



Object Care as an Intentional Experience between Art and Design

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ABSTRACT

Over the century, modern culture has produced many critical discourses on subject-object relationship that draws attention to: 1. subject-object polarity, 2. position of design as a very certain kind of objects in the world of goods that either serve for ideas and dreams or represent subjects' identities. Subject-object relationship is mainly debated on two processes: industrial production and mass consumption of objects. Critical texts on industrial production of objects emphasize the theory of alienation. The mass consumption of things is criticized focusing on loss of meaning and experience context. The study is based on a critical practice, entitled as 'object hospital' between art and design in order to emphasize intentional experience as a more complimentary subject-object relationship in the context of meaning and experience. Object Hospital, in which a group of abandoned objects are cared as phenomenological reflection, is related with Husserlian concept of intentional experience along with the thematic dualities: 'recognition' and 'relatedness'; 'meaning' and 'healing'; 'care' and 'production' in relevance of design within socio-cultural context.

Keywords: Subject-Object Relationship, Design, Object Care, Intentional Experience, Phenomenological Reflection

1. INTRODUCTION: Subject-Object Problem and Design

Discourses on design in the context of subject-object problem are theorized on either production or consumption cycles of design object. In the industrial production cycles, the problem is emphasized with the theory of alienation as a result of mechanization and capitalism. The worker is alienated to his object in the context of inner and outer worlds. The worker's labour becomes an object of the outer world rather than being something belonging to his own or inner world (Marx, 1844: 324). However, the problem is that human beings need his/her object for his/her self-expression. This theory of alienation leads to the lack of expected interaction between inner and outer worlds. This expected interaction is needed for the self expression (Hegel, 1977: 160).



In the consumption cycles of things, design object is used for symbolic representation of subjects. The experience and meaning are the main theoretical terms to criticize the subject-object relationship which rest on symbolic representations. The appearances of things are coded for meanings and communications. The purchased goods are supposed to define the individuals' identities and lifestyles. Consumption referred to "[...] the exercise of taste as part of a self identifying act" and "[...] 'having' rather than 'being'" (Julier, 2000: 48). The notions on identity and lifestyle function for the development of a distinctive middle class culture (Chaney, 1996: 21-22). The consumption of things are rested especially on symbolic and sign values rather than functional and use values; "[...] sign values- what things look like and how that image is interpreted" (Julier, 2000: 49). It is the cultural field, "[...] objects also serve as representations of and for subjects" (Keane, 2006: 198). This cultural field let subjects play with the symbolic potential of the objects to represent themselves.

2. THE METHOD OF THE STUDY AS PRACTICE AND THEORY

The study is based on a critical practice/workshop on object care that originated in this critical socio-cultural context. This critical practice is entitled as 'object hospital.' Through this paper, the study attempts to link practice with the theory. The theoretical discourse of the practice is developed through the intentional experience of Husserl. Thus, the study challenges to bridge a phenomenological theory with a practice between art and design.

2.1. Practice: Workshop on Object Care

The study criticizes material interaction without any physical contact that are defined either as alination or signification. The workshop tries to clarify and justify this critical point of view through a workshop. The workshop on object care is influenced by the idea that craft experience involving special tools is a more fundamental way than signification in order to contribute to the cultural and daily lives of people. (Dant, 2004: 109). The objects involving chairs, drawers and coffee table sets are collected to be cared by a workshop team involving two instructors and ten undergraduate design students of different design disciplines. Object care is developed as a critical practice with a special intention of having a physical and transcendental experience with material objects. The objects, which are collected and cared on purpose for this study, are listed below (Figure 1):

Two wooden chairs with upholstered seats (No 1, 2),

An old fashioned group of wooden coffee table grouping (No 3),

A broken wooden bench with missing sitting surface (No 4),
A circular wood surface (No 5),
A drawer with a missing chest (No 6),
A bedstand with a missing drawer (No 7), and
A set of legs without flat top (No 8).

