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CELEBRATING SLOW MOVEMENT: DESIGN OF A SENSORY EXPERIENCE THROUGH AN INTERGENERATIONAL PLATFORM

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Abstract

This thesis explores the intersections between wisdom, happiness, and aesthetics through intergenerational experiences of older adults and younger individuals. Parallel to this, I have researched the virtues of Slow Cooking, Slow Design, and the Slow Movement to address wellness needs throughout our world. The original solutions explored for balancing these values focused on mindful activities. Case studies of relationships within families in comparison with alternative communities, such as Eco-villages, have guided my research and revealed meaningful efforts that engage individuals with shared environmental and moral values. The final idea that I envisioned is, in essence, a form of sensory experience design for people of different ages to benefit from values of sustainability, mindfulness, and slowness by sharing time with both tangible and intangible resources. The final design of this project is a table to be located in a third place that serves to gather people together to knit and learn from each other. This idea is intended to encourage people to slow down and experience knitting as a manifestation of both the mindfulness movement and sustainability.

CELEBRATING SLOW MOVEMENT: DESIGN OF A SENSORY EXPERIENCE THROUGH AN INTERGENERATIONAL PLATFORM

by

Asal Andarzipour

B.A University of Tehran, 2014

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in
Collaborative Design

Syracuse University

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Dedicated to Mohammad and Soori:

my inspiring parents who devoted their lives to my sublimation and encouraged me to be brave in this wild world and explore beyond borders.

"The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it."

