

Absence, Function and Contemporary Jewellery Practice

BA thesis

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Introduction

My practice on jewellery is focused on the relationship of human body and daily objects. Then I questioned what jewellery can be and its characters. I observed and experienced the function of objects, and compared them with jewellery. The central interests are tensions between 'sense and nonsense', 'usefulness and uselessness'. I focused first on the structure of mass produced products; how the form appeared because of the function but not aesthetic. Then I explored how jewellery as part of people's daily life, resides at the edge of usefulness and uselessness, function and aesthetic. The special character and dilemma of jewellery makers are analysed, then related to the practice of contemporary jewellery field.

In Chapter 1, I mainly referred to the philosophy of Laozi and Martin Heidegger: the absence and function of objects, the different structures and usages between jewellery with other practical objects. From Heidegger's essay *The Thing*, I found the handle of his example of the jug interesting. In my opinion, the character of the jug handle has similarities with jewellery. In addition, I described and questioned my own jewellery practice, and how I discovered "absence". In Chapter 2, I studied similarities and differences of the jug handle and jewellery. In the contemporary jewellery field, I provided examples, referred to Jacques Derrida's idea of supplement, and questioning the meaning of jewellery. Jewellery is not only about the creation process but also the viewing experience. Thus in Chapter 3, I compared paintings from ancient China and Italy, and discovered a new way of viewing image and jewellery. I proposed the idea that jewellery is out of the corner of eyes. In the end, I refocused on the absence of objects, and added how people misuses daily objects, and few pieces of art. I believe the jewellery making can come from the idea of combining different absence parts from objects.

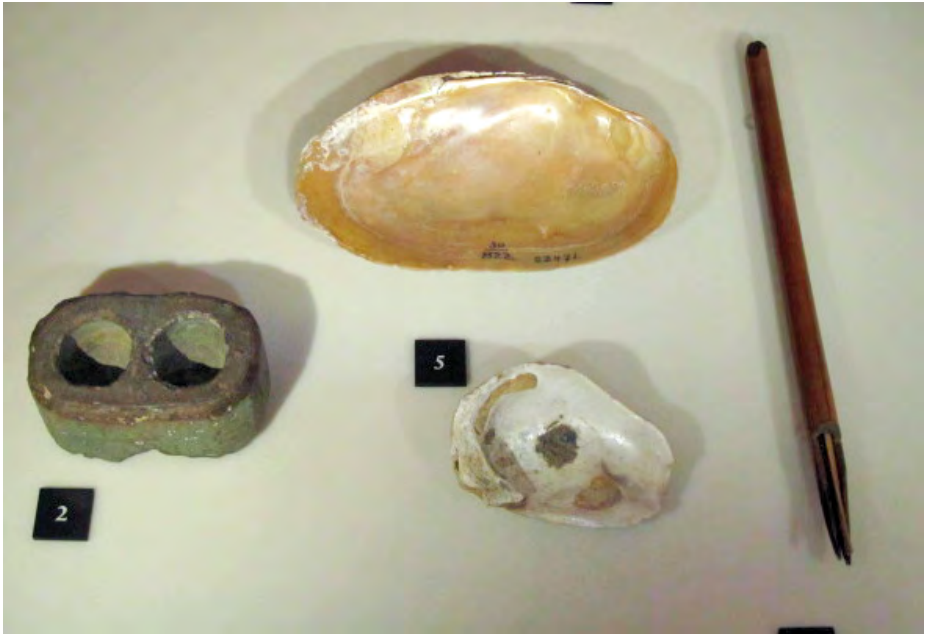


Image 1. Two shells and a stone ink container, undated. I took the photo in the Altes Museum, Berlin, Germany.

1.Function and Absence

1.1 From shells to man-made containers

During my summer holiday on Phuket island, I stood on the beach and attempted to hold seawater in my hands. I curved my palms naturally and squeezed my fingers together as tight as possible to stop the water from leaking out. Immediately I noticed an empty shell lying beside my left foot, and decided to pour the water from my hands into the body of the shell. I realized that this small action was a natural reaction. If I were from the Stone Age, these actions might be unconsciously done as well. The empty spaces formed by my hands and the shell function as containers. After this realization, I understood the concept of a container comes after using it.

When I filled the shell with seawater, I gave a new function to it. The cup shape of the shell reminded me of a container for brief moment. When I was filling the seawater into the shell, my motion gave a new function to it. Once I left the shell on the beach, it was not a container anymore. The shape of the shell had met my demand at that moment because the empty space of the shell gave me a hint that it could contain something. A shell is a natural form. Throughout history, humans discovered numerous functions to natural objects, using them as utensils and containers. People have built a man-made world out of nature. In museums, we can find evidence of this. For example, two shells and a stone container were put together in a glass case display (Image 1.). These three undated small ink containers showed the differences between natural items and man-made items. Indicating from its texture, the object on the left was obviously altered by human using a stone.

People used the empty spaces of the shells and created the empty space in the piece of stone. I understood the thought process of this development. First, men formed an empty space with cupped palms, then they found empty spaces out of natural objects, and later created empty spaces in cup forms to serve their needs.

1.2 Useful emptiness

Designing Design, a book by Japanese designer, Kenya Hara, stated the origin of a vessel came from our ancestors' lightly folded palms. Hara described a stick and a vessel as two primary tools¹. During the process of developing various sorts of vessels, Hara considered things, such as clothing, languages, and books as vessels, His reason is: all of them can "hold emptiness within and also hold or preserve things."² One question arises from this reasoning: Does emptiness exist in the vessel, but not in the stick?

Ancient Chinese philosopher, Laozi³, may have a different view. He wrote about emptiness in his book *Tao Te Ching* (600 BCE):

*Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore benefit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.*⁴

Laozi explained the uses of three man-made things: a wheel, a pot, and a room. He did not focus on their functions entirely, but on the emptiness of these things. Emptiness is an area that is easily ignored by most people, Laozi saw it as an important part of the objects' existences. He described different forms of absence and pointed out the relationships between people's actions with empty parts of things.

Moreover, Laozi elaborated on the emptiness of objects' sizes from small to big and from closed to open. Firstly, he mentioned the hidden empty parts in the structure of an ancient wheel hub. The naked eye cannot see the wheels' mortises and tendon joints when it is assembled. We have to remove each component to see that emptiness is one of the important elements in the structure of the wheel. When we pick one part out of an object composing of many parts, such as a wheel, the negative shape implies the absence of the missing part. Image 2 to 4 show the structures and appearances of wheel hubs from ancient China⁵. On the other hand, the positive shape of the part that was taken out can suggest the existence of the object.

1. Kenya Hara, *Designing Design* (Lars Muller Verlag, 2007), p. 39

2. Kenya Hara, *Designing Design*, p.40

3. Translated into Lao Tzu as well

4. Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, (Vintage; Bilingual edition, 2011), Chapter Eleven. Original Chinese character of words "not there" is "无"; it could be also translated into "nothingness/emptiness". The "nothingness/emptiness means haven't been seen or existed yet.

