DESIGNING BURIAL MONUMENTS TO INCREASE EMOTIONAL AWARENESS IN PRODUCT DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The motivation for writing this paper is the growing concern in society towards the amount of products we produce containing low utility and sustainability. Through emotional awareness the student can design meaningful artifacts which extend being more than consumer goods. The hypothesis is that Product Design students designing burial monuments increase their awareness of emotional and meaningful artifacts, and increase their emotional awareness in the design process. Twenty students worked designing burial monuments for a stonemasonry. Their design process was researched trough use of archival studies and participatory observations. The study shows the theme affected the students emotionally, which again influenced their design process. The research indicates that designing burial monuments led to an increased emotional awareness for the majority of students participating in the project.

Keywords: Burial monuments, emotional design, emotional awareness, product semantics, user attachment

1   INTRODUCTION

Several designers and consumers express concern towards an increasing amount of unsustainable and inutile artifacts. Research on emotional durable design and emotional design are aiming to focus on awareness towards the emotional aspect of design [1]. Emotional awareness is important for sustainability, and to achieve user attachment [2]. To design for product understanding the student has to develop consciousness to the use of communicative elements in design [3]. One way of creating awareness in product design education is this project which focuses on increasing the student's awareness towards design being more than consumer goods, and its potential to add meaning to people. The hypothesis is that Product Design students designing burial monuments increase their awareness of emotional and meaningful artifacts, and increase their emotional awareness in the design process.

There are a lot of inutile artifacts with low sustainability [1]. This can be related to themes like the definition of need, and ways to increase student's awareness regarding the utility of the product. A need can be described both from an emotional and a rational point of view. As human beings we are in need of essential artifacts like equipment for cooking and eating, transportation, clothing etc. This can be considered a rational need. On the other hand, if the equipment for cooking is the gold plated version of Philippe Stark's lemon squeezer, and the transportation we need is a Lotus car, we might not be talking about an actual need. The choice is more made from an emotional point of view. Donald Norman [4] describes the distinction between *needs* and *wants*. Needs is what is truly necessary for a person's activities and wants is what a person asks for. Ha claims that wants are determined by culture, by advertising, by the way one views oneself and one's self-image. This idea is supported by Rune Monö [3]. *"What we really pay for brand products, the latest fashions and trendy gadgets is the price of our own status, group affiliation and identity".* In Donald Norman's [4] studies of emotion, he suggests that the human brain work in three different levels; the visceral level, the behavioural level and the reflective level. The visceral level is the automatic, prewired level. The behavioural level is the part that contains the brain processes that control everyday behaviour and the reflective level is the contemplative part of the brain. He claims that each level plays a different role in the total functioning of people and that each level requires a different style of design. The three levels can be mapped to product characteristics like this:

Visceral design	>	Appearance
Behavioural design	>	The pleasure and effectiveness of use
Reflective design	>	Self-image, personal satisfaction, memories

"Apart from styling, what matters to the user (in addition to the product's actual functionality) is the products emotional and symbolic value – its meaning [5]".

Emotional meaning can be added to a product through conscious use of product semantics. Semantics in design has been developed for half a century, but the term *product semantics* first appeared in the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA)'s journal Innovation [6]. Butter and Krippendorff define product semantics as both [7]:

- A systematic inquiry into how people attribute meanings to artifacts and interact with them accordingly
- A vocabulary and methodology for designing artifacts in view of the meanings they could acquire for their users and the communities of their stakeholders

"Design is making sense of things [8]". Krippendorff claims this phrase can be read as *"design is a sense creating activity,"* or it could mean that *"the products of design are to be understandable to their users"*.

2   DESIGNING BURIAL MONUMENTS

The design case which will be the foundation for this paper comes from a course on second bachelor level in the winter of 2012. The course name is Communication and Presentation and gives 10 ects. Product design students were given the opportunity to work in real business collaboration, designing burial monuments for Johansen Monumenthuggeri, a stonemasonry company in Skjeberg, Norway. The students should take into account the company's corporate social responsibility, material properties, the company's production systems and relevant regulations for burial monuments. None of the students were forced into working with this project.

2.1 Research question

Several researchers have worked with semantic awareness and emotional design, but there is no research on how design of burial monuments affects the student's emotional awareness [1], [2], [13]. It is this knowledge gap this paper aims to investigate. This leads to the following research question: Will product design students designing burial monuments increase their awareness of emotional and meaningful artifacts, and make them focus on this issue in the design process?

