasure) yet it also entices

user's feeling to appreciate its simple and usable operational logic (psycho pleasure) that makes it look easier to operate. Therefore, I-pod becomes an instant hit the moment it reached the market, not only because the attractiveness of its appearance but also the uplifting pleasures of owning and interacting with it. Donald A Norman [1] points out that using the intertwined experience of our senses could enhance the pleasure of interacting with object. Yet until recently there are very limited studies and thoughtful analysis on the concept of (users') pleasures when they actually interact with objects, especially when it comes to embracing the sense and sensibility of using the product. To address the issue, this paper elaborated the concept of pleasure in product design by assessing the historical comparativeness of modernism and postmodernism thoughts, identifying how the thoughts brought our understandings toward the concept of pleasure, and using the gained knowledge to contextualize pleasurable experiences in product use.

## **2 In Searching for Pleasure through Visuals: From Modernism to Postmodernism**

For the greater part of 20th century, design generated its formula into the functionalism of mass and mechanized features of Modernism movement. The enthusiasm came to a peak of the "rejection of historical style and enhancement of purity" [2], which became a huge postulate in design movement. Function was placed as the priority feature in artifacts, which was meant to generate 'responsible' and 'universal' objects as oppose to the 'subjective' concept of object. Pleasure was universalized to achieve tolerable value in which regarded as being "simultaneous aesthetic quality." It was achieved by generating mass consciousness through "presume standard of physical function of artifacts." Modernism tended to see the pleasure of use through the fitness of function, which was merely laid in 'the intelligible' meaning of forms ----- Pleasurable Form will follow Responsible Function. Therefore, pleasure was objectified and mechanized into material aspect of product by limiting the emotional aspect of use. Gordon Russel, the Director of Design Council, argued that if "user (customer) demand something, which is well made of good and suitable material" and "does its job efficiently", it should "gives him/her pleasure" [2].

The formula was the only design "manifesto" where everyone seemed to embrace and not changed until some design experts began questioning the viability of Modernism. The bottom line of those 'denials' was based on the overriding assumption that object and image was not always had one 'meaning'. The consumers must have the capability of ascertaining quality and satisfying his or hers own needs accordingly. They rejected the idea of mass consciousness, which refer to Modernism, could be only useful or pleasurable to those who were able to witness it. Greenhalgh [3] noting that there were

contradictions within Modern movement in which "doubting the validity of the idea that design is a moral discourse". Greenhalgh opposed to the irony of universal benefit of emotional aspect of use that caused by similar 'function'. He rejects the idea of "empowering" a single style that could generate similar effect to various users in different sites. With the raise of semiotics and post-structuralism, the viability of "new concept" of pleasures in design emerges. Function is no longer being seen as the driven elements in defining pleasure. Instead, user urges to define what emotional and experiential benefit he/she likes to have for the definitive function. Mass consciousness, which formerly celebrating the 'power of function' (production), shifted to the 'contextual use' of object (consumption). Therefore, the existence of pleasure is celebrated through the growing role of varieties and pluralistic adaptations. Referring to Jean Baudrillard's idea of meaning as explained by Maurizio Vitta [4] in his article "The Meaning of Design", the world of design is becoming the repository of simulacra---empty signs, which allows users to define their own emotional benefit of design (self-expression). Accordingly, design should be well-developed and as neutral as possible, leaving room for gaining the emotional benefit to those who use it---Pleasurable Form will follow Meaningful Expression (Fun). However, since the pleasurable expression was achieved through differential experiences of users, there will be no valid criteria for judging 'appropriateness of use'. This is why Postmodernism expressions on experiences are somewhat tending to be subjectified, in which interpretation was emphasized on personal and individual diversities. This definition brings us to the subjective-ness and ever floating values, which made a designed object unrecognizable and unfamiliar among those who use it because it lacks of objective common values and demonstrable element of operation. As have been explained, we may understand that modernist approach deals mostly with logic because design is continuously defined through function (usability), objective qualities of object (dimensions, shapes, colors, materials, etc), and efficiency (of space, production, or composition). On the other hand, post-modernist approach deals mostly with senses because it is continuously defined through seeing (:aesthetic value, performance) and feeling (:cultural context, semantic transformation, mental imagery). Accordingly, both Modern and Postmodern frame of thoughts provide a 'rigid' contrary definition on where design generates its ends and purposes. It shows that throughout history of design, the problem in defining pleasure is always seen as the contextualizing problems between "emotional expression" (a subjective value) and "understandable usage" (an objective value)" or, simply put, the problem between logic and senses. In the following chapter, the author explains how to approach those contradictory problems and providing insights on how to understand the risen of user's "pleasure" when interaction with a designed object occurred.

