

The Art of Classic Design: What classic art can teach us about products that enchant, transform, and endure¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how classic art objects engage emotional responses, evolve over time, and are thus sustained over long periods. Then, the paper applies this learning to products to examine how classic product designs (CPDs) can likewise enchant, transform, and endure. Through a qualitative empirical analysis, this paper illustrates a framework for classifying classic products: CPDs achieve longevity when they disembed from their original meaning, transcend their organizational context, and become cultural icons as they are appropriated by users over time and across space. The paper concludes with recommendations for product design and management.

Keywords: art, product design, design aesthetics, classic designs, design management, arts marketing

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²The author(s) of this manuscript certify that the paper is an outcome of our independent and original work. We have duly acknowledged all the sources from which the ideas and extracts have been taken and we are responsible for any errors that may be discovered. The authors also thank the editor of CYRUS Global Business Perspectives (CGBP), and anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the manuscript and their insightful comments and suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasingly large interest in classic products that come into the world, endure, and allow their manufacturers to remain viable competitors in the marketplace (Sams, Rickard, & Sadasivan, 2021; Alrweih & Djafarova 2022). These products provide long-term emotional benefits to their owners and financial benefits to manufacturers; they are important not only in terms of psychic and monetary rewards but also in terms of staying out of landfills (Chapman, 2012). Additionally, there is a growing interest in brands, cultural consumption, and the arts (Walmsley & Meamber, 2021). Corbusier and other modernist designers and architects are intent on designing a world where most people would enjoy an improved life in a healthy, hygienic, and modern environment (Woodham, 1997). Perhaps no designer embodied this philosophy more than Norman Bel Geddes; according to Albrecht (2012), Geddes was a firm believer in the spiritual value of art and that art, architecture, and design make peoples' lives emotionally and psychologically richer. Thus, there are commonalities shared between classic art and classic product designs³.

While there is immense literature on the previously mentioned commonalities, what are the reasons for the longevity of both classic art and classic product designs? The purpose of this paper is to explore how classic art engages emotional responses, and to answer the following research question: "What can classic art teach us about how classic product designs are sustained over a long period?" In order to answer this question, the manuscript reviews the common characteristics that sustain classic art and classic products over long periods, and advances a new approach to designing products by drawing from classic art and classic writing. The answer to this question – that classic art and classic product designs have an enduring appeal because they have malleable meanings – can also be applied to new product designs to classify more recently-introduced classic products, as well as to design products with an enduring impact on consumers. To the authors' knowledge, this paper is the first to clearly hypothesize the connection between classic art and classic products.

This paper will be of interest to both researchers and practitioners, who are seeking to classify old products as classic, identify products that are recently in the process of becoming classic, and inform the design of products that transform, endure, and improve lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW: REVIEWING THE PROPERTIES OF CLASSIC ART AND CLASSIC PRODUCT DESIGNS

In order to find the answer to our research question, we need to find out the reasons for the longevity of classic art and classic product designs. While there is immense literature on the commonalities shared by classic art and product designs, few researchers have investigated the

³ As used throughout this manuscript, "classic" is understood to mean "traditional, enduring, representing excellence in a field", and should not be confused with "classical", referring to Greek, Roman, or 18th-19th Century European art.

reasons for the longevity of both. Hence, in this section we review the properties of both classic art and classic product designs, and synthesize the literature to suggest shared features or attributes.

Classic Art

Classic art, also known as great or breakthrough art, has a number of properties: it is unique, experts agree on its significance, it is associated with individual artists, it generates controversy, it retains its importance, and it improves the quality of people's lives. Below, we briefly describe each of these six properties,

First, it is unique, transformative, and different from art of the time (Gombrich & Gombrich, 1995). When an art movement such as Impressionism comes out, it plants a stake in the ground; it generates a feeling of awe and gives people the impression that things will never be the same. The artist Damian Hirst says that his goal as an artist is to make art that cannot be ignored (D'Amelio, 2019). The shock element is so great that viewers in an art museum find it difficult to move on and see other pieces of art. Pelowski and Akiba (2011, p. 81) describe a transformative aesthetic experience via art in the following way: it “constitutes a state of heightened awareness [...], leading to self-confrontation, relieved tension, resolved conflicts [...], consummation [...]; enlightenment [...] and cognitive development [...]”. In short, classic art leaves a lasting impression.

