

Essay 2—Optimum Modus Operandi

*Explains how standardization spiritually unifies society (Rancière and Benjamin).
Derives functionality from Communal Operations and its objective terms of efficiency.
Unveils culture as determinant to the term Functionality.*

By the beginning of the 20th century, Peter Behrens was a functionalist designer and main-man behind the consumables company AEG. Nowadays, he is also regarded as the pioneer of 'corporate identity'. French philosopher Jacques Rancière describes as such the good design intentions of Behrens: "The simplicity of the product, its style corresponding to its function, is much more than a 'brand image': it is the mark of a spiritual unity that is to unify the community" (The Future of the Image, 2007). Rancière suggests that based upon results of the standardization of needs, mechanical reproduction provided symbols that unify society, and that Behrens intent, was to ease in communal experiences by means of mass communication. On a similar point of view, Walter Benjamin rejected the aesthetic experience associated with the contemplation of art. He focused instead his aesthetic concerns upon media that he believed as a Marxist, would best suit the revolutionary purposes of the proletariat: the reproductive technologies of photography and film. Benjamin points out that mass consumption and reproduction obliterate the aura of the work of art, in relation to the fact that the work of art exists in one place only and can be seen only at that place at any one time. The aura, which is associated with and based upon, unique contemplative experiences and spatiotemporal relationships, gives place, in modern society, to communal notions of collective awareness. In "A Small History of Photography" Benjamin develops interest in the early daguerreotypes, which for him "illustrate the radical auratic potential lying dormant within technology that came to the fore at the moment of photography's invention." Under the umbrella of communal operations derived from the standardization of individual needs, in modern society entailed by operative thinking, the term 'functionality' is but a mean to achieve a goal based on rational logics of cause and effect. Therefore, it is measured solely into objective terms. We aim at an optimal procedure for every attitude.

Bearing this in mind, I have wondered for some time, how we could arrive at different utensils for the same function? How is it possible that we develop different objects for the same necessity? Look at the European fork and knife and the Chinese chopsticks.

Should we not by now, as race, have come to an optimal procedure for eating? Or is it so integrated in our routine that we don't consider this anymore. How can I exist knowing that I might not be operating in the best possible fashion? The anguish of likely underperformance shall withdraw my appetite... The answer to this dilemma is obviously cultural. Actually, it has taken a trip to China, to realize that it lies on the specific qualities of local gastronomy. After some time of using chopsticks in-situ, one recognizes that these pleasantly agree with the local food, and starts to wonder if coming back to westernized fork and knife will show to be a problem. With chopsticks one must gently pick the nourishment instead of poking and stabbing it, which fits to the whole Asia experience and is more likely to my own preconceived notions of spirituality in that part of the world.