### 3 Contextualizing Pleasurable Experience in Product Use

Buchanan [5] proposes that the ends and purposes of design are framed by the “polarity of pleasure and responsibility”. He argued that although pleasure is set in opposition to responsibility, “the creation of pleasure is still regarded as one of the responsibility of designer.” Therefore, he developed a matrix model in which pleasure is placed as the essential element on the range of designer responsibilities: the good, the useful and the just. The “good” means that design has responsible action to affirm the proper place of human beings. The “useful” means that design should supports the accomplishment of their intention while the “just” is referred as the responsibility of supporting equitable relations between human beings (including distribution of goods). However, the definition of pleasure in Buchanan’s matrix seems still to follow Platonian’s philosophy of ‘intelligible’ object, which is valued as the pleasure of visuals [6]. Vuokko Takala [7] argued that the element of pleasure, which occur only by visual, could be regarded as “pleasure within ‘eidolon’, mediate only through the eyes.” Therefore, pleasurable design, according to Takala’s perspective, should be occurred holistically within sensibility process as well as intelligible. Pleasure should occur through sense perception not only visual perception. Accordingly, the ends and purpose of design should consider pleasure within intelligible and sensible element of object. But how we formulate those essential elements in the real praxis of design? What kinds of pleasures do object produce when perceived by sensing as well as viewing? Refer to Hans Kemp and Mark Hartevelt’s research [8], to formulate those essential elements could be achieved by identifying four basic values that contribute to pleasurable design, which defined as follow: effective performance, social context, attached history and the sense of control. The effective performance deals with the feeling users has about the way the objects perform. The social context deals with how users articulate the objects of design by identifying its context within a particular social environment. The attached history deals with how the objects of design generate interrelationship through time with the users. The sense of control deals with how the objects of design articulate their fitness to user’s demands. Kemp-Hartevelt’s research, somehow, directly related to Patrick Jordan’s theory of pleasurable object from the perspective of human factor. According to Jordan [9], in the process of interacting with objects, human endures four types of pleasure: (1) Physio-pleasure: Pleasures of the body through sight, sound, smells, taste, and touch. Initial attraction through visuals and touch is the evitable pleasure that the users have when they interact with objects; (2) Socio-pleasure: Pleasures that derived from co-interaction with other users. Many products play important social roles, either by design or by accident, through co-interaction with other users, such as exchanging messages through text messaging facility on a cell-phone; (3) Psycho-pleasure: Pleasures that derived from people’s reactions and psychological state during the use of

products. Many interactive products require users to mentally adopt the operational logic of product through certain protocols using menus, icons, and/or commands; and (4) Ideo-pleasure: Pleasures that derived from people's reflection on the experience where one appreciates the quality or the extent to which a product is perceived has the power to enhance the quality of life. The pleasure comes from the statement of objects that signify the values judgments of the owners.