-David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*

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Introduction

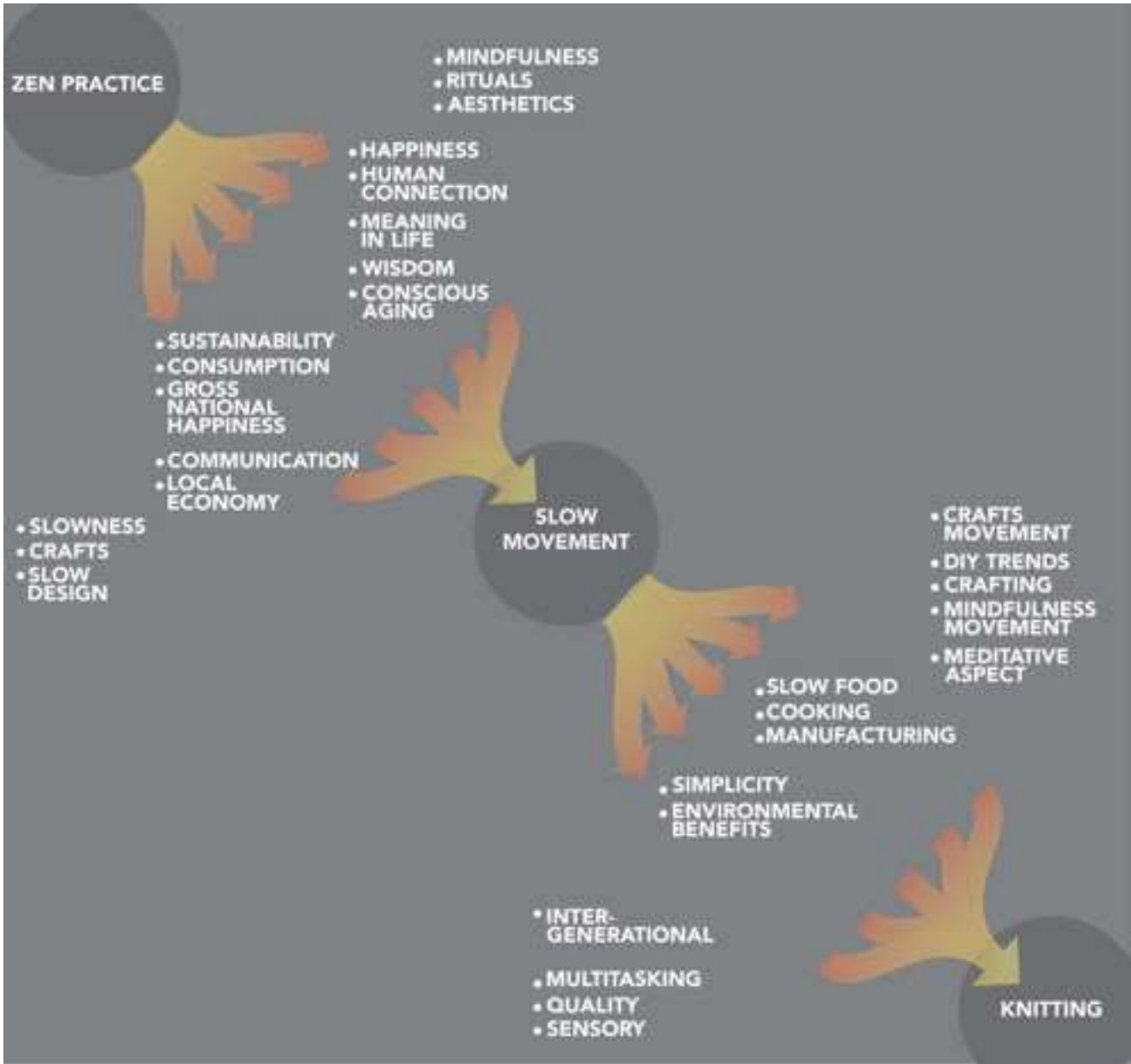
Design has been evolving over the course of human history. Different civilizations have always been looking for new solutions, and with this point of view, design has always existed as a discipline even before some people begin to identify as professional designers. Today, when we call someone a designer, they might be working as a fashion designer, visual designer, industrial designer, interaction designer, architectural designer, service designer etc. All these professionals use the same mindset of design thinking to generate ideas and implement them. Numerous aspects of design have a significant role in forming human life, and each has an inevitable footprint. This translates to our lives and also the planet. While the discipline can make positive change and growth in different aspects of human experience, there can be other aspects as well. In particular, some industrial designers have a critical perspective on their discipline. In that the design of mass-produced artifacts is a response to the needs of our industrial world, this critical way of looking at design evolved at the same time. That consists of environmental matters, consumption issues, and human behavior aspects. Decade after decade, designers have tried to modify the discipline to be more human-friendly, sustainable, aesthetically pleasant or meaningful. The ability to solve problems is what they claim, whether it is about the quality of can openers, food delivery systems or colonizing planet Mars. As the process of refining things for the world is

never ending, designers may find it challenging to stay positive about what they do. Victor Papanek was one of the impactful pioneers who questioned the moral aspects of working as a designer. In "Design for the Real World" he discusses how designers are reacting to the situation by career change to avoid contributing to a wasteful society. He continues by noting a group who responded to the dilemma between profit and social responsibility by choosing to "resolve any conflict between their work and their moral ideals through meditation or other spiritual activities." (39) It seems some designers find spirituality as a refuge from the material-oriented nature of their job. They may be looking for some meaning by this approach. The paradoxical nature of design opens up possibilities for spiritual points of view to this discipline. Like many other aspects of life, design practice can also be viewed beyond objects, materials and profit.

It might be interesting to note the core inspiration for this project came from a one month stay interning in a Zen Buddhism monastery. Experiencing a practice of mindfulness and seeing the benefits of slowing down, in addition to being close to nature and observing an almost self-sustaining community of Zen practitioners fueled my motivation to explore a new design approach to address a variety of values.

Design for a meaningful life was another concern in this project. As we are entering a world with higher life expectancy, new needs are emerging. Other than physical and mental challenges of an aging population, there are existential matters and new ways of perceiving life as a meaningful experience. This is possibly an area that some designers may face moral dilemmas. Design for the aging itself is a socially responsible act. However, finding balanced ways to respond to aging issues with the society as a whole also matters. While many design solutions for an aging population have a medical approach, further work on the spiritual wellness of older adults life is highly needed. That is why considering the happiness of humans matters in comparison with 'so-called' consumer satisfaction.