5. Image 2,3 from Yang Hong, "Essay of Chariot and Hub" ("杨弘: 战车与车战二论"), *Palace Museum Journal*, 03:2000, p.36

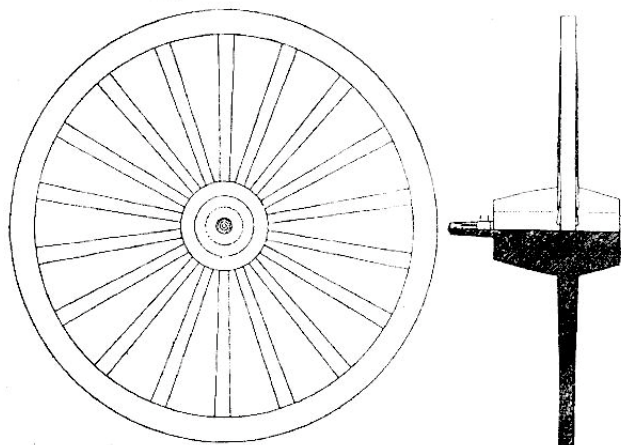


Image 2.

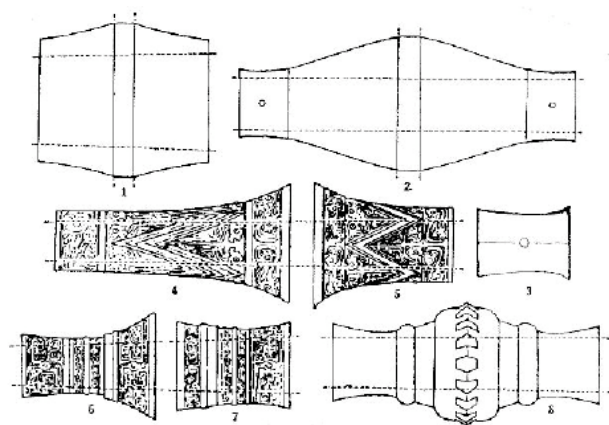


Image 3.



Image 4. Bronze wheel hub, Undated



Image 5. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Stairs)*, 2001

Secondly, Laozi argued that the emptiness in a pot. It seemed more obvious than the holes in the wheel's. The inside of a pot is supposed to be empty in order to contain and to hold. He stated, "Shape clay into a vessel". A potter shapes a pot out of clay, a tangible material, but it is the space inside that makes the pot functional. The negative space inside the pot is for containing something within.

A room is more complicated than a wheel and a pot, for it is made of masses and voids. An enclosed space of a room is similar to a container. When a person stands in a big scale interior space, it is hard for the individual to realize that he enters emptiness. A room's elements have many hidden spaces as well, such as spaces that doors and windows fit into.

Laozi stated, "Therefore benefit comes from what is there; Usefulness from what is not there." The three cases mentioned previously proved his statement. On the contrary, the works of Rachel Whiteread changed "not there" to "there". In 2001, Whiteread made *Untitled (Stairs)*, a sculpture in a shape of the empty space below stairs (Image 5). The original stairs' function is removed and the artist brought emptiness into existence. Whiteread "fossilises everyday objects in the absence of human usage"⁶. When the emptiness becomes tangible, it does not comply with functional needs anymore. If we continue to observe every product around us, we will find the absence I mentioned. In Kenya Hara's example about a stick and a vessel, the stick has certain size and form. At the same time, the stick creates the empty space around it. When a person is holding a stick, the hand is shaped by empty space.

Laozi did not mean to show people's inventions, such as making use of absence or creating useful utensils. He believed that beings and nothingness are engaged with each other. An object's function depends on how people use the empty part. When a potter makes a pot, he has in mind its function. The space inside the pot is for containing something. The absence of the thing that is supposed to be filled the pot gives a hint of what the pot is made for. Therefore, the absence of things outlines people's purposes resulting in functional objects of different sizes and qualities. For instance, the size of a room depends on how people want to use it. In addition, people produce and assign names to different utensils. There is a big difference between the room and the container called "pot".

6. Octavia Nicholson, Artist biography of Rachel Whiteread, 2001

1.3 The handle of a jug

More than 2000 years after Laozi, German philosopher Martin Heidegger also mentioned about the empty part of a vessel in his essay *The Thing* (1950)⁷. He used a jug as an example.

*[...] we pour the wine between the sides and over the bottom [...] When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flow into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what dose the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel.*⁸

I contemplated Heidegger's statement; we have to imagine the outward appearance of the jug, then read into his words to understand the type of jug he meant to describe. What is a jug? He described, "[...] a vessel, something of the kind that holds something else within it. The jug's holding is done by its base and sides. This container itself can again be held by the handle."⁹ Laozi did not mention about the outside of the pot directly. From Heidegger's description, we know that the jug is constituted of at least three parts: the bottom, the sides and the handle. The bottom and the sides together hold something, and the handle is for being held. Heidegger seemed to ignore the handle by not mentioning directly in the rest of his essay. The literal word "jug", both in German and English, includes a handle. Heidegger also argued that we cannot learn the meaning of a jug from only its aspect, this is an idea derived from Plato¹⁰. So, where is the handle? In which ways can we experience it?

Back to Laozi's view, the emptiness is found in the part we use. The half ring shaped handle encloses a space on the side of a jug. Why does a jug have a handle? Heidegger discussed the "taking, keeping and outpouring" of a jug. He says, "How does the jug's void hold? It holds by taking what is poured in. It holds by keeping and retaining what it took in.... But their unity (taking and keeping) is determined by the outpouring for which the jug is fitted as a jug"¹¹. People need the handle for the pouring action. The emptiness surrounded by bottom and side signify the holding space. However the handle relates to a series of actions. Furthermore, a jug is a vessel, temporarily retaining contents, without a lid and with a permanent handle. The handle seems to be a very important component for the jug, but why is it ignored? Maybe the prerequisite function of a jug is to retain content, and the handle is added for the secondary function, the act of pouring. Returning to Heidegger's statement: "The jug's holding

7. Martin Heidegger, "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Translated by Albert Hofstadter, (Perennial Classics edition, 2001)

8. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.167

9. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.164

10. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.166

11. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.169

is done by its base and sides. This container itself can again be held by the handle". There is a clear hierarchy in this statement: the base and sides precede the handle in both function and structure aspects. Just as a potter would shape the base and the sides, adding the handle after. Heidegger ignored the secondary part of the jug—the handle.

Although the handle is a secondary element and has a minor function, we know that it is there. How can this ignored part be acknowledged? According to Heidegger, a broken jug is still a "jug"¹². The jug with a broken handle can still be a functional vessel, and can be held. But a vessel made without a handle from the beginning may not be called "jug". In contrast, a vessel with a handle is a "jug". The name "jug" came to be because of the existence of the handle. Lastly, the small empty space within the handle can be held by the hand. By holding the handle, we are connected to the jug, a unit the handle belongs to. In order to have all these possibilities, two common elements are necessary: the base and sides the handle is attached to. These two commonalities are prerequisites in creating function, image and act.

If a handle was made separately without a jug, the existence of it would be questionable. A person would easily question his action for holding only a handle, for he immediately imagines a jug, knowing it is absent. This pre-perception of the absence of the jug triggers the need to attach the handle back to its rightful position on the vessel naturally. Furthermore, the characteristic of the handle could influence the image of the person holding it. The person might be seen as the original vessel for the handle (More specific example in Chapter 2.1.). If we pay attention to an independent handle, and consider its existence, Heidegger called this "vigilance of mortals". The handle is not simple, but elusive and falls in a grey area of functionality. It needs to accompany another, always as a subordinate one. However, separated from the jug, the handle's character has the ability to attach to another object and turning it into the main body. This image disturbs viewers' minds and evokes their imagination and conjecture.

