



The Design Philosophy of Symbiosis of All Things: Cross-border Experimental Creation and Reflection on Contemporary Ceramics

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Abstract

Research has shown that "human-centered" design methods can effectively create product functions and evoke emotions that resonate with users, thereby enhancing their satisfaction with the products. However, it remains challenging to stimulate users' perceptual thinking and to improve the interaction and social cohesion between users and the products. The emergence of these challenges undoubtedly highlights the limitations of traditional design methods that rely solely on human needs as the criterion for value judgment. This paper posits that design cannot be accomplished by humans alone. Surrounding materials, tools, objects, and natural elements all possess subjective agency and collaborate with humans to bring artworks into existence. Understanding and guiding design practice from the perspective of a "symbiosis of all things" does not diminish human subjectivity and life experience; rather, it emphasizes the interconnection and symbiosis among all entities. The design concept of the symbiosis of all things can provide a sustainable framework for addressing the ecological crisis faced during the Anthropocene.

Keywords

Design philosophy; art experiment; porcelain plate painting; humanistic reflection

1. Research background and questions

In the 1960s, American science historian Thomas S. Kuhn pointed out that with the continuous deepening of, it has gradually been discovered that the original research "paradigm" is difficult to solve existing problems, thus putting researchers in a crisis. The sign of the scientific revolution is that the "old epistemology" will eventually be replaced by the "new paradigm" and become a new explanatory framework (Kuhn T S, 2003). The "ontological turn" that has emerged in recent years is a new paradigm of "human-nonhuman" theory, which was proposed by academic circles to resolve the long-standing dissatisfaction with the limitations of analyzing the relationship between humans and nature based on the binary framework of "nature" and "culture", as well as to tackle numerous technological constraints and environmental crises. Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro believed that the world is composed of all things, and each of them interrelates and interacts with each other (De Castro E V, 1998). The proposition of the ontological turn in anthropology is consistent with the research paradigm of "Design X" (Norman D A & Stappers P J, 2015) and "Semantic turn" of design (Krippendorff K, 2005), both of them are all re-examining and reflecting on the fact that sci-tech development and modernization should not only be limited to human beings, but also pay attention to other life forms that are entangled with human beings. Together with humans, they form a universe-worlds.

Under such a research background, what is the value of design in this research context? Who are the products specially designed for? How to promote the progress of society through the way of design? Design as a way for human beings to understand the world, how should contemporary artists or designers redesign and present the relationship between "human beings" and "all things", "nature" and "culture", and solve the problems caused by "human-centered design" real dilemma? Therefore, this paper, based on the concept of "follow the Dao of nature and symbiosis of all things", will take the author's porcelain plate painting "Invisible Hills" as a case study. In this research, I try to reflect on the relationship between pottery production and design from the perspective of humanistic experiments and further explore the significance and value of sustainable design in contemporary ceramic creation experiments.

2. Beyond "human-centered design": immaterial, Mitis, and biophilia

Design is often viewed as a discipline that serves "others" (people and things). John Heskett believed that "design is to design a design to produce a design." (Heskett J, 2005). However, the purpose of design is not only limited to meeting the material needs of human beings but also to design for the meaning of life and the future of a better society. Design as an innovative practice, aims to inspire the unique inherent meaning and value of products (Rösch N, Tiberius V, & Kraus S, 2023), and promote a new emotional connection between products and historical, cultural, and social norms. Therefore, more and more designs are beginning to incorporate culture to enhance the experience of designed products. Especially with the rise of the experience economy, designers are paying more attention to users' emotional experience design in order to activate consumers' inner emotions and psychological needs, which enable consumers to permanently experience the existence of memories. Researchers believe that through design innovation, the social function and emotional value of products can be enhanced, which can help increase perceived value and thus increase purchase intention (Feng Xin et al., 2024). With product-centered design, the functions and scope of use of products are constantly improved, and the experience of aesthetic and practical interaction is constantly developed. As a result, more and more researchers/designers are gradually incorporating cultural and psychological factors into design. Although the intervention of cultural factors makes cultural products more innovative and attractive, a large number of homogeneous and replicable products have emerged. product. Richard Buchanan criticized that the designer's style, "is sometimes more than just personal preference for certain types of visual forms, materials or techniques, it is a characteristic way of seeing possibilities through conceptual placements. However, when a designer's conceptual placements become categories of thinking, the result can be mannered imitations of an earlier invention that are no longer relevant to the discovery of specific possibilities in a new situation. Ideas are then forced onto a situation rather than discovered in the particularities and novel possibilities of that situation" (Buchanan R, 1992).