Second, a community of art experts agrees that classic art is significant, and that it has special qualities. Most history of art texts (Gombrich & Gombrich, 1995; Osborne & Sturgis, 2006) describe more or less the same art objects, paintings, sculptures, and architecture. Third, classic art is usually associated with great individual artists (Zolberg, 1990), for example, Mark Twain's novels (Walle, 2021) or Salvador Dalí's Surrealism (Egger, 1993). Fourth, it generates controversy insofar as it reverberates with deeply held ideologies (Harris, 2002). Early art, for example, leveraged feelings about religion, while pop art leverages feelings about the consumerism order. Fifth, classic art retains its importance over a long period. Art movements such as the Mannerism and Baroque styles shape art-viewer perceptions for many years. Lastly, art generally improves the quality of peoples' lives (Partarakis, Kartakis, Antona, Paparoulis, & Stephanidis, 2011). With these characteristics of classic art in mind, now consider what characterizes classic products.

Classic Product Designs (CPDs)

Experts who write about classic product designs (Henderson, 2013; May, 2014; Panati, 2016) call the great or breakthrough product designs by many different names: classic designs, quintessential designs, iconic designs, special designs, significant designs, or cult objects. While there is seldom a lot of agreement about design classic status among these writers, most agree that certain items – for example, the Austin Mini car, the Eames Lounge Chair and ottoman, the Zippo lighter, the Airstream trailer, the Vespa scooter, and Coco Chanel's little black dress – are design classics. In this paper, we will simply refer to these as classic product designs or CPDs.

Many classic product designs (CPDs) are touchstones and benchmarks for brand identities and categories, and these products influence our daily lives (Sexton, 1987). For many years in the

southern United States, “Coke” stood for, or was representative, all soft drinks. Items like the familiar glass Bloomfield sugar dispenser (visit any diner!) and the LL Bean duck boots become old friends. Like classic art, architecture, and literature, CPDs are important symbols of culture; they represent ‘who we are’, and ‘who we were’. The hot dog is quintessentially American, and the Zippo lighter and leather bomber jacket embody US military culture in WWII.

CPDs are also labeled as special designs by design experts, and serve as inspiration to other designers. Some have cult followings and are considered to be collectibles and a reflection of our identities (Belk, 1988), whereas others are refurbished and provide both hedonic and eudaimonic benefits (Durgee & Agopian, 2018). Recently, classic product designs have been associated with their designers, for example, the Juicy Salif citrus reamer by Philippe Starck (Lloyd & Snelders, 2003)⁴. In addition, they generate ideological debates (Santana-Acuña, 2014), and their ability to stir ideological controversies helps sustain their popularity for a long time.

From Classic Art to CPDs

It is doubtful that designers of most CPDs set out from the beginning to establish them as classic designs, and knew that the designs would be popular for a long time; Coco Chanel probably did not think of this when she designed the little black dress. The same reasoning could be applied to classic art. So what makes classic art and classic product designs ‘classic’? What makes them attain classic status and sustains them over long periods? The relationship between art and product design has been examined for many years (Bloch, 1995; Folkmann, 2010; Veryzer Jr & Hutchinson, 1998). There is vast literature on the novelty in art and product design (Berlyne, 1973; Hekkert & Leder, 2008), the link between design and arts (Throsby, 2008), the ideology in art and design (Witkin, 1995; Asgary, Li & Yi, 2018), and the roles of artist versus designer (Durgee, 2006). Synthesizing the literature, we suggest that both great art and CPDs share the following features or attributes:

- Because of their uniqueness, all represented radical shifts when they first emerged or came into the world. When the iPhone was introduced, everyone felt that things would not be the same from then on (Wright, 2017). The chief designer of Chrysler cars, Trevor Creed, told one of our mentors that he wants people to see his new designs for the first time and react with “wow, what is that? I can’t believe it!”
- ‘Experts’ – individuals with extensive knowledge or ability based on research, experience, or occupation and in a particular area of study – extol them and agree they deserve to be on lists of “classics”.
- They generate controversy, because they reverberate with – or against – deeply held ideologies.

⁴This is not to say that the product’s brand and function are not of paramount importance, but in today’s day and age, individuals can have strong personal brands, so connecting two strong brands will create a powerful combined image.

- They are associated with “great” artists i.e. their designers (Durgee, 2006); for example, the Juicy Salif reamer by Philippe Starck.
- They improve the quality of our lives (Durgee & Agopian, 2018; Partarakis, Kartakis, Antona, Paparoulis, & Stephanidis, 2011)

In summary, the CPDs that the writers describe all have the same attributes as great art mentioned above.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Having reviewed the common attributes between classic art and CPDS, in this section we explore **which of the aforementioned attributes allow ‘classics’ to retain significance over long periods**. In doing so, first, we review the theories of the appeal of classic art and classic product designs and how they are sustained over long periods as presented by Santana-Acuña (2014). We use this theory to describe a new theoretical framework of how the appeal of art objects can explain why CPDs might be sustained and retain their popularity. We then illustrate both the framework as presented by Santana-Acuña (2014) and our proposed extension of the framework on two well-known classic products.