Conceptually complement to each other, Kemp-Hartevelt's and Jordan's theory in defining pleasure of design can be articulated to have function as follow (see Figure 1 for illustration):

- The dimension of Kemp-Hartevelt's effective performance and Jordan's physio-pleasure occur when users "operates" the product (how the object performs to fit the "operational" needs of users). This type of pleasure can be identified to have functions when it fulfills the operational-demands of users.
- The dimension of Kemp-Hartevelt's social context and Jordan's socio-pleasure occur when users "extend" the use of product (how the object serves as a medium to interact with other users). This type of pleasure can be identified to have function when it fulfills the social-demands of users.
- The dimension of Kemp-Hartevelt's sense of control and Jordan's psycho-pleasure occur when users "increase" their knowledge and understandings through the product (how the object increases users' knowledge and understandings). This type of pleasure can be identified to have function when it fulfills the mental-demands of users.
- The dimension of Kemp-Hartevelt's attached history and Jordan's ideopleasure occur when users "actualizes" themselves through the use of product (how the object provides a sense-of-belongingness and/or identity). This type of pleasure can be identified to have function when it fulfills the emotional-demands of users.

| hartevelt-kemp        | jordan          | function in product use context   |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---|
| effective performance | physio pleasure | articulates operational-demands<br>(fits users' needs, performs well, etc)      |
| social context        | socio pleasure  | articulates social-demands<br>(extends social-life, interacts with others, etc) |
| sense of control      | psycho pleasure | articulates mental-demands<br>(gains knowledge, increase understandings, etc)   |
| attached history      | ideo pleasure   | articulates emotional-demands<br>(actualization, belongingness, etc)            |

**Figure 1** Analysis on functions of pleasure in product use.

As we learn that pleasurable experience in using the objects comes from the intertwined of viewing as well as sensing, objects can create bond of emotion when *owned*, *used*, and *interacted* with the users. However, previous psychological study suggests that users tend to pay less attention when the object is too familiar to them [1]. The longer users interact with objects, the more probable that the objects look dated, old-fashioned, and un-pleasurable to experience with. Human brain naturally adapts to repeated experiences, which makes the emotional bond diminish with the repetitions itself. This is why human tends to rapidly respond to new things or new objects because “it is usually the novel and unexpected things in life that require the most attention” [1]. Accordingly, products that are able of “giving” those pleasures can endure the passage of time and seduce a long-lasting emotional bond with users. In similar tone, Khaslavsky and Shedroff [10] mentioned that for a designed object to have “a seductive power”, it must provide enticement through visuals, build emotional relationship through joy of interacting with object, and fulfills those emotional bonds through the signification of users’ judgments when deciding to buy, own, and use it.

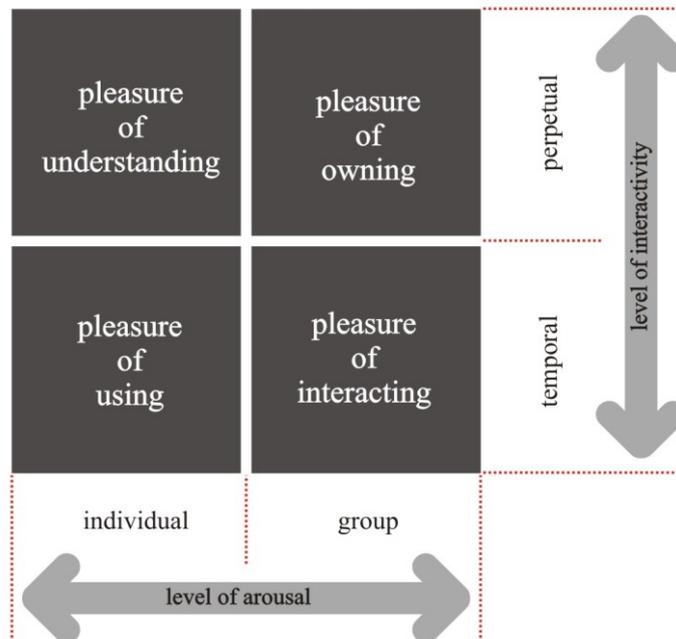
The challenge now is how can we evaluate those elements in order to learn further? According to Norman [1], a good pleasurable object is that the object should be rich and complex, the one that will “rise to a never-ending interplay among elements” and second, the viewer must be able take time “to learn, analyze, and reflect such rich interplay.” In other words, users of object must first be “seduced” to gain “interest” before they become “attracted” to use and to own the object. Indeed, long lasting pleasurable experience is a process—perhaps in divergence forms—from the initial attraction to the built relationship after. Previous research by the author found out that initial reaction toward the attractiveness of appearance could affect users’ perception when they interact with the object further [11]. The initial pleasure of viewing (: *visual*) evolves to