Therefore, overemphasizing the shape and function of products, allowing users to adapt to the object/product-centered design concept, was constantly questioned and denied by researchers in the 1990s. People increasingly hope to incorporate human emotions and moods into design practice. As a result, human-centered design concepts and paradigms have gradually been highly recognized by the industry and audiences. The humanized design of products advocates taking people's multi-sensory experience as the goal orientation, fully considering people's emotions and cognitive feelings, and then designing an effective, easy-to-use, and comfortable product. Researchers pointed out that the closer designers are to users, the more emotional experiences they have, and the easier it is for them to enter the user's inner world. Among them, "empathetic design" can drive innovation, allow users to obtain different product experiences and imaginations, and enable users and designers to reach a certain emotional consensus (Leonard D & Rayport J F, 1997). However, whether empathetic design can interpret the meaning of people's daily lives, Tuuli Mattelmäki and others have put forward different views. They pointed out that the research thinking and practice of empathetic design still remain in product design, it does not bring design closer to the art world, and its design practice is still object-centered design (Mattelmäki T, Vaajakallio K, & Koskinen I, 2014). Miriam Pastor also pointed out that the current state of human-centered design is: Design is mostly Western-centric, male-centric, middle/upper class centric, young and urban-centric, and marginalized groups are still excluded from design, which makes design a new form of colonialism (Miriam Pastor, 2018).

In order to solve the wicked problem between products and human beings, Branko Luki and Barry M. Kätz took a different approach and proposed the "non-object" design method. The non-object design attempts to bridge the folds or gaps between people or products as the center. They advocate starting from neither the product nor the user, but taking the blank emotional zone between the user and the product as the starting point for design (Lukić B & Kätz B,

2012). This method provides innovative thinking space and poetics for design to explore unknown areas. Although the non-object's design concept has shaken off the shackles of time and technology, it created new aesthetic concepts and design philosophy, the designer's emotional care for people and products is still an elitist logic, and the design also has a strong sense of Western-centrism. Due to cultural presuppositions and uncertainty, designers are unable to assess the adverse consequences and social crises that design actions may cause.

In terms of design, researchers have begun to move away from the "people or object-centered" design debate and turn to focus on the diversity and systematization of local culture. James C. Scott proposed the concept of "Mitis" to eliminate the dilemma caused by simplification and regularity of design. On the action level, he emphasized that planning and design should take small steps, and encourage the reversibility and flexibility of design. Design should be preserving the leave space for the temporary limitation of human design capabilities; While in concept, he emphasized the place of design knowledge nature, which is continuously formed through accumulation, is open and shared, and is constantly developing (Scott J C, 2019).

In addition to focusing on people themselves, researchers hold that design also focuses on the relationship between people and nature, which has gradually attracted people's attention and discussion. Especially with the development of technology, visual design has become the focus of people's attention, but the harmonious relationship between humans and nature is often overlooked in design, leading to a series of ecological degradation and other problems. Therefore, design for more-than-human futures should become a new paradigm (Tironi, M et al., 2023). As a member of the ecosystem, humans are facing an ecological crisis. Jonathan Chapman believes that emotionally sustainable design between consumers and products can reduce human consumption and waste of natural resources, and achieve resource recycling (Chapman J, 2009). However, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber believe that to solve thorny problems, the prerequisite is how to define (how to distinguish observed conditions from expected conditions) and position the problem (finding the real problem in a complex network of cause and effect) and determining which actions will effectively close the gap between "ideal" and "fact" (Rittel H W J & Webber M M, 1973). Faced with the ecological crisis and the thorny issues that arise in sustainable development, Lou Yongqi pointed out that we must break away from the traditional model of economic development at the expense of the environment, and while drawing on the successful experience of international sustainable development, we must "use humanistic thinking, especially the Eastern cosmology and values, and to reflect and criticize today's mainstream development paradigm of Westernization from a philosophical level," and promote the sustainable transformation of the economy and society through innovative design (Lou Yongqi, 2017), realizing the integration between human and nature, nature and things, and people and things.

However, the environment is not only a place for human activities, it is also a home for humans and other species to live in symbiosis. The "implicit intelligent design" proposed by researchers such as Han Yacheng and Yu Zhefan undoubtedly integrates design into nature and regards nature as the ontology. Artificial objects are designed in compliance with natural laws to enhance the user experience (Han Yacheng, Yu Zhefan, & Qiu Song, 2018). Unlike other scholars, Italian designer Aldo Cibic has turned to the discussion of "micro-realities", and advocates understanding the relationship between humans and the world from a natural perspective. In his view, nature itself has agency, and its self-expression is full of unpredictability. The responsibility of designers is to use design capabilities to guide the characteristics of social lifestyles, create better and more harmonious social relationships, and provide people with a better and more comfortable lifestyle (Chen Yongqun et al., 2010).

Based on the above literature research, the methods of immaterial design, Mitis design and biophilic design proposed by the above-mentioned researchers try to transcend the design limitations of "anthropocentrism". They incorporate "nature" into the design process, and encourage harmonious symbiosis between humans and the environment., but in the design process, the focus of design still emphasizes people's daily thinking, emotions and behaviors, and the subject is still human. However, the subjectivity of "things" is often regarded as the means of production by researchers in design, and is even exhausted or become extinct. The design philosophy, based on the perspective of symbiosis of all things, has also been reduced to an "unconscious" component. The emergence of these phenomena undoubtedly exposes the limitations of traditional design methods that focus on the "human" vision.