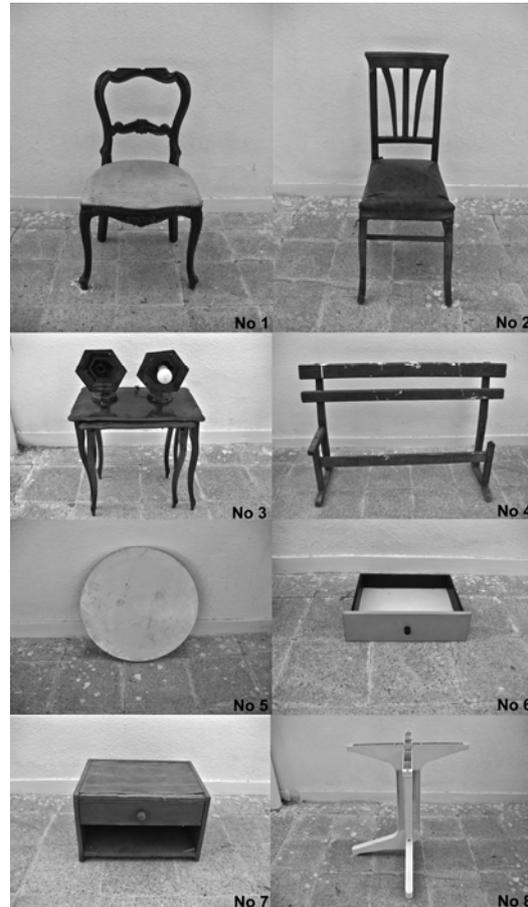


Figure 1. A Group of Abandoned Objects with Missing and Broken Parts

2.1.1. Workshop: Critical Practice Between Art And Design

The workshop is defined as critical practice between art and design. It is critical practice since it underlines the subject-object problem that bridges the theory with practice. It is between art and design because the relationship between 'the practice' and the term 'function' places the 'object hospital' between art and design. Jane Rendell (2006) defines the works created within the borders of art and design as critical practice. She separates art from architecture in terms of their relation with function. For her, art does not have to be as functional as design. If the workshop was simply about 'object care', it would be addressing to the studies in design and would be about the usability of the objects in a traditional way after some maintenance and care. 'Object hospital' is not organized to regain daily uses of the objects. It rather functions for critical thinking and

intentional experience. Although object care is involved the traditional practices of such as cleaning and painting, at the end of the workshop, objects don't maintain their original functions as chairs, tables, etc. They rather provide a representation or ideal setting for critical thinking on the problem of subject-object-design. They reflect a new experience of 'object care' in an unusual way that could be placed somewhere between art and design (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Production of Missing Parts 'Between Art and Design'

2.2. Theory: Phenomenological Reduction, the Realm of Reflections

The practice, Object Hospital, is theorized on Husserl's phenomenological method: phenomenological reduction—the realm of reflections. The study defines this critical practice as phenomenological reflection based on intentional experience at subject-object interaction. For Edmund Husserl, phenomenological reflections reveal the intentional experience that the objects are intentionally focused on. According to him, these experiences not only may have their own characteristics, but also may be in countless forms.

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Husserl defines "phenomenological reduction as achieving the attitude directed toward pure experience" (Husserl, 2006: 29). Phenomenological reduction is applied to be able to generate new kind of reflections which are unnatural, but based on the special intentional acts, transcendental (Moran, 1999: 157). In this context, stating something about the things is realized not in terms of mere form, but of content (Husserl, 2008: 116). Based on its content, object hospital is stated as phenomenological reflection. In this realm, the understanding of the terms such as noema and noesis becomes necessary to understand the route to object for experience.



While the subject is materially human being, experience as the performance of reduction takes place within material real world (Cerbone, 2006: 33). The meaning of the Husserl's noema is 'the perceived as perceived'. Noema is "[...] the route to the object. [... we can see the object but] we can not see the noema" (Moran, 1999: 157). John J. Drummond defines the terms: noema and noesis. "The noesis is the act philosophically considered; the noema is the intended objectivity philosophically considered, just as it is intended with its significance for us, in relation to our aiming interests and concerns, and with certainthetic characteristics" (Drummond, 2003: 71). The noema is clarified as three points: it can be integrated into an act, it can be a sense and it can be understood as the identical or ideal content and accordingly the noema can name an object (Ricoeur, 1996: 18).