The handle of the jug in Heidegger's essay is absent. I see it as my entrance and exit of this essay. In Heidegger's view, the absence he referred to in his essay was not about physical things. In a letter, his reply to a student stated, "The default of God and the divinities is absence."¹³ To Heidegger, the meanings of the word "thing" vary. The meaning from old German is close to the nature of things, which uses the word "thing" to name "gathering".¹⁴

12. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.167

13. Martin Heidegger, "Letter to a Young Student" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Translated by Albert Hofstadter, (Perennial Classics edition, 2001), p.182

14. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.175

He stated that “The thing stays—gathers and unites—the fourfold.”¹⁵ The fourfold means earth, sky, divinities and mortals, which Heidegger called in his own term as “fouring”. He also described that the condition of an object turns into a thing, “Whatever becomes a thing occurs out of the ringing of the world’s mirror-play.”¹⁶ Mirror-play composes the “world” as Heidegger explains, “The appropriating mirror-play of the simple onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortal, we call the world.”¹⁷ Therefore, gathering is an important basis in Heidegger’s view of the thing, thus he wouldn’t see a handle separately. Beside the abstruse meanings of God and the divinities, I see the handle as an interesting absence in his essay, because he noted shortly,

*When and in what way do things appear as thing? They do not appear by means of human making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls.*¹⁸

Vigilance is observation carefully and paying close attention to the surroundings. A careful observation of every part of a jug, not only use it to meet users’ demands, is also an experience. After I noticed the absence of the handle in his essay, I started to understand the vigilance Heidegger mentions. Moreover, the handle could not be an absence without him mentioning in one sentence, “This container itself can again be held by the handle.” Referring to Laozi’s thought, being accompanied by nothingness or vice versa, an absence is hinted by what is present. Heidegger explained to a student “...absence is not nothing; rather it is precisely the presence, which must first be appropriated...”¹⁹ So the “no-longer” of divinities is same as “not-yet”²⁰. He argued that science destroys characters of things, and critiqued about it: “Science always encounters only what its kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science.” The function of the jug has been determined for only holding liquid, due to the force of science.²¹ In this situation, the unknown possibilities absence I am referring to had been eliminated beforehand. Therefore “the vigilance of mortals” is the step towards an escape from pre-sets of thoughts.

15. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p. 178

16. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.179

17. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.177

18. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.179

19. Martin Heidegger, *Letter to a Young Student*, p.182

20. Martin Heidegger, *Letter to a Young Student*, p.182

21. Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p.168

1.4 My practice of using absence

I am interested in absence both physically and philosophically. According to my practice at a workshop called *Car Project* in 2012, I had to make jewellery pieces with a car related concept. I went to a car junkyard and found some car parts back. I found a small mechanical part, which is used to fix rear end lights of cars. I appreciated the form a lot (Image 6). Later, I found that by separating the part from its unity and resetting it in a new context made this reasonable car part confusing (Image 6,7). Without its original context, I could hardly guess the function of the circular part and the form of wire. On the other hand, its industrial quality made me believe that the form of this component must be functional and not for aesthetic reasons. Although I didn't know its function, I believed that it is a functional object. With this perception, I started to design and create.

I made silicone moulds of this component to cast some copies of the car part in plastic. I know that the circle and the wire are originally used for fixing bulbs, so the absent parts of the circle (including the small square absent parts on it) and the elasticity of the metal



Image 6. The part that in the back of car lamp to fix the bulb

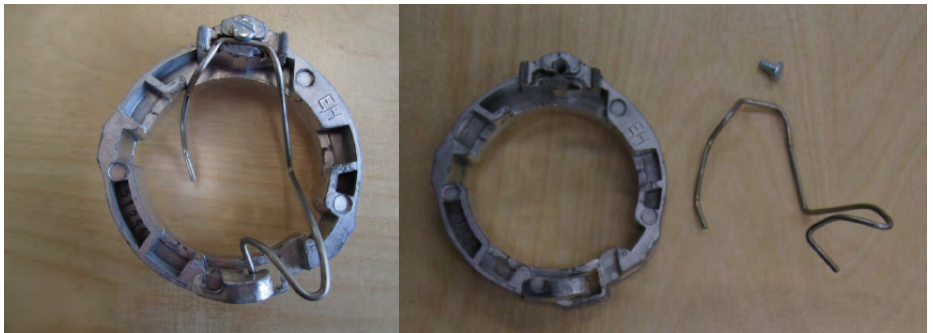


Image 7. Three parts constitute this component, circle, wire and one screw.

wire are important characteristics. Based on this principle, I continued exploring its function of fixing other objects, but in another context. Furthermore, I found that its structure is similar to the structure of a brooch. They both need elasticity of the metal wire to fix itself with other things.

Later, I tried to combine the car component with daily objects, such as cups, spoons, and forks. I bent the wire into different shapes in order to find the best way to set the objects (Image 8,9). During this process, I produced a lot of unexpected forms (Image 10). From observation, a similar feeling was discovered compared to when I looked at the original car component.

I made four pieces of brooches that are combined with different objects. They are titled as "*Form Study: Absence No1.2.3*" and "*Form Study: Function No.1*". The works consist of two parts, a photograph and a brooch (Image 15). They are composed with the absent of the plastic objects. The exhibition of the project is called *Carversation*. We exhibited it in Berlin as a part of *Extreme Crafts* exhibition in Freies Museum, 2012. I presented photographs on the wall and brooches on the table. Normally, images of jewellery function as an explanation of the pieces, but I see these two parts as parallel and they are composed as one unity. When they are presented together, people can perceive the absence in it.

From the car project, I found ways to observe absence of objects around me: to see what is not there, to imagine what used to be, and what will be there. However, at the end of the project I questioned the function of jewellery. I faced two tasks during the making: one is searching for a way to attach the plastic objects with copies of a car component and achieving the forms, the other is making them function as brooches. I gave new functions to the car component and the plastic objects, but I did not put enough focus on the natural use of jewellery, which relates to the human body. As a jewellery maker, I know that jewellery is not a necessity for people. On the contrary, a car component is needed to function as rear lights. Its simple form is not made for any aesthetic reasons. I asked myself, "What is jewellery?" What is its function besides the aesthetic reasons? I was selected to make trophies for graduates of Jewellery Department of Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 2012 because I examined the definition of jewellery. I was required to take the wearers into consideration when I worked on the trophy project.

I used some second hand plastic objects to build shapes of the three prize cups. I tied the plastic objects with the belt I made. Graduates received only the photos of the prize cups and the belts as necklaces, but they did not get the plastic objects.

The necklaces were given a new function, but the way of connecting them to the human body was still not convincing enough for me. Therefore, I had issues defining character of jewellery.



Image 8.



Image 9. Searching for the new function of the screw and circle parts. The size of the screw fits the absent part of this fork.

