



Harley (1989) argues that the rhetorical value of the map, in addition to its formal function, can be understood as a narrative of the cultural and social context in which it was built. In this sense, one can begin to think in a broader range of functions related to the map. Over time, a map can acquire new functions, as a historical and artistic object, for example.

## AESTHETICS FUNCTION AND ATTITUDE

For Mukařovský (1981, 119), “the aesthetics is the science that studies the aesthetic function, its manifestations and its carriers.” To define the aesthetic function, the author brings up the different attitudes assumed by the human being facing the world, the ways chosen to observe and interact with reality. He divides the attitudes into practical, theoretical, religious, and aesthetic. The practical attitude is related to labor and can change according to the individual perspectives. For example, for a carpenter, a forest has the practical function of providing wood, although for a park ranger it is a cultural environment, which has to be protected. The theoretical attitude has to do with the scientific thinking. It is the attitude that, when facing unknown objects, one tries to categorize them, understand them, and explain their existence. The aesthetic attitude is related to everything that is perceptible to the senses; in the aesthetic attitude, the person observes and contemplates the reality without modifying it, with no specific intention.

The functions of an object with regard to all attitudes are mutable and can change as time and space change. In the case of a map, it is possible to think about the function assumed by the viewer or, in other words, the use that is made out of it.

## AESTHETIC OBJECTS AND ARTISTIC OBJECTS

It becomes important to define the difference between objects in which the aesthetic function is the main concern and those in which the aesthetic function remains important but is not the main reason why the object was created. Considering Mukařovský’s theory, Ramalho (2001) says, “Everything that, among other functions, presents the aesthetic function as a secondary function, is aesthetic. And everything that has the aesthetic as a main function is considered artistic.”

Bringing the subject into the design field, Reis (2008) also comments on Mukařovský’s approach, saying that when the aesthetic function is present but is not the main intention, we say that as a result we have an **aesthetic object** (e.g., industrial design objects); when the aesthetic function is the main concern, the result is an **artistic object** (e.g., art and decorative objects).

In the case of a map, one can suppose that when a map is built with the main purpose of communicating geographic information, although bringing formal characteristics of beauty, it will be an aesthetic object. When its aesthetic function overcomes its geographic presentation purpose, it will be a decorative, artistic object.

## THE FORM AND THE FUNCTION

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German Bauhaus School was known by the statement that “form follows function.” For Bauhaus adherents, the utilitarian function prevails, and the aesthetic function must follow as a consequence. Therefore, it is important to point out that the design of a map is based on a necessity, a function usually defined by a practical task, and the aesthetic function is usually a secondary concern during the development of a map.

The utilitarian function of a tourist map, for example, is to give geographic directions and, in this way, is a practical function. In this case, the aesthetic function comes on a second level. Nevertheless, a pleasurable aesthetic experience can influence the user’s preferences and lead to an increase in engagement and interaction with the map.

## THE MUTABLE FUNCTIONS OF A MAP

The function of an object may change during time and space—for example, scientific illustrations that were created to register new species at a time when there was no photography may nowadays be used as decorative images.

The fact that function depends on use and context, and that functions are mutable according to space and time, brings us examples where the practical function of a map gives way to the aesthetic function even in a manner not intended by the cartographer/designer. In other words, an aesthetic object becomes an artistic object.

As an example, see Figure 1. Although one can argue that the mythological figures spread over the sea were merely decorative, they had a communication function in the context of their time, for both the public to which the “new world” was so unfamiliar and for those that aimed to describe it.

Another example is a contemporary piece (Figure 2): an urban map that comes in a frame and is sold as a decorative object. Although the distribution of the streets and places corresponds to the actual place, the main objective isn’t geographic localization; instead, the aesthetic function is assumed as more important when the map is hung in a frame, according to a typical attitude toward an artistic object.



Figure 1: Portion of 1599 Map of Arctic Exploration by Willem Blaeuw  
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Blaeuw\\_Full\\_Map.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Blaeuw_Full_Map.jpg). Accessed June 25, 2013.

## CONCLUSION

This text was based on a philosophical argument from Mukařovský's theory of aesthetics and aesthetic function, with the intention of bringing consideration to the fact that it is not possible for the cartographer/designer/artist to predict the actual use of the map. Whether a map is used as a decorative or a practical object is a matter of the circumstances in which it is placed. The actual use of the object is what defines its function.

## REFERENCES

- Harley, J. 1989. "Deconstructing the Map." *Cartographica*. 26 (2): 1–20.
- Ramalho e Oliveira, S. R. 2001. *Arte, Objetos Estéticos e Relações Culturais*. Lille: Université des Sciences et Technologies
- Mukařovský, J. 1981. *Escritos Sobre Estética e Semiótica da Arte*. Lisbon: Estampa.
- Mukařovský, J. 1979. *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*. Translated by Mark E. Suíno. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Reis, A. A. 2008. "Design Não é Arte." In *Ensaio em Torno da Arte*, edited by S. Makowiecky and S. R. Ramalho e Oliveira. Chapecó, Brazil: Argos.



Figure 2—Austin Neighborhoods Map., These Are Things Design and Illustration Studio. Source: <http://shop.thesearethings.com/products/austin-neighborhoods-map>. Accessed June 25, 2013.