This project is an exploration of alternate ways of providing human-friendly solutions for a world facing a fast-paced variety of changes including climate crisis, the growth of an aging population and emerging technologies for communication. It is believed that designers can influence human behavior and in doing so impact the world through their actions. This project is an effort to create a balance between different values in humans, society, culture, and the planet.



Covergent-Divergent diagram
Research areas over the course of project

Analysis and Synthesis

This inquiry began with focusing on three main keywords which were representing areas of interest by the designer. Based on the past experiences which inspired me to have a different perspective in design, I chose concepts that are not physical and may not be easy to measure or evaluate. Happiness, wisdom, and aesthetics were the three words. Regarding definition, happiness and wisdom are fuzzier and they rely on the context in which we choose to explain them. Aesthetics is an area in design that is constantly discussed and there are always challenges in striking a balance with technological function and economic goals. Looking at these three separately can help clarify meaning. Further, the journey of this thesis was a process of convergent/divergent thinking as visualized in the following diagram.

Happiness is a comparative experience and each individual has a different interpretation. The happiness I've been trying to discover through this project is that which is perceived on a daily basis through activities. There have been various inquiries done in this area by scholars and one was a cross-country research effort conducted by a group of clinical psychologists. According to Fave et. al "Happiness usually arises as a by-product of cultivating activities that individuals consider as important and meaningful." We can apply this understanding to design. In other words, designers can provide an activity based experience to nourish happiness in an ordinary way. The perspective of the Authentic Happiness Theory by Seligman has been used as a resource to define and analyze happiness. He introduces three elements of happiness: positive emotion, engagement and meaning. (11) The first one is about what we feel. "pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort and the like."

The second element is engagement and in particular the concept of flow. One example Seligman offers for flow is "being one with music." This reveals the importance of attention and mindfulness. When we are engaged with something, we are not distracted or doing something else, we are just present with the flow.

Meaning is the third element of happiness. “The meaningful life consists in belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self, and humanity creates all the positive institutions to allow this: religion, political party, being green, the Boy Scouts, or the family” (Seligman 12) We can see there are close relationships between the values mentioned. Motivation to bring sustainability to one’s life and having family interactions both have a shared area of meaning.

The second main keyword was **Wisdom**. At first, I was interested in knowing if life has another meaning for older adults? My assumption was the longer you live, the more introspective you become. Aging is of course a universal experience no matter how old we are. We may question ourselves and the meaning of our lives at different stages, however I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between wisdom and age.

There is a perspective to life in different cultures that is deeply associated with old age. There are many myths in folklore culture, which made me curious to explore means of action in elders life that is portrayed as age-related wisdom. I wanted to know whether it is beyond proverbs and stereotypes or not.

At first, I looked at different definitions of wisdom, and the one I found helpful was consisting of three qualities. Clayton and Birren have suggested a three-dimensional model for wisdom (qtd. in Dannefer 308)

Monika Ardent, a social scientist who conducted several research studies on the wisdom of age implemented an empirical assessment of the three-dimensional wisdom scale. She describes the reflective dimension as follows with “A deeper understanding of life is only possible if one can perceive reality as it is without any major distortions. To do this, one needs to engage in reflective thinking by looking at phenomena and events from many different perspectives to develop self-awareness and self-insight.” She mentions that cognitive dimension of wisdom includes “knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of human nature, of the inherent limits of knowledge, and of life’s unpredictability and uncertainties.”

Krause discusses how persons derive a sense of meaning through careful review of how their lives have been lived.(409-432) This is why Nilsson et al believe integrity does not stop here, but rather continues to evolve into the virtue of wisdom (494-508)

Aesthetic was considered as a keyword to consider the artistic aspect of design. Over the years of industrial design history, there is a back and forward transition between aesthetics,

functionality, sustainability and many other artifact values. There are different cases that attention to aesthetics have been distracting for many designers, and led to non-functional or not eco-friendly products. Based on my early studies and experiences, I found it challenging to sustain a balance between these different values. In many cases, the aesthetics aspect is the first one to be eliminated to make space for addressing other concerns.