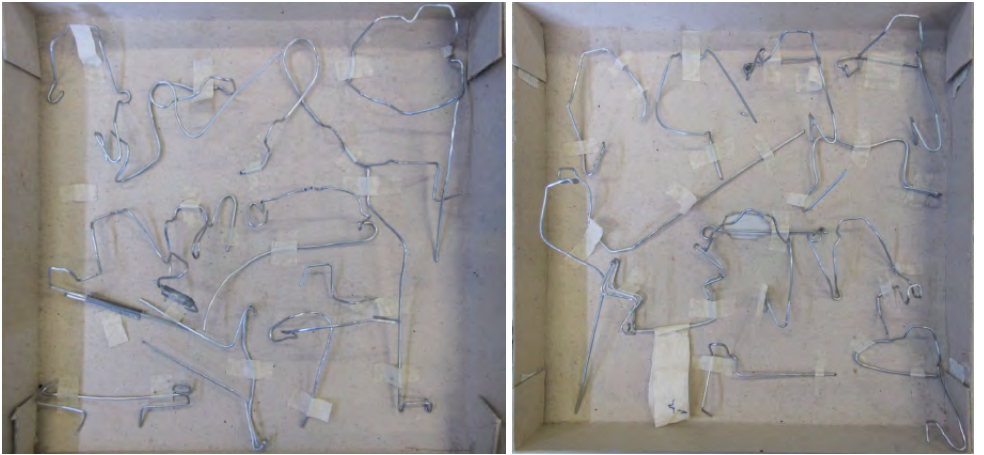


Image 10. The collection of all the bent wires during the making process.



Image 11-13. Photographs of parts of Form study: Absence No.1,2,3 (from left to right, up to down)

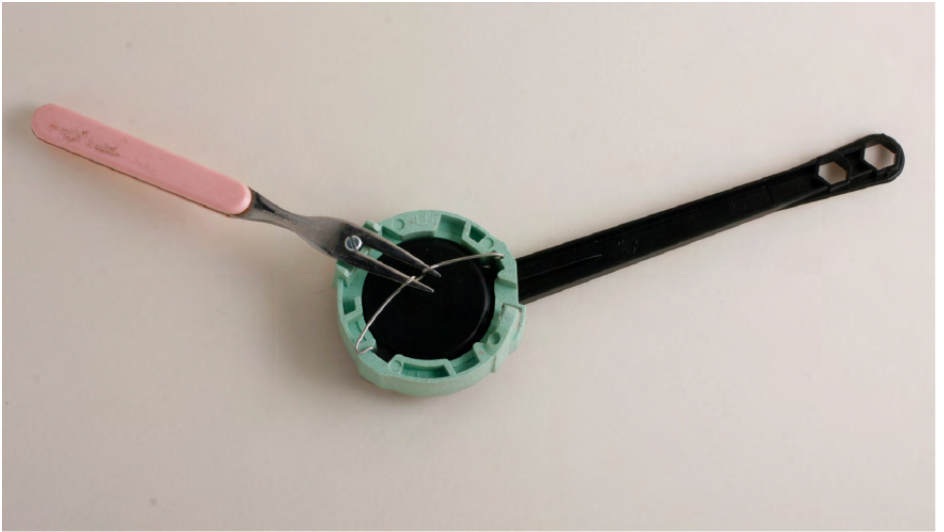


Image 14. A Photograph of a part of Form Study: Function No.1



Image 14. A Photograph of a part of Form Study: Function No.1

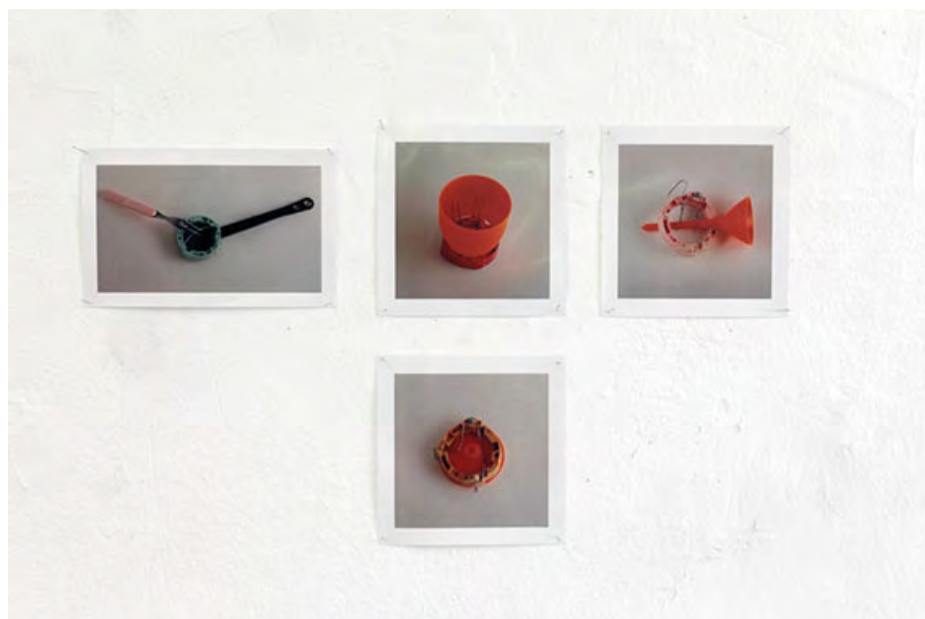


Image 16,17. My presentation in *Carversation of Extreme Crafts* exhibition at Freies Museum, Berlin, Germany, 2012.

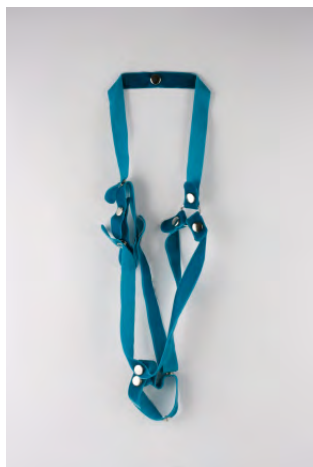




Image 19. The box of *Trophy*

2. Jewellery

2.1 Secondary and attachment

Jewellery has an equivalent role to the handle of a jug as they are usually in the secondary position. They could be independent objects, but when a handle lies on a table, a viewer might wonder where it belongs. Similarly and less complicated, the handle cannot function merely on its own. Naturally, the handle of a jug needs to be with the bottom and side. If the handle plays a subsidiary part to the bottom and the side, what part does jewellery play?

An example of the combination between handle and brooch in contemporary jewellery context is a series of brooches named *Knob* (2010) made by designer Noon Passama. She used fur to make door handle forms. Both a brooch pin and a door handle are parts made for attaching on to something. Passama combined these two things and created an image of two layers of attachments. Similar to a separated jug handle, an image of a door handle influences the unity it attaches on to. In Passama's design, the new unity is human body. The wearer of the handle-brooch may confuse viewers' perception of the representation of a door and the wearer's identity. The furry material gives tactile sense visually, and the shape of a door handle triggers viewers' mind to think of the act connecting to handles. As a result, others may mistakenly think the wearer as an object.



Image 20-21. Noon Passama, *Knobs*, 2010

In the former section I classified a jug handle as a “secondary part” rather than an “attachment”. That is the difference between a jug handle and Passama's handle brooch. The jug handle belongs to a unity that is named “jug” even before its made. However, jewellery is not a “secondary part”. Although jewellery is secondary and it cannot function by

itself, it is made separately from its wearer's body. It needs to be attached on to someone, therefore it is an addition on the person. Jewellery critic and curator Liesbeth den Besten stated in her book *On Jewellery*: "Jewellery is supplementary to humans; without man, jewellery only partially serves its function."²² Jewellery is an attachment or an extra part for human, because it is not part of human body. It is physically independent, secondary in function, and attachable. The handle of a jug makes the outward appearance of the jug complete. Jewellery is a small supplement for the wearer, the entirety. Can the handle of a jug be an attachment? The answer is yes. In the former section, I assumed its separation from the bottom and sides. Once it is combined with other parts, it becomes an attachment. Reiterating my point, the attachment composes a new image or identity with its new main body from the gathering.