3   METHODS

The research question will be answered trough a case study with the use of archival studies and participatory observations [9]. From a class of 41 students 20 students attended this project designing burial monuments. The archival studies are based on their project reports and reflection notes. The reason for using archival studies is partly its accessibility for this paper. Through project reports and reflection notes, the student perspective contributes to the research. Thus the student voice is the main source of information. This has been combined with the perspective of participatory observations. Participatory observations in the students design process, has been used as a method to collect empirical data. It is also used through analyzes of the students reflection notes. The student's reflection is important to learn from experience and increase possibilities to do conscious choices [10], [11].

4   FINDINGS

In the students reflection notes and reports there are several comments on new understanding, semantic insight and insight into their own design process. This paper mainly focuses on new insight connected with the specific emotional task of designing burial monuments.

"Designing a burial monument is a very special task, but also interesting. There were special needs to consider in this project. It is strange how a School Project can open for themes with such depth. I had at all not anticipated such themes having its place in a design study before attending this school"(student).

"I feel from this project I have learned how to research the most relevant areas throughout my project. For projects in the future I feel I have learned to more thoroughly consider the human factors involved in the design. How the product reads to them, how it is interpreted in its environment and how people understand their context" (student).

The project was clearly affecting the students on an emotional level. Personal views and experiences regarding death and burial grounds were used as inspiration. Two students experienced the death of close family members during the project. Several students let their design be influenced by personal experiences from visiting graves. Others were affected by working with this theme, which can be exemplified by the following student quotes:

«I chose to work with burial monuments especially for children who die in late abortion, stillbirth or sudden infant death. After some research on the theme I lost a lot of my motivation to continue because the theme really got to me».

«This task has been quite heavy regarding the simple reason one has been designing burial monuments. This theme isn't exactly pleasant and this has for short periods been demotivating, but I have been so lucky I've been able to work closely with fellow students. This has made us able to push each other's projects".

The intention to get the students to work with burial monuments was not to get them depressed. On the other hand the project could have the opposite effect on students. One of the students, who had recently and unexpectedly lost a close family member, claimed it was a bit therapeutic to work with a Burial monument. Another student wrote:

«This was a task I could relate to because of experiences of losing a close family member and growing up with a mother who had a different view on death, religion and faith compared to a traditional Norwegian family. »

Some students solved the design brief with a rational approach where the main focus was on production processes, production costs, material qualities, municipal rules and the stonemasonry's profile. Projects placed in this category would have smaller amounts of emotional aspect attached to them, but everything was thought of regarding production. The company could take the drawings to the workshop and just "plug and go". Others would address the design brief with an almost solely emotional approach. All students had some focus on the emotional aspect and most had some focus on the rational approach. The following examples of students' problem definitions display different levels of emotional approach to the design brief.

1. *"How to change the churchyard from a dull collection of graves to a resting place for different people who have left behind their different and unique prints in the world?"*
2. *"How to make a burial monument, for Johansen Monumenthuggeri, which strengthens today's marked booth technically and visually?" (Figure 1).*

Figure 1. Example of burial monument designed on a mainly rational problem definition

The first problem definition has an almost solely emotional approach. It does not even point out that the solution has to be a burial monument. The second definition has a rational approach. Its goal is to solve the design brief for the company and it has little focus on the emotional part.

Figure 2. A memorial designed from a combination of an emotional and a rational approach

One example of a combination of rational and emotional solutions is the memorial shown in the picture above (figure 2.). The idea behind a memorial is quite rational. This memorial is designed to contain 53 urns within the monument area. When several people are buried in the same aria using a shared monument we save space, maintenance costs and the amount of monuments. But this solution also had emotional connotations. A stone bench was integrated to create a space for reflection and communication. The bench is large enough to create possibility for socialization between visitors. The side of one stone contained the possibility to write greetings and messages to the deceased. These messages would be perishable, washed away in the rain, leaving room for new messages.

Approximately half the class chose other assignments than burial monuments. Several of these students worked with health related design. The majority of students who worked with other assignments designed for the visceral or the behavioural level. About 25% of these students also designed for the reflective level. For those who worked with burial monuments the percentage of students designing for the reflective level were about 70%. In addition 95% of these students designed for the visceral level. Some designed for all three levels. Product semantics was another theme which was emphasized in the project. The whole class showed new insight and understanding into this field.

«I feel the semantic considerations underlying the majority of the project also allowed me to give the aesthetic of the design greater consideration. Where I am used to exploring from with function, the projects nature allowed me to further delve into symbolic connotations. By considering what I wanted to achieve; the weathers interaction with the design as well as the symbolic recognitions of the design, the aesthetic of the design and more importantly the reasoning for my actions where more considered» (student).