3. Contemporary pottery creative experiment: The case of "Invisible Hills"

When human beings are faced with common survival difficulties, they will instinctively place themselves at the center of the problem to find new design solutions. This also makes improving human well-being and progress the purpose of design. Design anthropologist Ron Wakkary pointed out that in the name of human progress, almost all "non-

human" species and materials are stripped and depleted in design, and it exist solely for human consumption and use. Wakkary thinks human-centered design thinking is not the answer to these problems but rather, its part of the problem (Wakkary R, 2021). In fact, the designer's world is not only a human-centered world, "humans are no longer monarchs of being but are instead among beings, entangled in beings, and implicated in other beings." (Bryant, Levi R, 2011). Every artistic practice of the designer is a combination of symbiosis of all things.

In response to the real dilemmas faced by contemporary art and design, in 2022, I carried out a series of artistic experiments and creations around the "ontological turn" of art, and "Invisible Hills" is one of them. This work adopts the traditional porcelain clay board making and glaze decoration method. In the design of this work, it tries to integrate the theory and method of design, arts and anthropology, and integrates traditional Chinese painting with contemporary ceramic art design. This work is an experimental breakthrough and an in-depth interpretation for the design philosophy of symbiosis of all things.

At the experimental stage of material production in the work of "Invisible Hills", my experimental method is to respect the inherent quality and humanistic texture of materials to explore the form of art, while emphasizing the visual effects, touch and emotional design produced by the combination of different materials. Porcelain clay, as a medium between "human beings" and "all things", is very important for design creation. It is also experiential, memory and even moldable sustainable material. It was excavated from nature and each grain of dirt is unique in color, size and shape. These naturally occurring properties provide unique innovative potential for my experimental art. However, the new soil often lacks a certain stability, so it cannot be directly used for production. The potter will usually wait for the porcelain clay to differentiate for more than half a year. After it has fully absorbed the aura of sunlight, climate and rain. It was incorporated into the design process to stimulate the potential narrative of porcelain clay. In terms of glazing process, I will also continue to explore and experiment in the interactive stacking of "raw" and "cooked" glazes. The purpose of this experimental session is to verify the different visual and tactile experiences that glaze colors of different materials may have. In the firing process, this porcelain plate painting is made by 1200 °C high-temperature firing and medium decorating firing at a temperature of 730-780 °C. Its firing shaping cannot be achieved without the joint cooperation of natural things, such as gold, wood, water, fire and earth. All things as members of the medium, it's not only imperial powers that have agency, it but also directly affect how humans organize themselves into society. From this, the process of life transformation from "earth" to "vessel" seems to be completed independently "artificially", but the practice of each link reveals that pottery is the product of the cooperation of multiple forces.

Inspired by the design experiment of "symbiosis of all things", I tried to integrate elements such as people, mountains, rocks, and plants from different perspectives into the same painting in terms of color combination and composition. This kind of artistic experiment breaks the limitations of traditional painting and ceramics setting in a single time, a single space, and a single figure, allowing painting and porcelain, humans, and all things to achieve equal interweaving and cooperation in the same space. This creation strives to "person" back to the nature, it aims to trigger human beings to reflect on their own behavior, and realize that all things live together. In this work, I want to express that "human beings" and "all things in nature" live in naturally and coexist in harmony. Within the "heart", people are intoxicated with themselves. Under the boundless sky, where are the mountains? Beyond the "heart", the nature is vast and varied, man is just an ordinary part in nature. For the present and the future, man should "respect nature, conform to nature, and protect nature". We should explore how man and nature can live in harmony, and explore the way of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Through the cross-border experiments of "Invisible Hills", we find that more and more contemporary artists are constantly connecting "human beings" and "all things" in the form of design, expanding the subject concern of design beyond humans, which finds a new way out for the practical dilemma of contemporary art.

The process of transformation of the "symbiosis of all things" design is not "anti-design" or "anti-planning", nor does it advocate that the practice of design should be completely or partially undertaken by "all things", such as machines and nature. Instead, it responds to the neglect and concealment of all things by rationalism and "people-centered" design. The proposal of "symbiosis of all things" design is precisely to take people out of the regulations and dense meaning space of modernity so that people can see the true structure of the real world and the subjective value of "symbiosis of all things" in the design process (Hua Guanqing et al., 2023).

In fact, the design of "symbiosis of all things" in the ontological sense does not exist, but it can drive the collision and combination of the subject's internal and external worlds so that the design can find "human beings" from "all things". To a certain extent, it transcends the local values and practice of advanced technology, and moves towards

an artistic philosophy of "follow the Dao of nature and symbiosis of all things". It can reconcile the current rifts between technology and art, nature and culture, and between people and objects. The design of "symbiosis of all things" makes the relationship between designers and works not a pure production relationship. In general, from the work "Invisible Hills", we can see that art is not the product of the alienated labor of designers, but the ontology that is co-generated by the imprints and turmoil of humans and all things.

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