The Enduring Appeal of Classic Art and CPDs

Most theories that draw on the appeal of classic art and classic product designs espouse a psychological frame of reference. According to this psychological frame of reference, due to their shared features, both classic art and CPDs engage emotional responses. Thus, similar to classic art and architecture, CPDs also affect consumers; CPDs make peoples’ lives emotionally and psychologically richer. CPDs relate to other products similar to how great architecture compares to everyday architecture. Ballantyne (2013) calls everyday architecture, such as basic apartments and kitchens, “nests”; he calls great architecture, such as the Lincoln Cathedral in England, “pillars of fire”. We barely notice the nests, while the pillars of fire inspire us with their special meanings (Walker, 2013); they “embody a compelling program or ideology as formulated by a visionary architect” (Clark & Brody, 2009, p. 483). Similarly, Heilbrunn describes how the recent Alessi Michael Graves tea kettle and Starck Salif juice squeezers have a type of aura: “something which stands in front of us with an evident resistance... with a definite property of strangeness and otherness” (Brown, Clarke, & Doherty, 2003, p. 199). In short, both classic art and CPDs have an enduring appeal because they engage emotional responses.

This paper describes a new theoretical framework of how the appeal of classic product designs is sustained over long periods. In describing this new framework, the paper builds on the psychological approach of engaging emotional responses, but following Santana-Acuña (2014), it also considers sociological aspects of the appeal of art and product design, focusing on the theory of the durability of classic art (Santana-Acuña, 2014).

Developing the classic product design hypothesis: adopting “meanings” from art and applying them to CPDs

Art historians argue that, unlike ephemeral art, classic art endures because its meanings constantly evolve (Souriau, 1998), e.g. the meanings of Dalí’s masterpieces always change. However, a paradox in the Sociology of art criticism is how to reconcile enduring meaningfulness with shifting meanings for cultural items. The theory of classic art longevity – rooted in the Sociology of art criticism – describes “the process by which a cultural object is collectively imagined as meaningful over time and across national and cultural boundaries despite its changing meaning” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 101). Santana-Acuña (2014) demonstrates how a new work of art has lasting appeal insofar as it is disembedded from its original vernacular organizational context (or VOC) and becomes embedded in different cultures, in different places, in different times, and with different meanings. Santana-Acuña (2014) notes how an American product – the quilt – transcended its VOC and was appropriated by non-vernacular organizations, for example, New York art galleries and museums. Another example is the classic Hudson River School paintings of majestic scenes in the mountains, rivers, and forests of the mid-19th century US; these are considered classics because they evolved from symbols of patriotism (the great American landscape) to religion (natural wonders from God) to environmentalism (preserve woodland purity).

Accordingly, recent product design researchers (e.g. Gaver, Beaver, & Benford, 2003) have begun researching designs which, like abstract art, have purposefully ambiguous or fluid meanings. Like abstract art, these designs could have an appeal that lasts for many years.

However, ambiguous design is not the only way for products to generate lasting appeal; Norman and Verganti (2014) suggest that breakthroughs in new product design occur through new technologies as well as new meanings. Timex, according to Verganti (2006), produced simple watch designs, but Swatch came along and introduced watches that were fashion statements. Verganti (2006), however, refers to a singular meaning, the aesthetic, as opposed to multiple meanings as are considered by Santana-Acuña (2014), . Recent authors writing about design (e.g. Aurisicchio, Eng, Nicolas, Carlos, Childs, & Bracewell, 2011) have suggested two main expansions to Verganti (2006)’s paradigm: first, generalizing the idea of a product’s aesthetics or form to a source of pleasure, and secondly introducing other sources of meanings in product designs such as the item’s function - what the item does - and its social function, the shared social agreement about the relevant category. But these factors should not be considered in isolation. Sengers and Gaver (2006) claim that sources of meaning are highly complex, and add that researchers should consider the meanings attached to product technology – how it does what it does – as well as user interface issues, as in ‘how do I turn it on?’ and ‘how do I make it do what I want it to do?’ (Karapanos, 2013).

This recent body of work establishes criteria for determining initial meaning, while consequent studies have shown how these characteristics can evolve as products are taken from their original VOC, such as Karapanos, Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Martens (2009) which describes how these

different aspects of a new product design inspire different meanings in users over time. In a study of owner feelings about iPods, Karapanos et al. (2009) said that upon initial ownership, there was a strong feeling of excitement based on the product's aesthetics; they called this the Orientation phase. The next phase, Incorporation, is characterized by the multiple meanings based on all the functions the item made possible; in this phase, the item becomes firmly embedded in daily lives (Karapanos et al., 2009). The final phase, Identification, entails a fusion of identities between user and the item; this phase lasts a long time and includes meanings based on self and social identities facilitated by the item (Karapanos et al., 2009).

