

HANDMADE MEMORIES

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Abstract. Our memories can put their signatures on handmade products and the way an object is made can colour our emotional response to it. I use handmade pullovers by Ms Sirkka Könönen, the textile artist, and anonymous traditional pullovers from Korsnäs and Ostrobothnia as examples and ask how these products convey memories. To shed light on the phenomenon I use a ‘product essence analysis’. Relying on Charles S. Peirce’s theory and his categories of ‘Firstness’, ‘Secondness’ and ‘Thirdness’ I have formulated three stages to describe how to observe a product: ‘first impression’, ‘factual’ and ‘interpretation’. The product is interpreted as a semiotic base in which various signs and sign-combinations become anchored. Part of the interpretation is to look how these products serve memory. Pullovers from the Korsnäs district have drawn much attention because of their visual qualities. The Jussi pullover (known by this name because of a character in a play) is associated with notions of self-reliance and is perceived as a symbol of a special way of being a man and a Finn. Users are fascinated by Könönen’s pullovers and, when using them, experience their share of the glow. Pullovers convey collective memories of being Finnish. Pullovers are also very private objects and convey memories of the maker or the giver and of the relation to the owner’s life story.

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1. Introduction: craft as memory

The discipline – craft science – which I represent, provides a varied perspective on the study of products. Research in craft design science deals with people’s relationships with their surroundings and with the modelling of the living environment. This research addresses product design and manufacture, the material and non-material results, the relationships between the maker, the processes and products, and between the products and culture (Seitamaa-Hakkarainen et al. 2007). The main goal of this paper is to examine the handmade product as a conveyer of meaning, particularly as a conveyer of memory.

It seems that crafts provide a good way of having something important in life, to experience its highlights, and to strengthen your identity, to leave your fingerprints in the world. Crafts mean both the concrete product and the process of making it. It has been discovered that in a hobby situation the interest is focused more on the process than on the final product, however they are related to each other.

Handmade products are often very personal and therefore good examples of meaningful products. To illustrate this point, I use different types of pullovers, the 'anonymous' traditional Finnish pullovers and pullovers made by Ms Sirkka Könönen. The traditional pullovers from the Korsnäs district represent decorative and colourful designs from the 1870s. Korsnäs pullovers are in popular use even today. The Jussi pullover design from the 1920s is quite modest but also still widely used. The Jussi pullovers were designed for the stage and cinema for a character called Jussi, with the traditional models in museums as their starting point. Later on, they became very popular as men's everyday garments. Könönen, a textile artist, has made pullovers as part of her production since the 1980s. Her pullovers are colourful and she uses motifs from nature, such as plants and animals. In my article, I raise the question how these pullovers convey memories. To answer the question I analyse them by a method I call the 'product essence analysis'. The product essence analysis is a means of decoding the unspoken information inherent in an object. The analysis begins by first forming an intuitive impression. The purpose of the next step, the in-depth study, is to find factual information. The third stage, the interpretation, seeks to identify any universal traits and to formulate the key to understanding the phenomenon. I also present my observations concerning previous research.

Handmade memories can put a signature on a crafts product and the process of making it. Handmade memories can be product memories, process memories and bodily memories. Often, the stories related to the product provide the product with special meaning. Kwint (1999:2) stated that objects serve memory in three main ways. They furnish recollection and constitute our picture of the past, they stimulate our remembering by bringing back experiences, and they form records by storing information beyond the individual experience. Senses are also a powerful source of material for memories and the body carries them somatically (Stewart 1999:17).

Korsnäs pullovers can help us to understand something of past life. Jussi pullovers evoke memories of some kind of Finnishness. Könönen's knitwear often conveys private memories. Memories for the user and for the maker are different. If we have material objects as the only research material, we cannot find the whole story.

2. Sources and method

I am interested in products which convey strong meanings. Often handmade products and products which express cultural significance are especially full of

meanings. Clothes are rich in semantic content. Susan Kaiser (1997:216) has pointed out the role of clothing as a signal in addition to its practical purpose. By signal she means the social meaning to another. Minna Uotila (1994) debates the way we construct images in the way we dress. We may, through our clothes, express what we would never voice either orally or in writing.

