Designs You Don't Know What To Do With: A BOOK ABOUT DESIGN AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

THE MEANINGS OF

# 是我们愈来愈像设计？还是设计愈来愈像我们？

*游 靜*

　　我們生活在一個難以再界定什麼是「物質」的世界。我記得在紐約唸創作時，一群年輕藝術家圍坐著唸新舊的馬克思主義，有同學問：「如果文化可以不被看成是社會的超結構，那樣文化生產者，是否也一如其他生產者，其價值時刻被製造物料的速度與量度來決定？」我們生活在香港，不但每人都

是拜物戀物狂，也許更重要的，是我們已無法分辨，什麼是物質什麼不是。做一件裝置藝術品，作品形式甚至內容，往往取決於什麼物料有貨、什麼是師傅碰巧就手而你又負擔得起。即使電影、錄像、數碼藝術這些慣以為非物質性、virtual 的東西，不但在製作時實在由所有物質性的條件決定，更神奇的，是用看

# Are We Becoming
# The Designs We Don't Know What To Do With?

*Yau Ching*

We live in a world where the notion of "material" is in constant flux. When I was studying studio art production at the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York, we, as a group of young artists, tried to understand the differences between various versions of Marxism: orthodox and neo. One colleague asked, "If culture can be seen no longer as the 'superstructure' of our late capitalist society but as an integral and fundamental part of it, then is the value of cultural producers and workers, as that of any other producers and workers, also determined by our speed of producing material?"

This not only throws into question the arbitrary division between art and material, but also problematises the once mystified and romanticised notion of an artist. Living in Hong Kong today, all of us seem to be helplessly materialistic. Perhaps more accurately, we are all having a hard time figuring out what's a "thing" and what's not. Every step of planning, making, exhibiting or distributing art is pre-determined by the materiality of our reality. When one makes an installation art piece, its form and content have already been decided upon by what stock somebody happens to have been imported and by whatever material which happens to be lying around or left behind from a "real" construction job, since doing a special order for an obscure individual "artist" is a ridiculous idea, unless you are the daughter of Li Kashing.

For media which is usually conceived as non- or less materialistic — more "virtual", like film, video, or digital

與它們的關係跟與所有物質無異。你與一個網址、一部獨立電影、一本口袋書,跟你與你的手機套、全套鹹蛋超人公仔,或芝麻街牙刷、Hello Kitty 拖鞋等,同樣有戀物癖(fetishism)、崇尚嘜頭(由梁家輝、侯孝賢、安哲羅普洛斯,至鹹蛋超人)、貪新忘舊、用完就丟(或看完即忘記)、追隨潮流(《鐵達尼號》不得不看,因為人人都看)等元素。上述諸種傾向,界定我們的主體與所謂外在世界的關係。我們

習慣了用這些關係與外在世界溝通,把外在世界不斷地物質化,即使這世界中充斥著各種原來不一定物質性的東西,譬如資訊、文化、藝術。

過去十年來藝術家逐漸探索藝術品與觀眾互動的各種可能,也可看成是對後資本主義社會勢如強弩地使

art—not only are the possibilities of creation again pre-conditioned by the availability of the materials and machines included, but what is perhaps more fascinating is that the relationship of the user/viewer to these pieces is no different from that of any other material these days. One consumes a web site (on an iMac), an *independent film, a pocket paperback, just as one* consumes a cell phone cover, an Ultraman sticker, or a Hello Kitty toothbrush. One's attitude towards all of the above inevitably involves elements of fetishism, idealisation of icons (from Tony Leung, Hou Hsiao-hsien, to Angelopoulous and Ultraman), "the newer the better; once used, it's waste" mentality, and trendism (I've gotta watch *Titanic*, 'coz everybody is talking about it).

All of the above ideological tendencies prefigure our subjectivity in relation to the world around us. We are so used to these forms of self-positioning vis-a-vis our "external" reality that they *have become the dominant forms of communication.* In other words, we are increasingly materialising our being and our interactions with the world, including its culture and art. When paper seems to be gradually replaced by digital data, rather than experiencing dematerialisation, we are confronted with a shifting notion of material: forms of material that have become less tactile and more virtual.