Puntoni, Schroeder, and Ritson (2010) describe two types of polysemy, synchronic and diachronic. With synchronic polysemy, the same advertisement means two different things to two different audiences, for example, males and females; with diachronic polysemy, the same advertisement can mean different things to the same person at different points in time (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010). There are many cases of synchronic polysemy with new product designs. While fashion-oriented people bought the Swatch watch for its fashion connotations, probably many people bought it because they just wanted something to tell time. When it comes to CPDs however, diachronic polysemy is more interesting. For instance, when Ferdinand Porsche designed the Volkswagen Beetle (Mroz, 2016), he did not think of all the possible meanings his car would inspire over time.

Combining the theories of Santana-Acuña's (2014), Norman and Verganti (2014), and Puntoni, Schroeder, and Ritson (2010), we hypothesize that CPDs might retain their longevity and popularity for the same reasons as abstract art objects. In particular, similar to abstract art objects, the meanings attached to classic product designs change over time for a given target population. Our analysis draws on classic art in order to stress the role of meanings as drivers of classic product design popularity over time. Since product designs, like art, have purposefully ambiguous or fluid meanings, the meanings attached to classic products can change over time for a given target population and these product designs could have an appeal that lasts for many years. To sum it up, we suggest that both great art and CPDs retain significance over long periods based on shifting meanings. In other words, the changing meanings explain the extended popularity and sales lives of CPDs.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

In order to illustrate and empirically test the aforementioned classic product design hypothesis, we consider one illustrative example of classic art and extend this to two successful design classics: Starbucks and the Austin Mini car. The following section expounds on the mechanisms by which an art object is removed from their original VOC, is reinterpreted by new audiences, and is embedded into these new cultures, cementing their status as classic. Then, we demonstrate how this process occurs in a meaningfully similar way with classic products.

The Theory of Classic Art Longevity Applied to the Classic Status of the novel “One Hundred Years of Solitude” (OHYS)

To illustrate this recent theory of the longevity of classic art, we review Santana-Acuña’s (2014) application to the enduring popularity of the classic novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Argentinian author Gabriel Márquez wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude (OHYS)* in 1967 and over the past 50 years, thousands of people from 56 countries have read the novel. *OHYS* is a family saga set in the imaginary town of Macondo, and includes references to many otherworldly events (Márquez, 2014). Santana- Acuña (2014) suggests that art objects, such as the novel *OHYS*, have sustained their popularity over many years and in many countries because they represent so many different meanings over time to different groups of readers. In brief, as Santana-Acuña (2014) describes, *OHYS* has transcended its original VOC – its creator, location, and consumers – and has been appropriated and given new meanings by thousands of readers in different cultures around the world. The novel was pulled out of its VOC to the extent that it represented a popular new aesthetic category or genre, magical realism (Santana-Acuña, 2014). Santana-Acuña (2014) also suggests that the novel inspired an ideology labeled as “Macondism”. This ideology represented a mythical view of Latin America as an exotic land of antediluvian nature, characters who reach biblical age, and hyper-beautiful young women who are mysteriously swept up into heaven. Moreover, the author has become a world brand, and has escaped the boundaries of the original VOC. The below table presents the meanings of *OHYS* vis-à-vis other works of art.

Table 1: meanings of OHYS and other works of art

Classic Art	<i>“One Hundred Years of Solitude”</i>	The classic Hudson River School movement paintings	National Art Museums
Location	Argentina	US	Europe
Creator	Gabriel García Márquez	Thomas Cole (Hanc, 2017)	Napoléon Bonaparte (Dodman, 2021)
Original Intended Meaning	Entertainment for the people	Symbols of patriotism	Free education for the people (Feldstein, 2009)
Later Meaning	magical realism and “Macondism”	religion	Elite temples of beauty. Stress on aesthetics
Current Meaning Attached	author as world brand	environmentalism	Modernism. Museum as place for people with special cultural capital

The changing meanings of OHYS Brand Elements

Santana-Acuña (2014) reduces the novel *OHYS* to key brand elements – brand elements are cultural items or components of a work or product such as name, aesthetics, function, designer identity, and technology – and writes about how these were given different meanings than the

original meanings, and how the brand elements were then appropriated in four different ways. *OHYS* brand elements include the novel as a whole, the author Gabriel García Márquez, the setting Macondo, the opening sentence, the style of magical realism, and a special moment in the story when a character – Remedios – is swept up, or ascends, into heaven. Thus, the novel *OHYS* became a classic because the meanings of its brand elements shifted over time and across space. In particular, *OHYS* brand elements changed meanings via transcendence and appropriation (Santana-Acuña, 2014). “Transcendence refers to the process by which a literary work surpasses its vernacular organizational context of production and early diffusion” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 99). Transcendence is the result of brand elements being *disembedded* by actors (such as new audiences), organizations, and cultures that had no share in their original production. Disembedding is re-interpretation, where an element is redefined and given new meanings. The below table presents different ways of transcendence as understood through disembedding of *OHYS* brand elements.