The noematic constitution of the practice means the routes involving acts, senses, and contents to the group of abandoned objects to provide healing, caring and familiarity. The missing parts of the objects are examined for which is a part of the healing stage. The existing pieces of the objects are cleaned and painted. It was the route involving the acts as cleaning, and painting for caring. The objects are understood in their socio-cultural contexts in relevance of their identicals. It was the route for relatedness.

2.2.1. Intentional Experience

For Husserl, "Knowing about things in themselves means having a subjective experience called 'knowing', [...]" (Husserl, 2008: 154). He puts emphasis both on the 'conscious subject' and the drive needed for 'being directed towards an object' to achieve so-called intentional experience. According to this theory, the 'conscious subject' becomes complete or rather united with the object in concern. In another words, conscious subject completes his/herself with the object.

Intentional experience requires intentional consciousness. For Husserl, consciousness means being conscious of an object in the first sense. Yet, this approach differs from the one defining intentional consciousness. Intentional consciousness requires "[...] to be an experience, not only to be experienced, however, but to 'have' an object in itself, whether seeing it adequately, having it given in another way, or referring to it transcendingly." (Husserl, 2008: 244-45). In the intentional experience, the conscious subject gets engaged with an object in different transcendental ways. "Every experience that has the distinctive quality of intentionality, namely the quality of being-conscious-of-an-objectivity, of being-directed-toward-it, we call an intentional experience or consciousness in the second sense." (Husserl, 2008: 244-45).



It makes contact with objects (Cerbone, 2006: 22). "A state of consciousness is directed at an object [...] by means of a representation of that object. Such a representation then serves as a psychic intermediary between the state of consciousness and the object [...]" (Keller, 1999: 16). Conscious subject thematizes the intended object in a referential interconnectedness with the other objects that Husserl calls as horizontal consciousness—subject uses a concept being conscious of potentials. (Held, 2003: 19). The intended object appears in a horizon. It places itself within a network of other objects which are simply other reflections of itself (Ricoeur, 1996: 19).

As the intentional experience requires a kind of intentional act, these two are likely to appear in different forms within a 'meaning content' which means 'thought act', 'thought meaning', and 'thought object' They all rely on each other to function (Husserl, 2008: 151-152). Charles Taylor explains the meaning in three ways. The first one is 'meaning is for subject.' The second is 'meaning is of something.' Third: 'Things only have meaning in a field.' As for the first definition; the subject is a specific subject or a group of subjects. As for the second; the something has a different and distinguished meaning. As for the third: the meaning of things changes according to the field or to the meaning of other things because the meaning of something is relational (Taylor, 1985: 21-22). For Karl E. Smith, "these fields are always for a society for its subjects" and "[...] meanings are relatively fixed and relatively fluid" (Smith, 2010: 11, 26).

3. OBJECT CARE AS AN INTENTIONAL EXPERIENCE: BRIDGING PRACTICE WITH THEORY

In this study, the subject is workshop members with design backgrounds, and the objects are meaningful in relevance of the design field. In this study, horizontal consciousness is studied in terms of recognition and relatedness. The meaning of the practice is related with the term, healing. Since intentional experience requires intentional act, care and production are selected as acts for healing. Based on this theoretical knowledge, the study examines the intentional experience within three dualities: recognition-relatedness, meaning-healing and care-production.