Clothing is a very explicit conveyor of meaning, since clothes are worn daily, both in private and in public. The ideas linked with clothing are directly related to their function, i.e. the purpose for which a certain item of clothing is used will affect how it is interpreted and evaluated. Clothing has function-related material value and symbolic value.

The information concerning folk sweaters consists of museum collections and other collections, including historical material comprising of old documents and pictures, as well as knitwear (Luutonen 1997). I formed a picture of textile artist Sirkka Könönen's pullovers by examining the products, and reading the numerous articles about her in the press. I have analysed 25 representative articles with content analyses and the close reading method and classified their themes. This also formed the framework for the interview. I interviewed Sirkka Könönen in her workshop twice in the year 1998 and four times in 1999 (Luutonen 1999).

To interpret the material I have developed an essence analysis of the product. Essence analysis is one way to open the unspoken information inherent in an object. It is not a vehicle for transporting the researcher in a time-machine into a bygone era or for viewing the object as in a documentary film. Instead, it is a tool for approaching the phenomena embodied in the object from a present-day perspective. The products serve as vehicles for symbols and their combinations (Luutonen 1997, 2002, 2007).

My aim was to add depth to the analysis of products by employing the methods of semiotics and phenomenology. In devising this approach, I have drawn on Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs and phenomenological categories. Peirce's semiotic theory is based on the concepts of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. These three categories illustrate man's relationship with reality, where Firstness refers to immediate, non-analytical feeling, Secondness is the dynamic relation between actions and reactions, and Thirdness is the general rule by which feelings and actions are brought into relation (Peirce 1958: 220-221).

Semiotics provides tools for the study of meanings. Products convey certain ideas associated with cultural, psychological, social and economic values. The meanings we assign to products derive from certain values, or conceptions of what is good, and also from the products' intrinsic physical properties. Meaning is assigned to a product through a culture-bound process. Ideas are transferred from culture to product, and these ideas are then perceived as passing on to the person who uses the product. Advertising and fashion facilitate this process of transference. The product's maker, by contrast, has limited scope to influence the meanings attached to the product. Once it belongs to the user, the product begins to lead a life of its own; the user makes it their own (Ilmonen 1933 and McCracken 1988).

The essence analysis of the product begins with a first impression, an intuitive examination free from analysis. Any information that may be available is set aside, and instead the researcher tries to absorb only the first impression made by the item itself. The next step, depth study, is to find any factual information about the product or phenomenon. This applies both to the physical properties and to what they represent. In the case of a craft product this will include data about the person who made it and thus an understanding of the process by which it was made. As an aid in the systematic analysis of this material, I have adapted the product functions outlined by Victor Papanek (1970, 1995). In order to analyse what the product represents, it has to be placed in its natural context. The analysis thus proceeds to the genesis, history and use of the product, and the researcher's concept of the phenomenon. This will be based on the first impression and depth study. The interpretation will also seek to identify any universal traits and to act as a key to understanding the phenomenon.

My final conclusions are drawn at the interpretation stage, the most challenging section of the study. It draws together the intuitive and factual stages of the study, the aim being to form a general understanding of knitwear as a broad phenomenon. In all three categories, the product is interpreted as a semiotic base in which various signs and sign-combinations become anchored. The product is examined as an icon, an index and a symbol. The perspective of my analysis varies at each stage. At the first impression stage, the observers' perspective is emphasized. The depth stage brings forward the perspectives of the maker, the user and the viewer. The interpretation stage presents the author's conclusions, combining all the above perspectives.

Table 1. Essence analysis of the product.

ESSENCE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT	SIGN	ANALYSIS	ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT
First impression	Icon	<i>NOW</i> Feeling Intuitive First impression made by the item itself	
Depth study	Index	<i>GONE</i> Factual Information Papnek's Function Matrix: 1) method, 2) use, 3) need, 4) consequences, 5) association and 6) aesthetics	
Interpretation	Symbol	<i>FUTURE</i> Universal traits Meanings Understanding Objects' way of serving memory: furnishing recollection, stimulating remembering and forming records	

3. Traditional knitwear as conveyer of memory

I examine the Korsnäs and Jussi pullovers using the essence analysis of the product. I analyse the first impression stage by recording initial responses to a set of photographs and pullovers from museum collections. This is not an 'authentic' first impression; it is a contrived test situation (see Tables 2 and 3). In the final interpretation stage, I present my conclusions on the two types of pullovers (see more detailed information in Luutonen 1997).