Table 2: Ways of Transcendence as understood through Disembedding of Brand Elements

Disembedding Types	“ <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> ”
Aesthetic, new genre is created	“magical realism”
Industry, operations spread contents	New publishers
Ideological, new ideology is created which spreads	Macondism as an expression of reality (Delgado, 2018)
Authorial, spreading popularity of author	Gabriel García Márquez now famous (Hart, 2013)

Appropriation, on the other hand, is “the practice by which transnational audiences transform the components of a [...] work into meaningful content that they use to frame and make sense of collective and life-course events” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 99). In other words, appropriation is also known as adoption. Santana-Acuña (2014) describes how a wide range of audiences over the past 50 years have appropriated, or re-embedded, *OHYS* into their own organizational context. The different ways that different cultures embed and adopt the brand elements include lived experience, universalization, artistic commensuration, and entrenched criticism (Santana-Acuña, 2014). The first, “lived experience”, refers to how audiences use the elements to contextualize current and individual life events. For example, a Ukrainian referred to Macondo in terms of any place where

one wants to escape from reality. Universalization deals with how audiences transform elements into indexicals that are supposed to have universal reach. One example is a new adjective, “macondiano” which is “a universal adjective, such as quixotic and Kafka-esque” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 126). Artistic commensuration deals with how the elements are defined in terms of other cultural objects. Audiences, for example, have compared García Márquez to literary characters, classic writers, and artists. *OHYS* itself is compared to “War and Peace” by Leo Tolstoy, “Madame Bovary” by Gustave Flaubert, and “Moby Dick” by Herman Melville. Entrenched criticism “refers to the pattern that [...] compels audiences to index [...] elements in order to express their negative views about the novel” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 124). For many years, there has been a stream of negative critical reviews of García Márquez and his work by South American and other critics, which has served as a way for these critics to position or define themselves in terms of the famous writer (Santana-Acuña, 2017).

Table 3: Ways of How New Audiences Appropriate the Brand Elements of OHYS

Way of Appropriation	Lived Experience	Universalization	Artistic Commensuration	Entrenched Criticism
OHYS	Macondo becomes metaphor for a place to escape daily life	“Macondiano” becomes a universal adjective similar to ‘Kafka-esque’	Many comparisons to other famous novels: “War and Peace”, “Madame Bovary”, and “Moby Dick”	Audiences index book elements based on negative aspects and negative reviews of the book

After transcending its original VOC and “becom[ing] a disembedded cultural object” (Santana-Acuña, 2014, p. 99), *OHYS* was appropriated again in different cultures and places. As a result, *OHYS* resonated with many different value systems in different countries over a 50-year period and, consequently, achieved classic status (Santana-Acuña, 2014).

Applying the Theory of Classic Art Longevity to Starbucks and the Austin Mini

In the previous section, we explored how art objects such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have sustained their popularity over many years and in many countries because they represent so many different meanings over time to different groups of people. In the case of CPDs, as with *OHYS*, while the objects are redefined and appropriated by other, later audiences, the separate elements of the CPDs should come under review. What causes the meanings of elements to change? Disembedding and appropriation. With CPDs, the critical elements appear to be the product or brand name, designer identity, external styling, genre, and purpose. Thus, to illustrate the application of meanings to impact and longevity, our empirical study provides a qualitative analysis of the elements of both Starbucks and the Austin Mini car.

Starbucks: how audiences Disembed and Appropriate Starbucks brand elements

Starbucks brand elements include the coffees, baristas, décor and aesthetics (Hartmann, 2011), coffeehouse operations, and founder Howard Schultz (Phillips & Rippin, 2010).

Starbucks - Disembedding or Transcendence

One of the foundational changes that are occurring in marketing is the prevalence and diffusion of aesthetics. Aesthetic work develops cultural competence (Vlahos, Hartman, & Ozanne, 2021). In this spirit, Starbucks aesthetics created a new genre, the high-end coffee franchised chain with a “branded ambience” (Rosenberg, Swilling, & Vermeulen, 2018, p. 204). From an operations standpoint, not only is there a Starbucks “on almost every corner”, especially in cities such as Chicago (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 636), but also Starbucks changed the whole industry by spreading coffee business more generally. Ideologically, Starbucks created bohemian sophistication. Moreover, Howard Schultz became famous (Gallos, 2012).

