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# When the body feels the world: an interview on somadesign

How using our body to perceive the world helps us to develop better, more empathetic products

Dr Anna del Corral holds a PhD in Computer Science and is currently the Research Leader of Well-Being of the prestigious ELISAVA Design and Engineering School. Rubén Caño is a senior designer at Quadpack, a lecturer at ELISAVA and a talented artist. They have been collaborating for years on research projects, sponsored by Quadpack, that challenge graduate students to develop people-centred packaging products with a futuristic approach. We reunited them for an inspirational talk about how physical experience can influence – and guide – product development. Open your mind to discover the wonders of somaesthetics and somadesign:

What are somaesthetics and somadesign?

Anna: Somaesthetics is a philosophical current that studies a person's relationship with the world, considering the body as the mediator. It was developed in the late 1990s by philosopher Richard Shusterman, based on the belief that you can better sense and interact with the world by developing body perception skills. Likewise, somadesign is the application of somaesthetics in product development. By improving their body's perception, designers can create solutions that are very close to users and their relationship with the environment.

How has the beauty sector been using somaesthetics and somadesign to drive innovation?

Anna: It started with screens, in the user experience field and now physical artefacts are also adopting it. In cosmetics, there are a variety of examples, from an applicator that allows more natural and intuitive gestures to a pack that will consider people's differences.

What is your experience with graduate students' final-year research projects in beauty packaging?

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Rubén: It all started as a game. We proposed a challenge to try to solve a problem that has intrigued the fragrance industry for a while: how to get younger generations' loyalty? So, we challenged the students to come up with ideas.
Anna: It was 2017, and we did a 'self-ethnography'. The students had to map all the scents they smelled throughout the day and their physical and emotional reaction to them. It made them conscious about these smells and what they caused as a response, allowing them to be more empathetic when designing products. Then other projects came along, all of which used the body as a sensory receptor to different foods, their homes, their clothes, etc.
Rubén: Some projects were very powerful, like the one that targeted older people. One of the students, Maria, was inspired by her grandmother, who used to be proud of her neat appearance. Her movements became limited due to arthrosis; she was not able to perform her beauty rituals and became more socially isolated. So, Maria developed a whole line of products for people with movement limitations (that can also be used by other people). If you look at bodies with a ruler and a compass, you will design great products for 75% of the population. If you use yours and other people's bodies as an instrument, you'll be much more open to designing products that take them into account.

What's the role of sustainability in somadesign?

Anna: Take the empty packaging, for instance. What does it mean for a person to discard it? Nowadays, it's a feeling of discomfort. Instead of being considered a container which will ultimately be thrown away, packaging should be converted into a concept, a minimal product that allows me to keep the formula in better conditions and helps me to apply it. Something that fulfils this closed life cycle and makes me feel better about it.
Rubén: We must look beyond the packaging and tackle the whole product concept. Society is asking for something different. If packaging becomes a tool, you may wish to have it for life.

How has COVID-19 impacted the way we experience the world and, consequently, consume beauty products?

Anna: One of the consequences is the sales drop in make-up and fragrance, and not because we must wear a mask or are not going out as often. Something important has changed on an emotional level if you have been wearing perfume or applying make-up for 20 years and then suddenly stop doing it. It's the right time to rethink what is meaningful to people and how it should be offered in a socially and environmentally respectful way.
Rubén: I think it has created new routines as well. People have the feeling they are leaving their houses to danger, so I believe in beauty products with a pleasant meaning. A colourful hand

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sanitiser that can be an accessory or make-up that allows you to be playful in a way that's safe.

Rubén and Anna will be talking about Somaesthetics and Somadesign on 28 January, during the Beauty Innovation Days, organised by Beauty Cluster Barcelona.

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***About Quadpack Industries SA***

*Quadpack Industries is an international manufacturer and a provider of enhanced packaging solutions for beauty brand owners and contract fillers. With offices and production facilities in Europe, North America, and the Asia Pacific region and a strategic network of manufacturing partners, Quadpack develops bespoke and customised packs for prestige, masstige and mass market customers. For more information, please visit www.quadpack.com.*




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