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# In my hands, in my heart

Change and Transformation in Product Design to Facilitate Emotional Attachment

Yueyun Song  
2016



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Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts endorsed with Design at Massey University, Wellington,  
New Zealand.

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# Abstract

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the design of objects that provide visceral enjoyment, good user experience and strong emotional attachment. This study considers attachment, emotions and transformation in the process of deciding how to introduce a stronger relationship between user and products, so people will want to keep them for the long term.

Using change and transformation, I worked with everyday objects – tableware - to introduce design elements to stimulate emotions and promote emotional attachment. The objects designed for this thesis are either enhancements to existing products, designed to be transformed in an innovative way, or innovative designs that can transform to change the nature or function of the object. I wanted to explore whether I could incorporate the potential for change or transformation initiated by the user, into a product design in a way that elicited positive emotions, and therefore, attachment to the objects I designed.

The thesis discusses four case studies: “Complete and Fragment”; “Construction through Destruction”; “Standing Liquid” and “Reset”. All designs featured objects that changed or transformed, in ways that ranged from passive, gradual or negligible, permanent and irreversible change to the appearance and function of an object, though to dramatic temporary, reversible, incomplete and complete repeatable transformation to the form and function of the object.

Each of the objects had the potential for the user to be involved, to add or not, their input to the design, to change the form or function, or appearance of the product to suit their own aesthetic and needs, thus encouraging the user to develop a long term relationship with the object.



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# Preface

I want users to have a deep relationship with the products I design, to find something meaningful in them that encourages the user to develop emotional relationships with the objects.

My aspirations are fueled by working as a product designer in Guangzhou China since 2008, in an environment focused upon mass production. In China, product design is a service industry, led by engineers, market researchers or overseas trends, and a designer is generally used to solve a problem, adapt an existing design, or add marketability to a product. I believe a designer's job is not merely to solve a marketing or manufacturing problem, but to inspire people to think, feel, recall, so that the product sits in their heart.

A designer adds extra value for the user if they can create potential in an object for the user to discover or build their own story. I am seeking products that are in conversation with users. Instead of users only hearing my voice in the design of the product, I want to add the potential for users to express themselves through my products.

I am also concerned with the sustainability of our lifestyles. I enjoy designing the small, ordinary objects with which we fill our lives, but I am aware that mass production creates problems. Tableware, for example, is cheap and easy to produce for the mass market, but being easily disposed of and replaced leads to waste and greater use of increasingly rare resources. Mass production has encouraged development of a throwaway society, where product users are encouraged to buy new instead of retaining a product for ongoing use. If we want to live in a sustainable way, the wastefulness needs to stop.

My thesis research builds on my first year of Master of Fine Arts study, which led me to consider how art practice can contribute to product design. I explored cultural difference, consumer input in design, and the value of the unwanted, as in the case of "Tea Stain Cup" (Figure 1) mentioned later in this thesis. This study focused me upon how I can capture these values in my thesis case studies.

This year I have taken my thinking further to understand that the emotional experience of art that strengthens my design.



Figure 1  
"Tea Stain Cup"  
Yueyun Song, 2015