Alastair Fuad-Luke, the co-founder of the Slow Research Lab, mentions some of the characteristics of the current design paradigm. As he discusses how current design aesthetics are based predominantly on material shapes and qualities (Fuad-Luke, 6) There is nothing wrong with this approach, however we see many of the sustainable design practitioners ignore this aspect of design as they believe focusing on that can be harmful to the moral attitude of the design for both nature and humans. However, the topic of sustainable aesthetics continues to be a topic of great discussion by designers. The aesthetics that I'm referencing pertain to what we experience while interacting with consumer-based artifacts. Yuriko Saito, a professor of philosophy at the Rhode Island School of Design has made inquiries about aesthetics and their role as part of everyday experience. Aesthetics can be and is extremely influential when it comes to consumer satisfaction. This is how she discusses it: "Obviously, aesthetics aspects of artifacts

affect our decision making for purchase and consumption. In a better word, that is about style choices. There are discussions in which style is the crucial factor that determines the commercial success of a product.” (Saito 56) We (or I) should see while this quality is important, it should be used in a way to encourage and support sustainable consumerism.

Saito discusses how we are less familiar with the power of the aesthetic to affect and sometimes define the state of the world and the quality of life in ways that do not result from a particular program by the government, society, or commercial enterprise. (57)

The concept mentioned is the aesthetic I try to manifest through my work. One in which the user gains appreciation of important values and through interaction with the object brings our attention to the present moment.

While the main concern of the Slow Movement is environmental matters and human needs, we should consider the significant role of aesthetics pleasure and the way it affects patterns of consumption. Simple design and use of natural materials can postpone consumers becoming uninterested in a product well before its intended life span. The roots and origin of this simple and craft-like design aesthetic can be found in designs of Zen practitioners and the aesthetics of the Japanese Tea ceremony. They express these principles as Wabi-Sabi. According to the

Department of Asian Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art “These two amorphous concepts are used to express a sense of rusticity, melancholy, loneliness, naturalness, and age so that a misshapen, worn peasant’s jar is considered more beautiful than a pristine, carefully crafted dish. While the latter pleases the senses, the former stimulates the mind and emotions to contemplate the essence of reality. This artistic sensibility has had an enormous impact on Japanese culture up to modern times.” (“Zen Buddhism | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History”) Here we see this point of view can give the opportunity to look again at products, and find satisfaction in the way they are. Use of natural materials makes the rust and aging process inevitable. The simplicity of Wabi-Sabi brings clarity to the viewer and as a result persuades the user to embrace the object. There are a variety of concepts in Zen that leads to environmental responsibility among people. They can be considered as a “package deal”, including virtues such as compassion for all sentient beings, non-violence and treating all beings with respect and not as merely instrumentally valuable. Selflessness and being free of the desire to greedily consume natural resources and mindfulness to address the consequences of one’s actions, environmental or otherwise. (James 128) All these values can be implemented as guidelines of slow design. Zen is about stillness and focus of a clear mind. As the core of Wabi-Sabi, Zen has overlapping values with the Slow

Movement. A major benefit of slowing down in any activity (individual or in large systems), is the way consciousness increases, just by focusing on the present moment.

Parallel to different issues we are facing in the current world, there are ongoing movements of change. Some alternate ways of looking at different values and some ongoing practices have been studied parallel to analysis and synthesis. The following case studies are to clarify positive change over the world in response to the challenges we face.

The first to note is the example of Bhutan, which started to monitor Gross National Happiness versus Gross National Product. Gross national product (GNP) is defined as “an estimate of total value of all the final products and services produced in a given period by the means of production owned by a country's residents.” While measuring GNP is evaluating the material productivity in a society, Bhutan chooses to focus on another aspect. However there might be challenges in defining what they are trying to monitor, this is a sign of a change of attitude in a government.