3.1. Recognition and Relatedness

The study addresses to the concept of recognition to suggest a model for reconciliation between subject and object. Recognition is a transcendental condition that supports phenomenological development of intentional horizontal consciousness. Referring to Axel Honneth (1995), Varga tries to clarify recognition with two alternatives: "in the first one, primordial recognition has a concrete addressee involving a mental state that is intentionally directed at a particular object in the world. In the second alternative,



primordial recognition is a formal feature of being attuned that constitutes backgrounds to all our experiences, thoughts and activities" (Varga, 2010: 24). The study also refers to relatedness to improve a way to recognize the objects with their distinct beings. The study introduces relatedness as a cognitive instrumental way of seeing objects or a kind of communicative framework. Design styles, materials and production techniques of the objects which are defined in terms of socio-cultural contexts are the main instruments for communication regarding recognition and relatedness.

Wooden Chairs The workshop team initially focuses on the wooden chairs. For the designers, the chairs have always been accepted as very special objects to examine many aspects of subject-object interactions. Anne Massey, "The chair gives the designer-maker an opportunity to make a statement about beliefs, passions, and aspirations for society" (Massey, 2011: 139). To understand the ideas, daily life, the nature of materials and production techniques, a chair could be the most ideal object. Therefore, these two objects are the most directed objects in the study. Judging by their old look, team thought that they might have been produced in the 1970s or 1980s, most probably in Turkey. Their designs have the traces of classic and modern styles. The design of one chair is linked to the second half of the nineteenth century with antique round back and curvilinear fore legs (No 1). Especially, the ornate legs and the structural frame of sitting surface is recognized with Thomas Jeckyll' eclectic chair, designed in 1876. Thomas Jeckyll is regarded as one of the Aesthetic Movement designers (Fiell & Fiell, 2005: 35). This particular more ornamented chair reminds us discourse on conspicuous consumption in which middle-upper class desires to become upper through consumption of everyday life objects. Workshop team also discussed the characteristics of typical Turkish living rooms of 1980's in which this chair would match perfectly. The living rooms, which are decorated with conspicuous things, were not used in daily life by the owners, but they were mostly used to host guests only.

The style of the other chair (No 2), which has more straight lines, refers to the modernist Shakers of 1900s. The chair looks like a visual mixture of two chairs one of which is Henry van de Velde's *Bloemenwerf* of 1895. The one which is defined as "[...] 'anglicised' version of Art Nouveau" and "[...] his desire for functional objects that could exist beyond stylistic convention" (Fiell & Fiell, 2005: 48). The other one is Eliel Saarinen's dining room chair of 1929 which was designed for Saarinen House in French Art Deco Style. (Fiell & Fiell, 2005: 177). This chair is also considered to be produced for domestic spaces with an emphasis on simple and more modern daily life of the middle class.



The materials for the production of the two chairs were probably supplied locally. The chairs give the impression that they have been produced as a kind of craft tradition. However, they do not create any feeling of authenticity as far as crafting is concerned. At the same time, they do not seem to belong to the main stream of the modern consumer marketing. They seem to be produced in ordinary, humble workshops. The wood used in the production of the more ornate chair feels very hard and it comes from a particular tree called hornbeam which is very common in the forests of Aegean and Black Sea. According to the workshop members, these chairs were produced by anonymous craftworkers.

Coffe Table Grouping Apart from the chairs, the coffee table set is another object which are engaged the most. The set is very familiar to workshop team in terms of form, colour, texture and scale. The team members also mention that they have seen identical models before and they even used some at home in their childhood. With its typical delicate curvilinear legs, the set was one of the domestic icons of 1980s' middle class homes, constructed traditionally. But one sliding into the other, the set is very functional and it reflects a space saving idea of modern design context of the time.

Public Sitting Furniture Team remembers the furniture as a common type of furniture used in the public spaces of 1980s. and 1990s.

A Circular Wooden Surface A circular wood surface was probably a piece of a daily life object. It is thought that it could be a top surface of a coffee table.

A Drawer and A Bedstand These were the pieces of furniture made of fiberboard and produced for low income class. According to common view of the team, while the bedstand dates back to 1980s, the green drawer with black plastic lid is from the 2000s. The surface of the green drawer has a laminated cover that was very popular in the 1990s.