Folk crafts are commonly associated with qualities perceived as representing tradition, i.e. a collective body of knowledge, skills and experiences belonging to a particular community. There is no such thing as Finnishness per se, as it needs a physical manifestation such as a product to which to be anchored.

3.1. Korsnäs pullovers

(See Plate 10, Photo 1)

Throughout their history, Korsnäs pullovers have primarily drawn attention for their visual qualities. Seldom are they noted especially for their warmth or other practical properties. The process by which meaning is assigned to them has been influenced not only by their physical qualities, but also by publicity gained through the people who wear them, through research, published material and handicrafts courses. The main features for which they are noted are their colours, their decorativeness and their unique design. Korsnäs pullovers can be regarded as the decorative epitome of traditional Finnish knitwear. Artisans have a particular appreciation for the fascinating and intricate technique by which they are made: not everyone is able to knit this type of pullover; hence the makers' skills are highlighted.

The pullover is also an emblem of local heritage; it is a symbol of Korsnäs, of Finland's Swedish-speaking community, and of 'Finnishness' in general. Modern-day copies of traditional Korsnäs pullovers are iconic references to their original prototypes, which are now found only in museums. As an index, the Korsnäs pullover represents superior workmanship, an appreciation of traditional handicrafts, a particular style, and a warm article of clothing. The people who wear Korsnäs pullovers wish to emphasize their originality by wearing a unique item of clothing, and in doing so they also express what values they appreciate. For the maker, the pullover is a demonstration of his or her special skills. Some Korsnäs pullovers are girls' gifts for their fiancés. The human significance of these items is considerable and tells of the special relationship (Luutonen 1997, Dahl 1934).

Table 2. Analysis of Korsnäs pullover.

ESSENCE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT	SIGN	ANALYSIS	ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT <i>Korsnäs pullover</i>
First impression	Icon	<i>NOW</i> Feeling Intuitive First impression made by the item itself	<i>special</i> <i>handmade</i> <i>decorative, colourful</i> <i>for use, warm</i>
Depth study	Index	<i>GONE</i> Factual Information Papnek's Function Matrix: 1) method, 2) use, 3) need, 4) consequences, 5) association and 6) aesthetics	method: <i>craft (knitting and crocheting), wool, colours, decoration, pattern design, motifs</i> use and need: <i>for use and for showing, personal relation, gift, roots, showing skills, income</i> consequences and association: <i>time and timelessness</i> aesthetics: <i>style, time, beauty ideal, decorative, handmade</i>
Interpretation	Symbol	<i>FUTURE</i> Universal traits Meanings Understanding Objects serving memory: recollection, remembering, forming records	<i>personality</i> <i>personal relationship</i> <i>Finnishness</i> <i>roots</i> <i>nature</i> <i>past living, making process and skills of maker, personal memories</i>

3.2. The Jussi pullover

(See Plate 11, Photo 2)

As for the Jussi pullover, little attention is generally paid to its physical appearance, but it nevertheless enjoys a high profile and is instantly recognizable. Its design is eminently functional, thereby enabling the pullover to acquire its particular symbolic value. The Jussi pullover is perceived as a symbol of the district of Härmä, of the region of Ostrobothnia and of all things inherently Finnish. It is associated with notions of self-reliance and primordial force. People who wear this pullover are undoubtedly aware of the values they represent in doing so. The pullover sends out a certain message to the onlooker, who may not otherwise associate the wearer with these particular attributes. The symbolic value of the pullover has been reinforced by Artturi Järviluoma's popular play, *The Ostrobothnians*, by the Finnish film industry and by performers who wear the pullover as a stage costume. Emotions aroused by Jussi pullovers can be so strong that many people feel that they are impossible to wear. In both cases the story of

the item is interesting and users can feel that they are wearing something of the story.