In a smaller scale, we are witnessing alternate lifestyles and ways of forming societies. EcoVillage at Ithaca is an example of a community with shared values of sustainability, local economy and human connections. However, there are numerous eco-villages all over the world.

“At EVI meaningful human contact is the norm and not the exception. I consider myself blessed to live here. I can maintain my privacy when I need to, but also have plenty of opportunities to form and develop my connections with my chosen neighbors. Indeed I think that living in community fills the deep longing for human love and connection that is shared by our whole species” (Walker 75)

Slow Movement

As the term “slow movement” is still not well-known, that is the way most civilizations have been being sustained throughout most of history. With a viewpoint to the past, we can develop strategies for future systems. While the research on the concept of “Slow” is speeding up, it is needed to have actual acts of designing and producing things in this manner, and not be limited to theories and ideas.

Slow Design is a part of the Slow Movement. In this thesis, Slow Design was the guiding discipline.

Slow Design is still evolving. Scholars and designers are working on finding a comprehensive definition. However, the efforts by Slow Research Lab have had a significant impact in this process. *“A new design paradigm where the role of design is to balance socio-cultural and individual needs with the well-being of the environment.”* is the way Fuad-Luke defines it. (9) This means in Slow Design, the human life is not considered as separate from the environment, and they are interdependent. Considering balance between these encourages designers to rethink the priorities. There should be a methodology to guide the designer in this process, and facilitate evaluation of final solutions.

The Slow Research Lab defined principles for Slow Design. Reveal, Expand, Reflect, Engage, Participate and Evolve are the six principles. Let us understand what these principles communicate. The following designs were first recognized by the Slow Lab as examples of Slow Design that relate to each principle.

Lighting designs by Julia Lohmann is beautiful and unique, however when you get closer, you notice an organic texture that is unknown. First, when these pieces were exhibited, it **revealed** lights made of sheep and cow stomachs. The designer wants the audience to face the by-products of their everyday meat consumption. Here the message of design is more important

than functionality and mass-manufacturing capacity. Instead, the designer communicates environmental concerns.



Lohmann, 2004



Lohmann, 2004

Living With Things is a collection of artifacts by the German Designer Monika Hoinkis. The Radio is like any other radio, except one feature. The radio works only if you are holding it. If you leave it alone on the counter, the radio will not play music. Objects in this collection all have an intimacy message. Here there might not be any direct environmental concern, but the product is reminding the users about a sense of kindness. In this collection, functionality is not the main aim in design. Communicating meaning and intimacy are prior to usability, which means the designer **expanded** the expressions of a radio beyond its perceived function.



Hoinkis, 2005



Hoinkis, 2005

Industrial designer Martin Ruiz de Azua used the principle of **engagement** as the essence of his work. The Human Chair is not even a physical seat, but is an experiment to engage humans for the shared goal of sitting. The design object does not exist unless people collaborate to create it.



Azua, 2002

By reviewing three examples, we learn how broad the possibilities of the Slow Design are. From a work of art with environmental concerns to a non-tangible experience for spreading the word about human interdependency, it covers a diverse range of disciplines.

Based on all the studies and prior definitions of Slow Design and considering it as an evolving design thinking system, it is important to come up with a personal definition. This can help us to know what Slow Design means to this project, and how it is used:

Slow Design is an innovative approach to balance human-environment needs by raising awareness and mindfulness.

This means throughout the process of designing a Slow product, we consider the values of sustainability, and wellness for humans and society. Encouraging users and designers to be mindful of themselves, others and their environment is possible in supportive conditions where they can do things at the right pace and have a meaningful experience to actualize the benefits of mindfulness. In this project, designing for or Co-Design with older adults is a requirement.