A Plastic Table without the Flat Top Team examines the set of plastic legs by disassembling it to study its mass produced parts. One of the parts is broken. Plastic lightweight tables are mass produced outdoor objects of the time. They are still considered as one of the most practical and mass produced daily life products.

3.2. Meaning and Healing

In his book, *what is a Designer: Things, Places, Messages* (1969), Norman Potter (1923-95) portrays designers as doctors who develop treatments for their patients. In his



book, he starts with questioning modern design. He suggests that “[...] the root impulse and need of truly modern design, it is not self-contained; it is contributory” (Potter, 2002: 9). He stresses that “if the word ‘design’ is used without reference to any specific context” or the term design remains as an abstract notion different from ‘making’ or from spontaneous activity, it brings out difficulties (Potter, 2002: 10). For him, “[...], it is perfectly possible to study design simply by doing it” (Potter, 2002: 11). Counting on Norman Potter, Philippa Lyon discusses designer identity under the title of ‘designer as healer’. He introduces designer as a person who is aware of consumption culture and environmental issues rather than being a heroic character designing cool things (Lyon, 2012: 40). In the context of the terminology of Husserl, workshop team, a group of designers, is position taking conscious subject. In relevance of Norman Potter’s thought, this position taking conscious designers are critical healers in meaning context of the workshop.

3.3. Care and Production

Care and production are mainly related to the modes of physical experience involving cleaning, painting and producing missing parts. First, the workshop team focuses on the physical state of the objects to diagnose the missing, broken and the damaged elements/parts of the objects. The drawer with the missing body and the bedstand with a missing drawer complete each other. They surprisingly match perfectly. The cracks are very obvious on the circular flat top. This material might have been stored in a wet place or outside to be exposed to water. Two rectangular seating parts and the rectangular right linkage part of the public bench are missing. Those three parts are very essential for the stability of the furniture. Therefore, the lack of those missing parts cause the other parts to move in the x, y and z directions individually. Therefore, the linkages are very poor. The linear cracks on the texture of the surface are realized as the harmful effects of water and air. The ornate chair is very stable but the other one is broken. Both of them had dirty and worn-out seating covers. Coffee table set, on the other hand, is thought to be in good shape as far as the material and the appearance is concerned. As for the plastic legs, one part of the set is broken.

Workshop team disassembles the set of plastic legs, removes upholstery off the chairs, cut two front legs of the linear chair, cleans all the objects, fills the cracks and finally paints them all white. The tools are pincers, and coping saw for removing unwanted parts, sand paper for cleaning the surfaces, spatula for filling the cracks with mastic, and brushes for painting the objects. Then the team produces all the missing parts from two dimensional cardboard sections like prosthesis (Figure 3). The tools used for this process are pencil, ruler and craft knife. In this process, team examines dimensions and

proportions of the parts. To examine the physical subsistence of coffee table, team duplicates it with cardboards using the same technique (Figure 4). The adaptation of the drawer with the missing body to the bedstand with missing drawer is considered very similar to organ transplantation. The plastic legs are recycled in an unusual way so as to create a new sitting surface. The team finally completes this process of taking care of and examining all the selected objects physically. The team believes that this experience saves the objects from their miserable state owing to being thrown-away by their owners. The practice makes them appear again as self-standing objects but in exhibition context (Figures 5, 6).



Figure 3. Cleaning, Painting and Production of the Missing Parts (left)
Figure 4. Reproduction of the Side Table with Cardboard Sections (right)



Figure 5. A Group of Abandoned Objects, After the Healing (left)
Figure 6. Exhibition (right)



4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the problem of disengagement between subjects-objects is a result of the ignored phenomenologic dialectic. The study emphasizes the lost dialectic through the dualities as recognition-relatedness, meaning-healing and production-care in terms of Husserlian intentional experience. The objects are intentionally directed as physical beings and design objects in socio-cultural contexts. The intentional physical acts like caring and production are also re-defined in transcendental terms such as healing. The study tries to coalesce phenomenological theory with design discourse and practice which might be seen challenging in their own contexts.

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