Table 4: Starbucks Disembedding in a comparative table

Disembedding Types	Aesthetic, new genre is created	Industry, operations spread contents	Ideological, new ideology is created which spreads	Authorial, spreading popularity of author
“One Hundred Years of Solitude”	“magical realism”	New publishers	Macondism (Delgado, 2018)	Gabriel García Márquez now famous (Hart, 2013)
Starbucks	The high-end coffee shop chain	Spreading coffee shops and coffee business	Bohemian sophistication	Howard Schultz becomes famous (Gallos, 2012)

Starbucks - Ways of Appropriation

Lived Experience

Coco Chanel probably did not anticipate that the little black dress would influence the lived experience of women in the 1920s as they expressed new sentiments about women’s freedom and self-expression through clothing for work, formal, and other social occasions. Similarly, while “coffee has long fueled the minds of many people in the world” (Grandelli, 2019, p. 2), Starbucks was not anticipated to capture the mind and imagination of the coffee-consuming public as the ‘place to be’. Starbucks became appropriated as the ‘third place’ – where people from “many walks

of life” visit often, either for the pleasure of each other’s company (Hartmann, 2011; Oldenburg, 2013, p. 8) or simply to “read the papers and just kind of watch people” (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 634). Starbucks informed and reshaped the whole ‘daily urban life’ culture; “Let’s meet at Starbucks” became a famous phrase that represents a daily experience.

Universalization

New words spread and take on different meanings: e.g. “barista” became a universal term (Michelli & Hill, 2007).

Artistic Commensuration

Starbucks is compared to other artisanal coffee providers, as well as to other artisanal businesses such as Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, W Hotels, and artisanal brewers (Holt & Cameron, 2010).

Entrenched Criticism

While Starbucks provides standardization, such that a specific Starbucks drink looks and tastes similar regardless of which store in the world it is sold in (Rosenberg, Swilling, & Vermeulen, 2018), there are criticisms regarding Starbucks globalization, colonialism, and crushing of ‘authentic’ local coffee houses (Grandelli, 2019) as well as Starbucks corporate responsibility (Kay, 2019). In fact, hating on Starbucks is now commonplace for coffee snobs (Hartmann, 2011) and “oppositional localists” think that Starbucks is awful (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 636).

As a result of appropriation, Starbucks could attribute its success and pervasive presence (Hartmann, 2011) to changes and shifts in meanings over long periods.

The Austin Mini car: how audiences Disembed and Appropriate Mini Cooper brand elements

The Mini Cooper was launched in 1959 as the Morris Mini Minor. It followed the Austin Mini sedan; both cars were designed by Alec Issigonis. Due to a petrol crisis at the time ensued by the Suez Canal closure in 1956 (Hartshorn, 1968), Sir Leonard Lord - chair of the British Motor Company (Smith, 2007) – intended the Mini to be a proper “fuel-efficient and compact [car] while still remaining fairly spacious” (Schnell, 2010, p. 13; Smith, 2007). In spite of its small size, people found it surprisingly roomy. While the Austin Mini sedan followed design conventions of the time – sculpted shape, extended hood over forward-facing engine – the new Mini took a jarring turn. It featured a transverse engine and powertrain, front-wheel drive, four-wheel independent suspension, and new standards of maneuverability and road handling (Smith, 2007). Compared to the Minor sedan, it had a boxy, low, and squat shape that made many compare it to a bulldog.

Table 5: Starbucks Appropriation hypothesis in a comparative table

Way of Appropriation	Lived Experience	Universalization	Artistic Commensuration	Entrenched Criticism
OHYS	Macondo becomes metaphor for a place to escape daily life	“Macondiano” becomes a universal adjective similar to ‘Kafkaesque’	Many comparisons to other famous novels: “War and Peace” by Leo Tolstoy and “Madame Bovary” by Gustave Flaubert	Audiences index book elements based on negative aspects and negative reviews of the book
Starbucks	Starbucks reshapes daily urban life through the concepts of ‘Let’s meet at Starbucks’ and the ‘third place’ (Hartmann, 2011; Oldenburg, 2013)	New words spread and take on different meanings: e.g. “barista”	Comparisons with other artisanal coffee providers and businesses: Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, W Hotels (Holt & Cameron, 2010)	Criticisms regarding Starbucks globalization, colonialism, and corporate responsibility.