The Role of Seniors

The following chapter discusses the potential role older adults have in the Slow Movement. At first, there were a few questions to explore:

- How elders can promote the values of their generation to the future?
- How can they act as the latest witnesses of an era?
- How can people accept the aging process as an inevitable phenomena?
- How can elders embrace the tranquility of their lives?

The goal was to look at this social cohort from a new perspective. Elders have the capacity to offer their experiences to the world as change makers. By learning about the Slow Movement, the question is can older adults have a role in Slow Design practices? There might be stereotypes about them, and designers may have assumptions that they are not motivated to stay active. As a result of this point of view, we might think the design solutions for the Baby Boomers can not promote activities. According to Smith Walker, designers should create facilitators, not fixes to old age.(P.102)

This is based on the way Baby Boomers evaluate what designers offer to them.

From a mindfulness point of view, we can see that some solutions do not challenge minds. When things get more automatized, people do not pay attention to every moment in their lives, and causes disconnection from the environment, objects and as a result, they lose their sensory experience. Facilitating direct experiences of the present moment is one of the considerations for the final design.

Mindfulness practices are challenging but helpful for the brain. Another challenging area to stay active is learning new skills. "In the Yankelovich Boomer Dreams study, 71 percent expected to devote more time and energy over the next five to ten years to learn a new skill or hobby.(Walker Smith and Clurman, 2007, p.108) It seems boomers are open to learning new skills. Making crafts can be a good skill that is slow, mindful and has a potential to be environmentally friendly. This could inspire our design solution as a way to involve Baby Boomers in the Slow Movement. But first we should see if this generation has any interest in the values of the Slow Movement, in particular environmental matters. By the way, boomers in America were in their youth when the Silent Spring by Rachel Carson was first published, and later they witnessed growth in environmentalism as a part of the counterculture.

Yankelovich inc.; the pioneer in generational marketing and one of the first organizations to name the generation “Baby Boomers” has an inquiry titled Boomer Dreams Study. This study categorizes Boomers based on 174 value items to six segments. The potential target cohort for this Slow Design project are the last two segments named Diss/Contenteds and Re-Activists. These are under Societal category. Table 1 is a part of Boomer Segments containing details of these two cohorts.

Table 1 (Smith and Clurman, 2007, p. 178)

Diss/Contenteds 8%~6MM	Worldview	Thumbnail	Future Focus
	Skepticism Comfort	Dissatisfied and Challenging the status quo, but not to the point of spoiling comfort.	To connect with a broader vision or mission that restores and renews hope and trust
	Big Idea		
	Purpose		
Re-Activists 15% ~15MM	Worldview	Thumbnail	Future Focus
	Social causes Self-Discovery	Poised and ready to get heavily reinvolved in saving the world.	To re-engage with bigger ideals and movements before the chance is gone forever.
	Big Idea		
	Last Call		

According to Smith and Clurman, these two segments are more willing to think the system should be changed and people should be free to do their own thing. (Smith and Clurman, 2007, p.196)

In general, they are open to getting engaged in social causes without lifestyle sacrifices. In this case, we can assume they are more likely to join the Slow Movement, because it gives them the chance to make change using a big idea. This change may be made by a single product they purchase, or an experience that they remember. By having an eye on the examples of the Slow Design mentioned earlier, we know there is room for creating experiences. Diss/Contenteds and Re-Activists look for things that are meaningful, not material stuff. The research shows that creative satisfaction for them is more important than financial satisfaction. Their preference is the most among Baby Boomers. That is why we can recognize a specific target group as potential contributor to Slow Design.

Slow Food

Slow Food have been the starting point for the larger Slow Movement. In 1986 when Carlo Petrini took part in a protest against the opening of a Mc-Donald's fast food restaurant in Rome (Ducasse), he might not know the significant impact that establishing Slow Food Association had in spreading Slow Movement to other areas. In this project, to narrow down the research, slow food was selected, as this study can expand to other areas of slow movement.

