Chapter 7
Pretenders and Misleaders in Product Design

ABSTRACT
Meaningful messages may be conveyed in product design with the use of pretenders as the carriers of hidden messages; they refer to visual practices in design, architecture, and visualization. For this reason, they may be useful for working projects in further chapters. The notions of iconic objects, or iconcity of an object, make a basis of product semantics. Proper design versus pretenders, misleaders, informers, double-duty gadgets, and multitasking tools are discussed and then contrasted with the notion of camouflage.

INTRODUCTION
Themes contained in this chapter describe the concerns that may be common for perceptual representation of scientific concepts and the product design. For this reason concepts related to product semantics may be useful for working projects up in further chapters. When we communicate online, send a voicemail, or use visualization to convey our message or information, we often interact with shortcuts. We use signs, symbols, icons and metaphors, connotations and associations to create open or closed messages depending on our intention: whether we want to be understood exactly as intended, or we’d allow for imaginative interpretation.

Object design has to fulfill functional, ergonomically oriented, aesthetic, material, and space related demands. Various trends in product design aim for comfort, simplicity, elaboration,
or a foolproof and easy use, along with aesthetic considerations. The best design is often self-explanatory. However, matching the area of joy of the user is equally important. Some objects are designed to inform and entertain at the same time by mimicking other objects’ characteristics. Some of them are made to mislead us. The thinking behind this design is aimed to entertain, make the day brighter, or make a product more attractive, while fulfilling its purpose.

**CANONICAL OBJECTS**

Some items should always look in an obvious way and be easy to recognize. For example, a fire extinguisher should be easy to find and then used fast without any instructions. Scissors must fit a hand and a hammer should be easy to use. Such objects that have an easy recognizable shape are called canonical objects. In spite of the new line in a design of cellular phones, we still draw an old-style telephone with a round dial to signal where we can find much more modern touch-tone ones in the phone booths (however, phone booths began to disappear).

See Table 1 for Your Visual Response.

**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Visual Response: Canonical Objects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draw as many examples as you can that show the use of images of canonical objects on various signs: at the mall, an airport, or on a road. How the sign designers use visual symbols and an iconic way of communicating information?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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