Referring to Heidegger's view of the thing, jewellery naturally needs to be taken as an object. A ring or a necklace is self-supporting when it is alone, which is also the aim of making them. "An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bring it to mind in a recollective re-presentation [...] The jug remains a vessel whether we represent it in our minds or not.", Heidegger stated in his essay. Though a piece of jewellery is self-supporting, it is hard to be "independent" and always an "object". From Noon Passama's example, the furry handle brooch was made to evoke and confuse people perceptions. Traditional jewellery items like a wedding ring or an inherited pendant are objects of remembrance. According to Heidegger, how does a piece of jewellery such as a necklace or a ring create nostalgia without a specific pre-perception in mind?

2.2 Functional but almost useless

How can jewellery be practical and useless at the same time? This is a contradiction. It functions in aesthetic, and symbolic ways. Liesbeth den Besten argues:

Jewellery is categorized within the realm of objects that beautify, decorate, signify and have a practical function. But jewellery has no utility; it is practically useless [...] A piece of jewellery is not an implement, a utensil or an appliance, which all have a straightforward and unambiguous purpose.

Den Besten added, "Function, when talking about jewellery, should be understood as meaning. The function of jewellery is its meaning in the public and the private realm...", she considered that the main function of jewellery depends upon individuals, otherwise

its function is partial. A large part of jewellery is made out of expensive materials. In the contemporary sector, artists expanded the range of materials used so the perception and concept are just as important as their practice.

A brooch is a typical example to show contradicting aspects of jewellery. It has two sides: the backside faces the wearer and the front side towards exterior. Following its nature of having two sides, a brooch's functions are doubled. The backside is always with a pin for function, which is to be attached to and fixed on clothes. The front side is visible for viewers. This duality corresponds to the wearer's purpose and the others' view of the piece. The front side of a brooch is dominant while the pin is discriminated. However, having the pin on the backside, the front is showcased, although the brooch is an unnecessary accessory item for the wearer. In the act of wearing, the pin brings the useless into the total image of a person. Therefore, the word "almost" is an important word to put in front of "useless".

Contemporary jewellery artist Manfred Nisslmuller played with the concept of confusion and created a brooch inspired by the idea. He used readymade brooch pins as sole material to make a brooch. He combined several pins together as the front part of the brooch. There is a pin on the backside that can fix the whole thing on someone. The sort of mass-produced pins can be found easily in the market. It is sold with absence of the thing that can be pinned on and the thing to be attached on the pin. Looking closer at the readymade pin, there are three small holes made specifically for adding new additions on the pin. The readymade pin functions as an empty stage. Usually, in a finished brooch, this kind of pin is hidden. However, Manfred Nisslmuller brought this hidden part on the stage and it looks like putting a stage on a stage. He used the pins to fill the absence of another pin, so every single pin is each other's secondary part. There is one in the back that has to function as a normal pin, which is to be fixed on someone. The presence of other pins questions the original function of the pin.



Image 22. Brooch, 2001, Manfred Nisslmuller, Stedelijk Museum

According to Den Besten, “The function of jewellery is its meaning in the public and the private realm...” Meaning is a very abstract concept. It is not only given by the maker, but also by the person who wears or keeps it. The meaning of a piece of jewellery comes from people’s perception. Every object can have a meaning, but for a piece of jewellery it is a necessary. Meaning might be secondary for many things, but for jewellery it is primary. In this aspect, jewellery itself is secondary to the meaning it has been given. Similarly, Manfred Nisslmüller’s brooch is the secondary of secondary. A pin in this brooch must be the secondary of secondary of secondary. The mass-produced pin he used is usually understood as a base to hold a “meaning”. He turned the pin itself to be its own secondary. The pin does not hold anything else but itself. Thus, this brooch itself represents the idea of “functional but almost useless” with the endlessness of secondary.

2.3 The floating main body

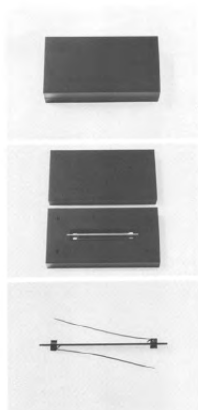
As stated by Liesbeth den Besten, “Jewellery is supplementary to humans; without man, jewellery only partially serves its function.”, we know that human is the prerequisite for and the main body of jewellery. Jewellery needs to be worn and to be represented in the mind. I notice often, jewellery is “partially serving its function” in places like drawers, boxes, display windows, and safes. Jewellery is not necessary in people’s daily life, but because of its meaning, we have other things for keeping jewellery. But, the keeping creates absence around a piece of jewellery. Jewellery itself is an attachment and it always has other attachments. For example, if a piece of jewellery lies in a delicate box inside of a drawer with locks, which one is the attachment and which one is the main body? Jewellery has led me falling into the logic of duality, and it is like walking in an endless maze.

A brooch named *Brooch Für Zwei Personen* (Brooch for Two People, 1980/82) by Otto Künzli shows an ultimate relationship between two sides of brooch. In the photo named *Ich steck Dich an, Du steckst mich an.* (Translated into English as “I pin you and you pin me.”), it is evident that the brooch could be worn by two people facing each other. The two sides of the brooch act as the main body and the attachment at the same time. It depends on from which angle to see them. Glenn Adamson comments this works that, “[...] each body became an ornament for the other.”²³ Obviously Adamson saw this brooch’s function as an ornament, and it questions which side of it is act as ornament. The meaning of

23. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Berg Publisher, 2007), p.26

Broosche für zwei Personen
1980/82

Edelstahl, 10 x 76 x 7 mm
Kassette 1982
Acrylglas, schwarz, 30 x 120 x 62 mm



Ich steck Dich an.
Du steckst mich an.



Image 23. Two pages from catalogue *Körperkultur*: Otto Künzli, Gerd Rothmann, 1982

this brooch is more than that. It shows the boundary of two sides of brooch, and the limitation it can connect by its structure.

Beside the brooch itself, we can see that Otto Künzli made a box especially for keeping this brooch. The third photo on the left page displays the brooch on a clean background, so readers can clearly understand its simple structure. Other pictures show the brooch worn by two people or in the box. The brooch is hidden in these two latter situations. I notice that there are two ways to look at these two pages: to read the information and to read the images. Firstly, the photos gave some information. They are like the manual of this brooch showing people how the structure is, how to store it, and the way to use it. There are some hints of the meanings of the piece in the photos: the special box signifies treasure, a man and a woman standing face-to-face hints a relationship. The brooch is the secondary to its meaning, and it is an attachment of the body. Another way is to look at the composition of the photos. The brooch is in the most important position in these images. On the photo with a man and a woman, we cannot see their faces. They have no clear identity, and standing in front of a clean wall. The two people look like pedestals for the brooch. The brooch itself is hidden but showing its effect on the wearers in the middle of the image. Ernst Gombrich writes in his book *The Sense of Order* (1979)²⁴ that, “(in

24. E.H.Gombrich, *The Sense of Order* (Phaidon Press Limited, 1979)

nature) Wherever attention is to be enlisted for attention or for threat, we find these means of geometrical simplification, isolation and the halo effect of surrounding zone which sets off and enhances the centre. ”²⁵ By putting the brooch in the middle of the box and in the centre of photos, Otto Künzli draws the attention to and enhances the brooch. The images imply where the focuses are, therefore the two people are supplementary and secondary rather than the jewellery. On the image, the jewellery is enhanced by the others’ presence. It is in the centre and calling viewers to assign meanings to it.