Traditional knitwear is a semiotic repository in which meanings become anchored. This special attribute partly accounts for the long life-span of folk-style knitwear. Its physical properties make this possible, but its symbolic value appears to have greater significance. By wearing rustic pullovers, we thus tell others who we are and what we stand for (Luutonen 2001).

Table 3. Analysis of the Jussi pullover.

ESSENCE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT	SIGN	ANALYSIS	ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT <i>Jussi pullover</i>
First impression	Icon	<i>NOW</i> Feeling Intuitive First impression made by the item itself	<i>Ostrobothnian</i> <i>traditional</i> <i>manly</i> <i>ordinary</i> <i>for use</i>
Depth study	Index	<i>GONE</i> Factual Information Papnek's Function Matrix: 1) method, 2) use, 3) need, 4) consequences, 5) associa- tion and 6) aesthetics	method: <i>craft (machine or hand</i> <i>knitted), various material,</i> <i>common colours and decora-</i> <i>tion,</i> use and need: <i>for use and for</i> <i>showing, roots</i> consequences and association: <i>time and timelessness</i> aesthetics: <i>traditional design,</i> <i>ordinary</i>
Interpretation	Symbol	<i>FUTURE</i> Universal traits Meanings Understanding Objects serving memory: recollection, remembering, forming records	<i>personality</i> <i>manly Finnishness</i> <i>self-reliance</i> <i>primordial force</i> <i>roots</i> <i>nature</i> <i>theatre and film history, manly</i> <i>Finnishness, personal memories</i>

4. Beautiful and useful, Sirkka Könönen's knitwear

(See Table 12, Photo 3)

Knitwear dominates textile artist Sirkka Könönen's production because knitwear is her idea of a good product: useful and warm and it can also have long-lasting funny shapes and it is used up or recycled.

The phenomenon is initially examined by exploring the first impression given by the press and then looking at the reality, the process that started this pheno-

menon and finally at the interpretation of the result. The headlines of the articles gave an impression that the journalists were describing the personal feelings they got from looking at the sweaters. Their charm lies in the nature themes such as animals and plants as well as magnificent colours. The product fascinates the observer. They have a captivating aspect that makes potential customers want to have a sweater of their own. Through interviews with Sirkka Könönen, I tried to build up a picture of her world, to interpret her works and give them meaning.

Nigel Cross (1999:25–39) feels that one form of good designing is being able to create an attractive product. People may purchase a product that they have never been able to even dream about. An owner of Könönen's violet pullover became enchanted about the glowing pullover and wanted to get some of that glow too. Good designing according to Cross is not just an optimal solution for a certain need but it is new and creative. Könönen started working on the ordinary sweater and knitted it again making it into something new, into utilitarian art. At the same time she knitted into the pullover her views on the environment and nature.

The knitter can make the pattern show in a beautiful way and sometimes even spoil the overall look. Pullovers convey memories of the knitter's skills. The same aspects that the customer can relate to, can also have influence on the purchase. These aspects can have something to do with the person's appearance, the

Table 4. Analysis of the Könönen pullover

ESSENCE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT	SIGN	ANALYSIS	ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCT <i>Könönen pullover</i>
First impression	Icon	<i>NOW</i> Feeling Intuitive First impression made by the item itself	<i>charming</i> <i>decorative and colourful</i> <i>nature themes</i> <i>handmade</i> <i>for use, warm</i> <i>textile art</i>
Depth study	Index	<i>GONE</i> Factual Information Papnek's Function Matrix: 1) method, 2) use, 3) need, 4) consequences, 5) associa- tion and 6) aesthetics	method: <i>craft (knitted), wool, colours,</i> <i>decoration, pattern design, motifs,</i> <i>quality</i> use and need: <i>for use and for showing,</i> <i>personal style, gift,</i> consequences and association: <i>time</i> <i>and timelessness, story, mission</i> aesthetics: <i>textile art, decorative,</i> <i>special colours, handmade</i>
Interpretation	Symbol	<i>FUTURE</i> Universal traits Meanings Understanding Objects serving memory: recollection, remembering, forming records	<i>personality</i> <i>nature, ecological responsibility</i> <i>beautiful and useful</i> <i>designer and maker, personal</i> <i>memories</i>

customer's surname can be the same as the animals, the customer's personality can be similar with the characters of the animal in the folk-tales or a general interest in nature. Many people called Violet have become owners of a violet sweater. Every user of the sweater has also attached their own meanings to it that can have something to do with how the user got the pullover, for example as a gift.