文化物質化的一種回應。如果藝術品不再被看成是一個獨立自成的個體；如果藝術品的價值、意義隨著觀眾的參與而改變；如果藝術品是否成為藝術品，也甚至由觀眾決定，那樣藝術品是否更能介入觀眾的主體，或更能成為觀眾主體的延伸，而不像一般物質，因為已經自我完成，所以只能被用者選擇擁有或遺棄？

近年來在歐美看到不少提倡互動的藝術作品，包括唯讀光碟、網址、電腦多媒體裝置等，又帶出另一組問題。由於創作者需要控制作品的結構與意義，也必須控制參與者。各種互動的可能往往有預設的行動或答案。你按一下滑鼠，便會觸發一連串事情。你按兩下滑鼠，又會觸發另一串事情。參與者被訓練成按滑鼠的機器，到頭來不過是為了解破藝術家或設計師的預設難題，猶如考學能測驗。

Artists have been exploring various possibilities of embodying interactions between their works and the audience over the past few decades. This can be seen as a response against the overwhelming climate of material culture in late capitalist society. If artwork can no longer be seen as an autonomous entity; if its values and meanings depend on audience participation; if the whole notion of its being art or not, or its being usable, playable or not might even be decided by the audience itself, would it then be able to interfere with the audience's subjectivity, or become an extension of their subjectivity more easily, unlike other materials, which one can only choose to possess or dispose according to their self-completion and predetermined functions?

Many interactive artworks I have seen in Europe and the US in the last few years, including CD-Roms, web sites, or digital/multimedia installations, present another set of problems. Where is the line between the artists' control and audience interaction? If an integral part of artmaking inevitably involves controlling the work's structure and meaning, thus involves controlling the various possibilities of audience participation, then would the audience be only fulfilling a preset function, to come up with an expected action or answer? Does, then, the audience only fulfill a preset function? You click the mouse once to trigger a series of events; you click the mouse twice, to trigger another series of events. The participant becomes another machine — an automation controlled by the function of the machine. What's perhaps even stranger is that the participant also finds her/himself
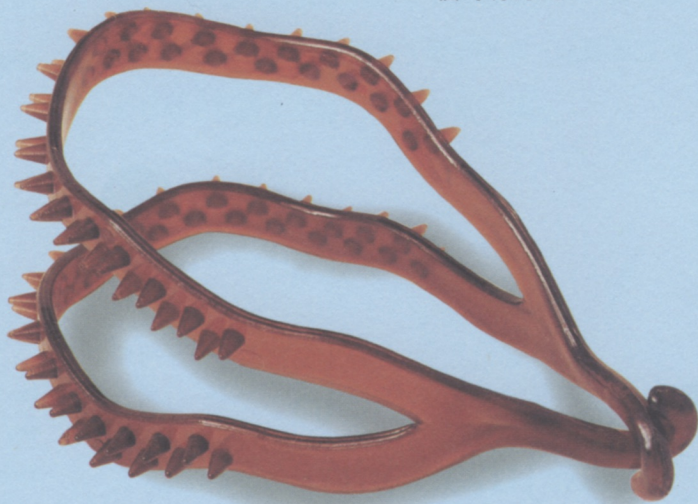
半年前蕭競聰跟我談他
的展覽構思，向我展示他收集
的那些唔知做乜嘅設計，我們在半
說笑間談到請觀眾把場中可以做捕獵蒼蠅的設計找出
來，純粹依靠觀眾的想像與說服力。半年後我們坐在
理工大學飯堂，驚心動魄地發現觀眾在設法想
像及理解蒼蠅的感情及心理結構的情況下，尋
找一些會「嚇死」蒼蠅的設計。這再一次證

明，即使在這樣的社會，也依然有用者決定設計，而
非設計決定用者的條件。藝術品、物質與大眾主體間
的互動，實在還有各種久被埋沒了、尚待發掘的空
間。這大概也是我們作為製造、改造物質的文化生產
者，使藝術、設計逐步趨向民主化的一
個可行方向。

in a position to second guess the artist's preset
answer, an experience similar to trying to pass
the Hong Kong Learning Ability Examination
(HKLAE).

When Siu King Chung first showed me some of his
"designs you don't know what to do with" six months
ago, we half-jokingly came up with an idea to ask
viewers to vote from the collection one thing that
could be used against flies. Recently, we sat at the
PolyU canteen together, stunned by the
imaginativeness and persuasiveness of the ideas
viewers submitted, including one, clearly based on the
psychological and emotional complexity of a fly, which
proposed to use the (freaky) design of an object to
"freak a fly out". This perhaps reminds us once again,

even in the material culture of Hong Kong, that one
can still envision an environment in which the user
controls the function of a design, and not vice versa.
There remains numerous possibilities and unexplored
forms in the interaction between the "thing", the
person who makes the thing, and the person who
uses the thing. For us, cultural producers and workers
are faced with the task of making or re-making
material. This opens up some more possible directions
to democratise art, culture, material, and design.