Mini - Disembedding or Transcendence

Perhaps because of its radical aesthetics, the Mini initially did not sell very well. It might have remained a small economy car for British towns and roadways, but it jumped in popularity across Europe and later the US, in part because popular entertainers and stars at the time liked it. Moreover, the Mini not only became the most successful car to be built in Britain (Smith, 2007), but also it transcended the British market for many of the same reasons that *OHYS* transcended the Colombian market. It created a new genre, the small yet roomy performance-car (Smith, 2007). At the time, cars such as the VW Beetle and Citroën Deux Chevaux, both of which were cars that were slow and very cramped, dominated the economy market. Just as the fame of *OHYS* was exported from Colombia based on the spreading fame of the author (Santana-Acuña, 2014), the designer of the Mini, Alec Issigonis, was knighted and attained widespread acclaim for himself and the Mini among car buyers and car writers, especially in Europe (Julier, 2005). The Mini was literally disembedded from England in 1994 when BMW Automobiles purchased the company (Khan, 2019) and moved headquarters and all production to Germany. When it was introduced in the US market, BMW wanted to retain the original British connotations, however, so the Mini sales, dealers, and showrooms were set apart from the BMW sales, dealers, and showrooms (Raisch, 2008).

Table 6: Mini Disembedding in a comparative table

Disembedding Types	Aesthetic, new genre is created	Industry, operations spread contents	Ideological, new ideology is created which spreads	Authorial, spreading popularity of author
“One Hundred Years of Solitude”	“magical realism”	New publishers	Macondism (Delgado, 2018)	Gabriel García Márquez now famous
The Austin Mini car	the small, yet roomy, performance-car	Spreading car business	anti-establishment car	Alec Issigonis is knighted and becomes famous (Julier, 2005)

Mini - Ways of Appropriation

Lived Experience

While the Mini initially did not sell very well, it eventually captured the mind and imagination of the British public as the anti-establishment car of the 1960s, much like the Volkswagen Beetle in the United States. Thus, the Mini became the ‘car of the people’, not only transcending Britain’s historically rigid social hierarchy but also being appropriated as a rejection of social hierarchy in general. People from a variety of backgrounds took to the inexpensive auto that was popularly understood to reject class distinctions. The car was appropriated as part of – and informed – the whole ‘swinging 60s’ culture in London at the time, consisting of new rock-n-roll, clothing styles, slang, and nightclub scene. The car also became famous as a rally car and later, as a car that represented a European urban fashion statement (Sudjic, 1985). When the car was brought into the US market in the 1990s by BMW, it was appropriated – and informed – a whole young and urban lifestyle which researchers described as non-conformist, technologically savvy, interested in creative and eclectic hobbies, having a broad range of cultural interests, and not status conscious but rather strong advocates of excellent quality and style.

Universalization

The name ‘Mini’, like ‘Macondiano’ became a popular adjective that was applied to many things: the miniskirt (Foreman, 2014), ‘Mini Me’ of Austin Powers movie fame, mini-van (Nicholls, 2017), mini copiers, and so on.

Artistic Commensuration

In the US market in the 1990s, the car-buying public defined the Mini in terms of cars such as the revived Volkswagen Beetle and the hot-rod Chrysler PT Cruiser. Being marketed along with these cars, the Mini gained a retro identity, for it had been many years since the first Mini, VW, and hot-rod car styles were first popular. Yet another way that the Mini was defined in terms of another cultural object was when it not only was featured as a quintessential British vehicle in the 1969 film *The Italian Job* but also became one of the heroes of the film (Field, 2014).

Entrenched Criticism

Radical designs engage critical analyses from all quarters, and the Mini is no exception. Critics gain notoriety by focusing on the same popular new designs. As Swan (2002, p. 12) writes, “whatever one may think of the Mini Cooper’s dynamic attributes, which range from very good to marginal, it is fair to say that almost no vehicle in recent memory has provoked more smiles”. The car is so much fun to look at and drive that the reviewers suggest that one overlooks its faults such as cooling issues, electrical failures, and engine problems (Dirkes & Vanden Berg, 2010).

Table 7: Mini Appropriation hypothesis in a comparative table

Way of Appropriation	Lived Experience	Universalization	Artistic Commensuration	Entrenched Criticism
OHYS	Macondo becomes metaphor for a place to escape daily life	“Macondiano” becomes a universal adjective similar to ‘Kafka-esque’	Many comparisons to other famous novels: “War and Peace” by Leo Tolstoy and “Madame Bovary” by Gustave Flaubert	Audiences index book elements based on negative aspects and negative reviews of the book
The Austin Mini car	The car reshapes the urban lifestyle, the ‘quality and style’ concept	New term spreads and applied to different things: e.g. ‘miniskirt’	Comparisons with other compact car brands: Volkswagen Beetle, Chrysler PT Cruiser	Criticisms regarding Mini faults: electrical failures, and engine problems

As a result of appropriation, the Mini was even awarded Car of the Century, being named as the second most influential car brand of the 20th century (Cobb, 1999). Thus, the car could attribute its success and longevity to changes and shifts in meanings over long periods.