According to the picture with two people wearing the brooch, the main body of this brooch is floating. We can move our eyes away from the people (the usual main body of jewellery). It is the main function of this jewellery piece, and it is the intention of the artist that the piece is the focus. Liesbeth den Besten defined that “Jewellery is categorized within the realm of objects that beautify, decorate, signify and have a practical function...”²⁶ Jewellery should be the thing that draws attention to and enhances its main body (the wearer) just like what a jewellery box does for a piece of jewellery. But, sometimes the intention might be from the artist’s or the wearer’s own wishful thinking, and never know where the viewer might focuses on.

2.4 Supplement

In the photo of Künzli’s brooch, there is an obvious focus. It is because the artist had to display the piece through an image and he wanted to emphasize the jewellery. If jewellery is secondary and almost useless, why should it be emphasized? Is it because of the meaning of jewellery? But, meaning is something unpredictable. According to Den Besten’s definition, the function of jewellery is unpredictable too. If jewellery’s main function is meaning, jewellery will be trapped by its own function. That means jewellery could not be itself, as Heidegger attempted to wish a thing to be a thing. It is a very difficult idea to apply to jewellery. To emphasize the meaning a jewellery, is to ignore the jewellery itself all at once, because the meaning is supplementary to jewellery.

In the book *Thinking Through Craft* (2007), Glenn Adamson wrote, “[...] jewellers adopted two opposing approaches, which, nonetheless shared a common goal: to avoid the implication that their creations were simply supplemental.”²⁷ Thus, jewellers from mid-twentieth century are roughly separated into two groups, the Constructivism that view jewellery is autonomy from human body, and the another one is Surrealism that see jewellery and body as a unity. Adamson commented about these two groups, “jewellery

25. E.H.Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, p.235

26. Liesbeth den Besten, *On Jewellery*, p.11

27. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p.22

fully free of the body, or fully melded with it, is no longer jewellery at all.”²⁸ Therefore, does it mean the approach of these jewellers who wanted to avoid the notion that jewellery is “simply” supplemental failed? The mid-twentieth century jewellers thought jewellery needed to be enriched by something else to avoid its status of supplement for body. It lacked something else. Their motivation of making jewellery was to search for ways to enrich jewellery. Nicholas Royle explained Derrida’s idea of supplement, “A supplement is at once what is added onto something in order further to enrich it and what is added on as a mere ‘extra’.”²⁹ According to this explanation, jewellery needed its supplement to get rid of its supplemental position. Something “extra” was jewellery’s supplement that jewellers were searching for. They wanted to put their own meanings into jewellery. Derrida stated, “the supplement is maddening, because it is neither presence nor absence.”³⁰ If the meaning is enriching jewellery in order to get over its supplemental status, the enriched jewellery can never be jewellery and is always something else.

In the previous sections, I searched for characters of jewellery in the relationship of jewellery and body, jewellery and others, the inner structure jewellery, and the meaning of jewellery. I continued to fall into the logic of duality. Perhaps duality is an aspect of jewellery? Derrida argued, “One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source”³¹ Maybe tracing the necessary element of jewellery like peeling off an onion is an incorrect way to proceed, but another layer always exist.

How could jewellery be itself? Can I see it with Heidegger’s “vigilance of mortals” ? Heidegger explained to a student, “Guardianship is vigilance, watchfulness for the has-been and coming destiny of Being, a vigilance that issues from a long and ever-renewed thoughtful deliberateness, which heeds the directive that lies in the manner in which Being makes its appeal.”³² What is the appeal of jewellery? Jewellery is something on the edge of sight. When we move our focus from one point to another, maybe we can see it. Because of jewellery’s character of secondary and attachment, by focusing on it is always focusing on something else: material, appearance, structure, its story, its history, and the maker’s idea. On the other hand, jewellery can be viewed as an item with absence of its main function. It cannot function on its own. However, jewellery as an attachment has subtle power. By sticking on the wearer, it disturbs or and builds up a new image with him/her.

Based on Glenn Adamson’s example of Margaret DePatta’s (1930-1964) work, I glanced

28. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p.22

29. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (Routledge Critical Thinkers, 2003), p.48

30. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, p.73

31. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, p.74

32. Martin Heidegger, *Letter to a Young Student*, p.182

at the “jewellery” in one of the photos. She always preferred to photograph her works on neutral background without human body, because she believed that the jewellery should be autonomous.³³ When I looked at the photo, I focused on the stone and the reflection in it first. Later, I noticed the thin chain on the top from the corner of my eyes. I realized that this thin chain signified the absence of human body. Without the chain, it is hard to know this pendant is so-called “jewellery”. Next, I focused on the chain itself, I could clearly see some information, such as its structure and material, but the image in the glance of “jewellery” was gone. The chain is the part connecting the pendent and the body, but is it also independent of the body? There is no full aspect of this chain in the photo because it is secondary. If DePatta saw human body as this pendant’s pedestal, this thin chain is an in-between.



Image 24. Margaret DePatta, *Pendant*, 1965, Photography: Lee Fatherree

33. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p.23

3. Out of the corner of the eyes

3.1 View on a plane

Jewellery can appear out of the corner of the eyes. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* argued, "We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models."³⁴ Focus and border of sight might be another kind of duality, but it something happens in this grey area.

There is no need to lose focus on purpose to find jewellery, because focus is necessary. There is a way of looking at Chinese traditional art. Our eyes can enter and exit from any spot of an image. The major difference between traditional Chinese painting and European painting is the perspective. Chinese traditional artists used axonometric projection and cavalier perspective (with multiple central points) to describe space, whereas European artists used linear perspective. For example, the painting named *Ranking Ancient Works in a Bamboo Court* (without specified year) of Chinese painter Qiu Ying³⁵ (1494-1552) from Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) has no vanishing point because of the axonometric projection. We can move the focus from the boy on the top right corner to the old man in the middle. Both of them could be the centre of the vision but not the centre of the painting. The space in the image could be infinitely extended without any distortion. When we look at it, the focus is following our eyes just like our position is floating. Approximately, at the same period in the history, the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael (1483-1520) finished the fresco, *The School of Athens* (1509-1511). He used one-point perspective to represent the interior space of the architecture, thus there is a vanishing point in front of the viewer, which gives a strong impression that he/she is standing in that virtual space. It is very clear that the centre of vision is in the middle, and our position is fixed by force of perspective.