the pleasures of perceiving in which the object “provides” credible and trustworthy assurances (: *ideology*). The acquired knowledge coupled with Kemp-Hartevelt’s, Jordan’s, and Shedroff’s theories, leads to assumed framework that when users do interact with product they can endure four identified functions of pleasure: *pleasure-of-using*, *pleasure-of-interacting*, *pleasure-of-understanding*, and *pleasure-of-owning*. *Pleasure-of-using* occurs when users start to use or operate the product. This function of pleasure occurs because the product functions to articulate users’ operational-demands. *Pleasure-of-interacting* occurs when users begin to adopt the product as their “supportive-partner” when in use, seen as a medium to interact with other users. This function of pleasure occurs because the product functions to articulate users’ social-demands. *Pleasure-of-understanding* occurs when users stretch the operational capabilities of the product due to their extended knowledge about it. This function of pleasure occurs because the product serves perceptual fluency for the users to understand more about the product and therefore articulate users’ mental-demands. *Pleasure-of-owning* occurs when users begin to reflect product “belongingness”, actualizing themselves through the product. This function of pleasure occurs because the product provides identity and articulate users’ emotional demands.

By understanding each function of pleasure, it can be identified that all those functions can be mapped into experiential matrices of pleasure in product use—a framework for understanding the pleasurable experience on designed objects. The first experiential matrix is considered to be the *arousal* aspect of product (: senses, mental adaptation) that can persist either in temporal or perpetual level. The second experiential matrix is considered to be the *interactivity* aspect of product use (: interaction, ideological adaptation) that can be derived either by individual or group. Accordingly, the function of *pleasure-of-using* and *pleasure-of-interacting* can be placed on a temporal level of arousal aspect because both types are typically experienced when attraction and interaction with objects occur in temporal stage (the initial experiential process between users and objects). On the other hand, the function of *pleasure-of-understanding* and *pleasure-of-owning* can be placed on a perpetual level since both are experienced when the interaction process occurs passing the temporal stage. These experiences are triggered gradually as users develop their interaction with the product. Thus, this experiential facet of pleasure is depended on how well one can adopt and understand the “meaning” of the product.

The *pleasure-of-using* and *pleasure-of-understanding* are placed on an individual level of interactivity element since both are initially experienced by individual when he/she—as a personal—become aware of the product, while *pleasure-of-interacting* and *pleasure-of-owning* are placed on a group level since both are experienced and endured when he/she interacts socially with

other individuals. This experiential facet of pleasure is depended on how well one can utilize the product to enhance their interaction with other users. Illustrated matrices are presented in the following figure:



**Figure 2** Matrix of functions according to level of arousal and interactivity.

#### 4 Conclusions

Based on Kemp-Hartevelt's and Jordan's theory of pleasure, it can be deduced that during the process of using the product (object), users can experience four functions of contextual pleasures: pleasure of using, pleasure of interacting, pleasure of understanding, and pleasure of owning. Further, these four functions of pleasure can be mapped according to two experiential aspects that direct the process of pleasure: (1) arousal aspect (which consists of temporal – perpetual levels of experience), and (2) interactivity aspect (which consists of individual – group level of interaction). The author hopes that the results can trigger more critical thoughts on the subject of pleasure in design since most studies are dedicated to analyzing the dis-pleasure of usage (:such as error-rate, task accomplishment percentage, discomfort level, etc) as the contrary end for the purpose of a designed object. Thus, instead of trying to understand the negative experience of users when interacting with an object, the author wishes to have the result as key insights to understand a positive users' experience, as it has

and always been the "real" purpose of a designed object. Although further studies are needed to investigate a quantitative assessment of pleasure in designed objects, the paper shows that designer-in-praxis can expose essential elements of pleasure and how it may implicate the creative process in product designing.

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