5   DISCUSSION

Burial monuments are consumer goods, from an industry with a clear economic view. The monuments are a *need* and usually also a *want* [4]. You need a monument to mark the grave and inform who's buried there. Most people also want a monument to remember their loved ones and have a place to seek comfort. Choosing a monument can be a way to treat your sorrow. This thought can be supported by observations made by students:

"I have observed that many feel that to care for a grave is synonymous with caring for the deceased. Many addressed the stone and stroke it as if it's a link to the deceased. They tell stories, introduce new family members. They communicate with the deceased through the monument, even if there is no answer to receive".

"The burial monuments direct mission is to tell who is lying in the ground, but they also speak of a mourning process. They are for many a spokesman between the relatives and the deceased".

Several students attempted to create a personal bond between the customer and the burial monument. An example is this idea to create a collage through a process where the customer brought photos and information of the deceased. The collage would then be sandblasted into the surface of the stone. The process would help the customer to search through the deceased's life, and progress in the mourning process. The idea of personal bond between the monument and the customer corresponds with the concept of product personalization [12], [13]. *"The more effort a person invests in a product during the personalization process, the more self-expressive value this product obtains, and the stronger the emotional bond with this product becomes* [13]*"*. Most students addressed the design brief both rationally and emotionally. This was also the intention of the assignment. In the design brief the

students were asked to focus on company profile, materials, the company's production system and relevant regulations. These were all factors that would encourage a practical approach. One could say that on account of the design brief most students would have a rational approach. On the other hand the curriculum had the following content: *"The course will promote the student's knowledge and awareness to use communication in a specific design project. The student will learn to communicate through semantic tools…».* This aspect was presented to the students through lectures and tutoring. Looking at Donald Normans [4] studies of emotional design, and the three levels which define how the human brain works, the design with the collage is clearly for the reflective level. Due to the student's emotional approach to the design brief, the majority of burial monuments were designed both for the visceral and the reflective level. Some were even designed for all three levels. The students who chose a rational approach designed primarily for the visceral level. This indicates that an emotional approach to the design makes the student more aware in seeing the artifact in different ways. The findings displayed an extended use of design for the reflective level amongst the students designing burial monuments. The group who worked with other design cases mainly worked on the visceral or the behavioural level. Taking to account that the whole class had the same input through lectures and curriculum, it is likely to assume that this difference in the use of reflective design is related to the specific design cases. Designing for the reflective level, and especially designing consciously on all three levels would, according to Norman, indicate a deeper emotional awareness.

The whole class experienced an increased awareness towards product semantics. But it does not seem that the level of semantic insight was much different for the students working with burial monuments, than for the rest of the class. The students probably reached this increased awareness due to curriculum, lectures and tutoring, and not because of their specific design briefs.

Designing burial monuments for a stonemasonry has a relatively clear framework. This leaves room for emotional exploration. The theme is affecting the students emotionally. This might open up their minds for an emotional approach. The findings showed that some of the students felt it was emotionally though to work with burial monuments. However reading through the reports and reflection notes, and communicating with the class, there is no evidence of depressed students at the end of the course. The student who worked with stillbirth and sudden infant death delivered an excellent project. Her design was one of Johansen Monumenthuggeri's favourites. She seemed thrilled at the end of the course. Another student expressed the following in her reflection note:

"I believe the task has been very thrilling. I liked the combination of the personal, down to earth perspective with a burial monument and a design process. I often find myself a bit resigned and uncertain on the whole of the design profession which may seem a bit superficial and know-it-all, but I feel in this task it was wonderful to work with something more important" (student).

Apparently a lot of the students appreciated this kind of assignment. They embraced the possibility to explore the emotional aspect of the burial monument. This can be seen in the students' problem definitions. Most of these definitions showed an understanding for and an interest to explore the emotional side of design.

6   CONCLUSION

This research indicates that designing burial monuments leads to an increased emotional awareness for the majority of students. Students who worked with the stonemasonry used emotional design to a greater extent in their projects than the group who worked with other projects. Emphasis on emotional design is relevant in design education. The visceral, the behavioural and the reflective level each play a critical role in human behaviour, and an equally critical role in the design, marketing, and use of products [4]. The findings related to emotional awareness from this particular study could potentially translate within the context of other engineering and product design processes. Through integrating an emotional approach in design education, with equal learning outcomes like the examples shown in this study, the designer can increase the utility of the artifact through durable attachment [1] and product personalization [12], [13]. Design work within this or similar areas can trigger the student to develop emotional awareness and consciousness to how artifacts affect people. This leads to a conscious use of communicative elements in the design process, which enables the student to consciously design for product understanding [3]. Finally a quote from Donald Norman [4]: *"Emotional value – now that is a worthy goal of design".*

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