For artists, these are two ways to create images. For viewers, they have different ways of viewing the images. In vision, Qiu Ying's painting is eccentric. There is no vanishing point, and the two big partitions divide up the space. The main characters are averagely arranged. Compare with Qiu Ying's painting, there is intense cohesion in Raphael's fresco, which signifies higher spirit and order. The characters are arranged to surround the central two main characters (Plato and Aristotle) in the position where the vanishing point is. Plato and Aristotle seem to be walking towards the viewer, giving the viewer a strong feeling of involvement. On the contrary, implying from the characters' actions in

34. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, [the University of Minnesota Press, 1987], p.2

35. Chinese is 仇英, another translation is Ch'iu Ying



Image 25. Qiu Ying, *Ranking Ancient Works in a Bamboo Court*, Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Handscroll, ink and color on silk



Image 26. Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509-1511, Fresco



Image 27. Details of *Ranking Ancient Works in a Bamboo Court* and *The School of Athens*

Qiu's painting, the main characters are leaving the middle of image because the boy on the top right corner is preparing the chess table for them. The two paintings are both implying sounds (Image 27). There is quite an atmosphere in Qiu's painting. He painted two dogs romping next to the chess table, where the other characters are going. In Raphael's painting, most of the characters are arguing except the characters around the centre. They are listening to Plato and Aristotle's conversation.

Furthermore, these two paintings have different physical forms. The Chinese painting does not have a frame but only with scrolls. From the detail of *Ranking Ancient Works in a Bamboo Court*, we can see three scrolls of paintings on the table in front of the man in white and a boy carrying four scrolls on his shoulder. People have to roll the scrolls out to see the images. Chinese artists see a painting as a pure plane. The viewers see it in the same way. In the work of Raphael, although *The School of Athens* is a fresco, there is a thick vault frame with decoration around it. Jacques Derrida wrote about the frame in *The Truth in Painting* (1978) that "[...] it nonetheless conveys the sense of the painting's importance; it props up the work, as it were, making it seem important."³⁶ It agrees with Gombrich's statement of the principle of getting attention, geometrical simplification, isolation and surrounding zone that enhances the centre.



Image 28. Details of *Ranking Ancient Works in a Bamboo Court*

36. Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p.12

3.2 Viewing absence

There are multiple focuses in Qiu Ying's painting, it may seem that there is no centre focus in his painting. In fact, there is a clear theme in the image but the way he dealt with it is not about choosing a focus. He allowed viewers to wander in the image.

A Chinese artist named Xia Gui (夏珪), lived in The Southern Song period of Song Dynasty (1127-1279), a much earlier period than Qiu Ying's time, but no one knows exactly when he was born or died. His landscape painting *Pure and Remote Mountains and Streams* is a long painting of 46.50 cm high by 889.10 cm long. It is obvious he did not paint the whole image combined of ten sheets of paper, thus we can see a lot of blank area in it.

With cavalier perspective (multiple centre points) method, the vanishing point in the painting is following viewer's focus. It is similar to standing outdoors looking at the landscape.



Image 31. The detail of *Pure and Remote Mountains and Streams*

In the detail of *Pure and Remote Mountains and Streams* (above), the painter made a few simple lines in this area, therefore the viewer needs to experience the painting instead of checking the details. In fact, the part left empty in the painting has a shape outlined by the visible parts and the edges of the papers. It is evident the size and form of the emptiness were part of painter's consideration. The absence in this painting is like a hint for viewers to use their imagination. These blank areas could be water, fog, clouds, or not only the



Image 29. Qiu Ying, *Spring Morning in the Han Palace*, Ming Dynasty, Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 30.6x574.1cm link <http://www.npm.gov.tw/da/ch-hm/images/photo/cat7-4b.jpg> to high quality digital version from Palace Museum, Taipei, website, people have to roll the mouse horizontally to see the whole image. This act is very close to the movement of looking at the real painting.

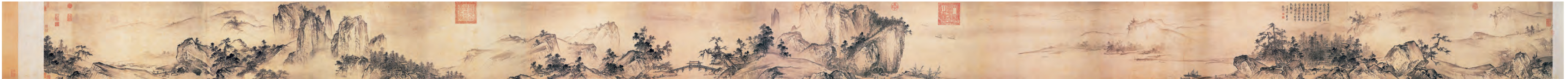


Image 30. The right part of *Pure and Remote Mountains and Streams*

nature, because Chinese landscape painting has a tradition that a painting can describe the painter's personal emotion or spirit through nature views. In the following dynasty, amateur painters were more important in the history, therefore the landscapes in paintings were more subjective.³⁷

Xia Gui was famous for his particular way of painting composition with large proportion of emptiness or leaving the centre of the paintings empty. Later, this way of composing images became quite formal in Chinese traditional painting. It is known as "leaving white/blank", a way of letting people sense the painting instead of indicating. When people look at the blank space, they ponder about what they are looking for. It is about the whole view, and not only the area seen. The Chinese ancient scientist Shen Kuo³⁸ (1031-1095) mentioned about paintings in his *Dream Pool Essays* ³⁹(1088, Song Dynasty) in order to appreciate calligraphy and painting, physical form is not considered. The viewer has to understand them by taking the hint. Shen Kuo thought most people just cared about figure, position, and colour. It is difficult to grasp the spirit of the painting.⁴⁰ He emphasized the sensing of paintings, not only the looking. Furthermore, he mentioned the cavalier perspective and considered that to paint a big scale landscape, one should transfer it into a small scale image which is different from representing the real space.

Therefore, to sense an image is to wander in the image which is different from focusing on the "important" thing. This way of looking needs contemplation. Back to jewellery, probably it is appear from the wandering in the paths of perception. When people shifting the focus, the jewellery is in the out of corner of eyes.

37. James Cahill, *Hill Beyond a River* (Weatherhill, 1976), p. 4

38. Original name: 沈括

39. Original title: 梦溪笔谈

40. Shen Kuo, *Dream Pool Essays* (Chinese version from Zhonghua Book Company, 2009), p.179

4.Searching for the absence

4.1 Misuse

Heidegger used a series of terms “challenging”, “setting-upon”, “ordering” and “standing-reserve” to describe that how modern technology requires nature in the essay *Question Concerning Technology*⁴¹. This idea lead to series scenes, “Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore⁴²[...]”, the mining is ordered to stock for sun’s warmth, river is set for electricity, even a view is set by the ordering from vacation industry.⁴³ And human use the technology to drive these processes, man has been occupied by the way that ordering the real as standing-reserve. These situations have not changed in nowadays consumer society. In this running system, thousands of products are waiting to be produced, owned and used. Human has been involved in as Human Resource. Compare with this, the gentle relationship of being and nothingness from Laozi’s philosophy looks simple and natural, he wrote manmade objects for discovering the rule of natural. The nothingness in Laozi’s view is a type of concealment. However nowadays, the nothingness became foregone being, which is set in the force that Heidegger called Ge-stell. Therefore, the unknown as a character of nothingness is gone, everything is pre-set. As a result, it means the potential possibilities in the emptiness are already ruled which covered the rule from nature itself.

However, the concept of misuse is the way of using out of foregone setting. There is a website called *There I Fixed It*.⁴⁴ It introduced itself as “Funny Bad Repairs”, it allowed people to post their own photos and show how the individual have misused or badly fixed objects with limited skills.