6. Conclusion

My main goal was to examine the handmade product as a conveyer of meaning, particularly as a conveyer of memory. This study shows that handmade products convey memories in different ways. For artisans, Korsnäs pullovers convey process memories of interesting crafts. Korsnäs pullovers in museum collections tell stories from a little Swedish-speaking rural district. Korsnäs pullovers have primarily drawn attention because of their visual qualities. Seldom are they noted especially for their warmth or other practical properties. The process by which meaning is assigned to them has been influenced not only by their physical qualities, but also by publicity. The Korsnäs pullover has a history of 150 years. These pullovers are still made and used. It is interesting because of its visual and symbolic values.

For the Jussi pullover, little attention is generally paid to its physical or visual qualities. Its design is primarily functional, thereby enabling the pullover to acquire its particular symbolic value. It is associated with notions of self-reliance and is a symbol of special masculine Finnishness. The Jussi pullover is used quite often by both older and younger people, and for the most part by men. Emotions aroused by Jussi pullovers can be so strong that many people feel that they are impossible to wear. In both cases the story of the item is interesting and users can feel that they are wearing something out of a story. The meaning may be far more valuable than the object itself. Many items of clothing operate as visible and easily decoded messages.

The charm of Könönen's pullovers lies in the nature themes such as animals and plants as well as the magnificent colours. People are fascinated, and when wearing them, they feel as if they acquire part of the pullover's glow. They have a captivating aspect that makes potential customers want to have a sweater of their own.

Sirkka Könönen's Korsnäs and Jussi pullovers express feelings and bear symbolic meanings. These are the main reasons why they are still interesting and in use. Their physical properties are also successful. So what can be learned from these examples? One formula for a meaningful product is to combine a workable solution and a fascinating story. The story in these cases can be interesting crafts and visual qualities, an artist's own story or a cultural story. The story makes the product meaningful and gives for the user a possibility to add their own values and make it feel like his/her life story. They bear some kind of authenticity which is timeless.

Handmade products integrate human factors. They can be tailored and are user-friendly. Their material and techniques are flexible and it is easy to consider personal wishes. Industrially made products try to achieve usability for everyone, but handmade products try to achieve this for one special person. According to Patrick W. Jordan (2000,13–14) emotional benefits are those pertaining to how a product affects a person's mood. Pleasure from a product comes from the relationship between a person and a product. Jordan uses the four pleasures espoused by Canadian anthropologist Lionel Tiger (1992, 53-60). Physio-pleasure has to do with the body. Socio-pleasure is the enjoyment with others and psycho-pleasure pertains to people's cognitive and emotional relations. According to Jordan, idea-pleasure pertains to people's values, and Tiger writes, "idea-pleasure is mental, aesthetic, and often intensely private".

These three types of pullovers are functional and easy to use. Pleasure is a natural part of them. Pullovers are comfortable and nice to touch. To put on a sweater often indicates leisure time. When someone receives a sweater from someone who maybe made it by hand, it tells about human relationship. A nice, beautiful and suitable piece of clothing is emotionally satisfying. Ecological responsibility, for example Könönen's sweater with nice motifs from nature, can represent idea-pleasure.

Traditional knitwear, such as Jussi and Korsnäs pullovers, bears memories of their history and production process. Artisans also have bodily memories of that production process. The Jussi pullover of today still refers to manly Finnishness as exemplified in *The Ostrobothnians*. Sirikka Könönen's knitwear bears in many cases the owner's own memories or memories of who gave it as a gift. Knitwear like many other products can stimulate remembering.

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Photo 1. Korsnäs pullover. Photo: Luutonen 1983.



Photo 2. Jussi pullover, postcard, film Pohjalaisia 1925.



Photo 3. Pullover design by Sirkka Könönen Photo: Luutonen 2003.