Reading Response #1 to *Artful Design* • Chapter 1: "Design Is _____"

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Reading Response: Values and, unrelatedly, Tactility

In Ge Wang's *Artful Design*, he presents Principle 1.15:

> \"Design not only from needs--but from the
> values behind them.\"

The ideas I have always been presented when it comes to engineering, design, and other such endeavors, is that in order for a piece of work to be \"valid,\" it must address some kind of need. Little thought has been given to the idea that needs stem from values, and that the needs that those values generate can be questioned and interrogated. In my opinion, this way of thinking should inform whether a specific need is the place to focus our design skills, rather than the value that that needs stems from. For instance, I recently learned that the school district I grew up in was implementing a program of random drug testing for (essentially) all students. The details are too messy to get into now, but in essence, a huge part of the discussion was how to design the testing process as fair as possible, and to design the punishments for failing the test such that they discourage drug use. Rarely was the implicit, but elephant-in-the-room-like, value of \"we, as the school district, **should** endeavor to find out what drugs our students are taking, and then punishing them for it.\"

Essentially, the school district decided that it valued being part of the carceral system to help purportedly reduce the harms of drug use. From that value sprung the need to design a system that was (or at least looked) fair. However, if we question whether that value is what, as a designer, we feel we should design for, a whole other world of possibilities opens up. In this example, the point is less that school district bad, high schoolers drugs good, but more that awareness of the values informing a design can better illuminate its consequences, whether intentional or not.

On a totally different note, I want to talk about the element of tactility in design. Ge writes that \"the sublime is an aesthetic experience.\" I agree, but I think that the tactile element of the sublime is often ignored. For instance, I make a fair amount of clothing, partially because I think many clothes sold today are designed for an age in which we assume that somebody is filming us at all times. We value how we **look** over any other sensory experience. Thus, the texture, drape, and other tacile elements of clothing are relegated to merely a supporting role. Despite this, I think that a key element of a piece of clothing making someone feel more or less confident is whether it *feels* right to wear. It's the way a fake collar under a sweater doesn't feel like wearing a dress shirt, even though in a photo they may look the same. In addition, because the main ways we interact with consumer technology today are visual, the tactile has been relegated to the back burner in consumer technology. This is partially because we have good ways of generating visual stimuli on demand, while tactile stimuli are not nearly as well-developed. In my opinion, this is what holds back a lot of digital music instruments. Physical instruments provide tactile feedback, and for many musicians, the tactile aspect of their instruments are the cues they become most attuned to, even more than aural cues. Without that tactile feeling, it is very difficult to achieve the sublime. The feeling of a chilly NorCal beach breeze, to me at least, is perhaps even more essential to the experience of that beach than what I can see. Tactility perhaps could be summarized as the element of \"here-ness\" that so often accompany or inform the sublime.

Cymbal Synthesis Chuck File

Parts 1&2

An Electric Outlet

Functionally, an electric outlet is, at first glance, incredibly simple. It exists to be plugged into. However, the tactile experience of using the outlet elegantly points at its more subtle design elements. For instance, some outlets are polarized, and some are not. However, a user doesn't need to know the difference, or even that a difference exists or not. Non-polarized appliances will fit into polarized sockets, but polarized appliances will not fit into non-polarized sockets. The third ground pin is equally elegant–if an electric outlet is not grounded, it will not have the ground pin. This acts as both a visual and a tactile indicator–an outlet can be determined at a glance whether its grounded or not, or even without knowledge of what grounding is, whether a plug would fit into it. Aesthetically, an electric outlet reminds me a little bit of a shocked face. I feel like it always brings me a little bit of joy when i re-see the surprised face in the outlet.

Flute

A musical instrument is an excellent example, to me, of the idea of design as experience. My flute's design, for instance, is in part informed by the music I want to play on it. However, the music written for the flute is also itself informed by the design of the flute. In particular, I am deeply awed by the tactile experience of using the flute and how its designers created so many ways to adjust that experience in so little space. Every single key's tension can be adjusted at will. The scale of the instrument, or how the inevitable imperfectness of its tuning is managed and where compromises are made, is a very clear example of the values of the design. My flute is designed so that the errors are distributed evenly throughout the range. Some flutes are designed so that error is more pronounced in the higher register, so that the lower and mid ranges are more in tune with the understanding that the player will have to work harder to keep those higher notes in tune.

KitchenAid Stand Mixer

I love the KitchenAid. It's one of my favorite kitchen appliances ever. It's job is to provide a rotational force with variable speed vs. torque for different kitchen tasks. I love how it has one single attachment style, so every KitchenAid compatible accessory is compatible with every KitchenAid. I also love how tactile the machine is–you can feel the gears shifting when you up the speed, and it gets harder to do as the speeds get higher. Aesthetically, I really like how the KitchenAid is a statement in itself. It fits right in, especially in a chrome finish, into the design styles of the 1930s, when it was invented, but today, it looks unapologetically like a relic of that era. It seems to suggest that (perhaps in line with a value of longevity) it has been in kitchens for 100 years and will remain in them for 100 more.

Part 3

For my guerrilla design, I decided to design a poster for a happy hour my house is hosting soon, rather than just announcing the date and time. Here it is below:

An example of a design choice I made was to avoid numerals in the date–I felt that adding numerals to the date often draws the attention from what the event actually is and what it is about.