In summary, we have shown how art becomes classic through its departure from its original VOC, where it is then reinterpreted by new audiences before becoming embedded into these new cultures. Similarly, classic products may start small before being appropriated by a larger audience with a new meaning, becoming a cultural icon in the process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we present our conclusion and suggest implications, recommendations, and tentative directions for the design practice and subsequent product management of new product designs.

This paper established a new framework for defining the key characteristics of classic products by examining their commonalities with classic art. This framework can easily be extended to identify more recent products that are in the process of becoming classics, and even provide insights into the billion dollar question, “How can we design products that are more likely to become classics?”

Breakthroughs in new products occur through new meanings (Norman & Verganti, 2014; Santana-Acuña, 2014), but more importantly, how can the products’ impact last over time? During recent decades, new product design and marketing methods have been based on the need for a single product benefit or ‘core benefit proposition’ (CBP; Urban & Hauser, 1993; Weber et al., 2022). Designers are admonished to focus on target markets of one, and advertisers stress the importance of one focused meaning in the advertisements (e.g., “Volvo means safe cars”). However, the design evolution of many classic products suggests a design approach that is different from the recent methods mentioned above. This classic design approach focuses on individual targets, however it also focuses on core product meanings, and brand identities. Simultaneously, it might be possible to consider the design and new product marketing processes differently if the designs were targeted to have a high impact or initial appeal and then sustain their popularity across many user groups over long time periods, given that these user groups will attach different meanings to them.

Specifically, if the design and new product management process of a potential classic was broken into phases or components, we suggest that these phases and components would consist of the following:

- **target and consumer testing suggestion:** Have no specific target in mind. On the contrary, keep open the possibility of – and execute testing directed at – multiple targets, including target markets of one, and that many different groups of people over time and in different spaces might find meaning in the product. Additionally, during product introduction, consider design critics as the only relevant target;
- **consumer benefits suggestion:** Since CPDs represent different meanings to owners and consumer profiles over time, account for different consumer benefits and uses by allowing subsequent consumer groups to come up with their own meanings for the product, appropriate and adopt it in their own different ways;
- **product design suggestion:** Since the goal of a design is to produce a transformation in the viewer, enhance design ambiguity so that the meaning of the product is not immediately

visible. Also, consult other designers and trend experts (Verganti, 2018) for design inspiration, per se, coming from recent trends in art;

- **brand identity, source suggestion:** During manufacturing, give free reign to the designer (Verganti, 2018), focus the brand on the designer's identity, and include references to said identity. Also, stress designer/artist identity during advertising for these products;

Upsetting the status quo is difficult, thus even with the aforementioned insights, designers should not expect to create exclusively instant classics. Consider Tesla, whose stated goal is to demonstrate the potential for electric vehicles so that other automakers follow suit, so that together, the market would offer more sustainable options for consumers (Musk, 2014). In order for their company to be a success, Tesla would need to upset the status quo and prove to the world that electric vehicles are a viable product, to understand the intangibles of designing a product that can capture the imagination of the world. Effectively, Tesla would *need* to create a Classic Product Design. So, this framework can help designers create a product capable of achieving an organization's goals and that can have a financial impact measured in billions over the lifetime of the product; but perhaps even more importantly, by using this framework designers may create a classic product that can have different meanings for different people over time and across space and for which they will be eternally remembered.

Future Research Directions

This work provides important new insights on the malleability of meanings through testing the classic product design hypothesis. We tested our hypothesis based on comparing two design classics that are Starbucks and the Austin Mini car. These are two iconic products with mostly positive attributes. However, this is only the first step and our hypothesis needs further testing. Next, we can use a larger sample of CPDs and their brand elements in a quantitative confirmatory study to address external validity. The CPDs may even have a negative impression on people's minds, but are still making an impact on the lives of millions. Specifically, we can use consumer tweets to explore the malleability of meanings and provide evidence from the classic product design hypothesis. Furthermore, statistical analysis of the balance/proportion of the different brand elements could inform designers where to invest most, whether that be in product or brand name, designer identity, external styling or design and aesthetics, genre, and purpose. For example, should a marketer invest most into crafting a memorable product name, hire a designer to create the aesthetic, or ensure the design fully achieves the product's purpose?

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