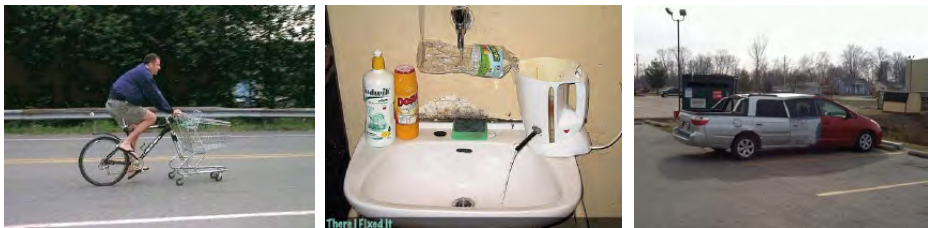


Image 32. Three photos from *There I Fixed It* website

41. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Translated by William Lovitt, (Garland publishing, 1977)

42. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p.15

43. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p.16

44. <http://failblog.cheezburger.com/thereifixedit?page=1>

As Laozi stated, “Therefore benefit comes from what is there; Usefulness from what is not there.” these images show how people made their own objects by combining different absence from varies of parts. People are searching for the absence they need in the fragments of mass production. They seem to return to stone age to use what is available (Chapter 1), but in the jungle of man made objects. In misuse, people refined the potentials in the absence; the bottle is not only used for containing water, it is now used as a pipe because of its material and inner space.

But the misuse doesn’t escape from the system that stated by Heidegger, although from misuse people created the object we have never seen before, it is the same principle of modern technology, he explained that,

*What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.*⁴⁵

Misuse essentially is another round of challenge but for the existence of what people made by taking apart the original objects and reconstruction. Heidegger stated that “revealing” is the process from nothingness to being. Art is also a sort of “revealing”, it is similar to the technology but fundamentally different.⁴⁶

45. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p.14

46. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 35

4.2 Art

There are no pre-set answers for the revealing of art. In contemporary art, some artists questioned the relationship of human and object in their works.



Image 33. Sonja Vordermaier, *Strange Order*, Photography on Dibond, 2003-2007



Image 34. Melanie Bonajo, photography from book *Furniture Bondage*, 2009

They look similar with the concept of misuse, but without practical demand. These practices were based on the questioning of objects, but forced them to fit our requirements. The moment that artist began to blow the water from the pot to the cup, it was incorrect, but it was a form of experience. It showed another possibility of the absence of pot and cup. In addition, wearing a group of objects is showing a person's daily life with body directly, it is a question of normally life, when they reconstructed in an unusual way, people might recognize every piece on her body, but the image of this combination is quite uncomfortable, because human body looks like one of these objects. However, it could be a statement of daily life.

What about jewellery? Jewellery is part of the objects we use, although it is almost useless. Is it possible that we experience a piece of jewellery in "incorrect" way? Or do we to make Jewellery from other ready-mades. Japanese jeweler Yuka Oyama did a project called *Schmuck Quickies* from year 2002-2007, she set up an small area like hair salon and invited people to join. She made a piece of jewellery quickly from the materials she collected from daily life under the direction of the audience.

Yuka Oyama's project broke the traditional material and structure of jewellery, she reconstructed ready-mades and combined them with the body directly. Therefore both for the maker and wearer, jewellery became a process of experience. Her idea of the project



Image 35. Yuka Oyama, *Schmuck Quickies*, 2002-2007



Image 36. left: "I want to have the strongest look of all so that no one can beat me. It looks like a but. Great! Add some more of that blue stuff." right: "I would like to have a piece like a pet that you can carry and walk around with."⁴⁷

was related to consumerism; she made jewellery for the fast moving society. Most of her items can only be used once. However everyone is different. In my opinion, the most interesting thing about this project is, this type of jewellery doesn't need boxes or pedestals, it has to be worn with bodies. These pieces of jewellery are temporary for people but not secondary, because the jewellery and the wearer gain attention together as one unity. The position of jewellery and wearer parallel. Oyama decided on a complete image with objects for her audiences, even when they requested with specific demands. The relationship of the maker and wearer became more complicated than before. Both have to accept an unknown image, and avoid the pre-set of jewellery together.

Conclusion

Jewellery as daily object has its own special characters. Its purpose is always caught between functionality and uselessness, body and object. I think it is also mixed between being the focus and the ignored. To accepted jewellery's in-between identity could be the direction of contemporary jewellery practice. In the last century, jewellery artists tried to figure out a clear position of jewellery. From their struggles, I realized to thinking about jewellery with the logic of duality is always a trap (Chapter 2). But how to create and view jewellery from other perspectives?

In the creation process, the absent part of an object is always important. It could also be a way to make and think of jewellery. The philosophy of Laozi influenced my way of looking at an object. I wonder what will be or used to be in the absence of a piece of jewellery. It also involves the function of jewellery, which I question in my own practice. I am interested in the structures of brooches and the ways they connect to bodies and objects. Are there other possibilities in their absent parts?

I took Manfred Nisslmüller and Otto Künzli's works as examples in order to study the limitation of structures of brooches. Nisslmüller's brooch used mass produced pins to hold itself—or against itself. It is ironic but also a very serious question for a brooch. Is the brooch pin just an invisible medium between the wearer and the decoration? The pin functions as a very practical part of a brooch, but it is also the part that is ignored easily or hidden by the maker's purpose. If the meaning is the main function of jewellery, is the pin just a part that supports the meaning from behind? Jewellery itself cannot exist without such small thing, just as the jug handle in Heidegger's essay *The Thing*. He also mentioned "vigilance", which I think it is an important way for the jewellery maker to observe, perceive and question every normal details on objects.

Jewellery artists from the last century wanted to change the status of jewellery. They tried to enrich jewellery; for a pin of a brooch, it was just a support of excessive things on top. Otto Künzli's brooch for two people pushes the concept of a brooch to the limit; the "extra thing" on the brooch is replaced by another human body. Maybe the maximum capacity of a brooch is to support two wearers. Therefore, I don't think by adding something extra is the way to change the status of jewellery. Personally, absence is a way of making use of jewellery. It could also be an angle of looking for making jewellery. The absent parts that form the basic structures of jewellery give me imaginations but not pre-set images.

The misuse in daily life is also based on the absent parts of objects. People create

new objects to meet their demands by taking apart ready-mades and re-combining the fragments. In art, artists misuse objects by creating images and explore different perceptions. Jewellery artist Yuka Oyama's project *Schmuck Quickies*, used ready-mades and found objects from different places. Most of the jewellery pieces she made are temporary and more like for creating images with the wearers. Many artists have used various materials for jewellery, and are not satisfied with the traditional costly materials, such as precious metals and gemstones. Readymade is a huge resource available. Misusing or searching for the absence in ready-made objects could be a connection of normal daily objects and contemporary jewellery to human body.

For perceiving jewellery, the way of looking at ancient Chinese paintings inspires me. In the ancient Chinese paintings, there are no images that are emphasized visually. I think this could be applied to the relationship between jewellery and the wearer, in a way that they parallel and create a new image together.

I found that often jewellers prefer to emphasize the status of their works. They want people to focus on their creations. This is very obvious in their jewellery photographs. I used two pages from Otto Künzli's catalogue as examples, and concluded that the packaging and the wearers enhance the focus of the brooch. It is similar to the composition of Raphael's painting *The School of Athens*, which sets the important figures in the center.

Outside of photographs, in real life people wear jewellery in motion. The focus is not always on the jewellery pieces as the way jewellers prefer. The focus is moving and flexible. So, the jewellery will more likely appear out of the corner of our eyes and not as the center of attention. Jewellers should not be afraid that their works may be ignored, or avoid placing their creations in a supplemental position. Instead, they should all view and make jewellery by using these characteristics.

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