In-progress Thesis Statement

**“DESIGNING AN
EXPERIENCE TO
HELP SENIORS KEEP
COOKING, AND PASS
THIS CULTURE TO
THEIR
GRANDCHILDREN.”**

Food is the intersection of many different concerns in this project. It is a universal need through all beings on planet earth, and has strong roots in every society's culture. There are many forms and rituals that relate to food experience, whether for preparation or consumption. Although the food subject did not shape the final design, investigations in this area were helpful in order to make sense of Slow Design throughout the process. As an example, food is an understandable area for local businesses.

Nowadays local food economies are being examined. The growth of Hardwick in Vermont inspired Ben Hewitt to write “The Town that Food Saved”. He explains how individuals in a community are responsible for each other, in a way that all members can benefit from the local food system. (Hewitt 172) This interdependency can form other innovations. It is possible that a meaningful experience can make people of all ages feel responsibility and care for each other. The other aspect of food experience is in the preparation. We can view it as a process beyond physical needs. Taking time for cooking, making relish or even wine is a way of respect to self and non-self. Food is our direct connection to nature, and making it with care, makes us more conscious of the resources we have on planet earth. If we simply touch, smell and feel what we are going to eat soon, we will realize how important it is to save lives that are sustaining our

bodies. That is the reason food experience is multi-sensory. This sensory experience can be expanded beyond food.

There is a social aspect of food consumption that can change our worldview. Most of us prefer to share a meal, rather than sitting in a corner and eating alone. Sitting at a table is a social activity and a way to have interactions and get connected to each other, the health of our body, and the nature of all the food that comes out of earth and we eat. Food consumption is a key factor in making balance on the planet. If we think again that how another living being is giving its life to sustain us, we will be more thankful for all the resources on the planet earth. As we realize this, we can use them in a conscious way, reduce the food waste and try to end the hunger . This can expand to the larger image of a variety of resources we have access to.

In meaningful experiences of food preparation and sharing, the goal is not as important as the process. People enjoy taking time for doing these activities. It seems mindfulness is the essence of food experience. Based on this, we may be able to expand this attitude to different activities. These insights formed a new thesis direction for generations to share values of Slow Movement.

In-progress Thesis Statement

**"HOW MIGHT WE
DESIGN A SENSORY
EXPERIENCE IN AN
INTERGENERATIONAL
PLATFORM TO
CELEBRATE THE
VALUES OF SLOW
MOVEMENT?"**

Mindful Crafting

Mindfulness practice is rooted in Buddhist meditation. Zen and the tradition of craftsmanship are interwoven in Japanese culture. While Zen students are trained by Zen masters, there is also a master/apprentice approach in the making of a Japanese craftsman. The historical background goes back to the residence of Korean artists, craftsmen and scholars in Japan between the fifth and seventh centuries. (24) The act of making crafts requires focus and mindfulness. The process of making crafts by hand and tools, needs tender care, which is in contrast with the fast and cheap process of mass production. Mente compares Japanese and American manufactured products, which clarifies this discussion. First, he notes the impact of Zen Buddhism on the Shinto traditions of paying extreme attention to the details of things in nature, by adding the ethical and philosophical idea of paring down the form and shape to its essence and making them perfectly functional. (67) He claims American design and manufacturing is simply “to come up with products that are easy and cheap to fabricate”.

Every handcrafted object takes more time to be built, and as a result, has a higher price. At first, that might not be considered as a user-centered and affordable approach. But, all these lead to more care and attention from the consumer, at the time they are using it. This can help what designers refer to as product attachment.

There are numerous environmental aspects to crafts in that crafted artifacts are usually made directly from natural resources. Contemplations on rugs, pots, baskets, woodworks and many other crafts, make us realize the strong connection between an artifact and nature. In Zen, practitioners are encouraged to con-temple on natural phenomena, and as a result, the sacred art and crafts in Zen demonstrate the beauty of nature. Having elements from nature, in terms of material, form, and function is a major factor in design for sustainability as it can encourage people to appreciate nature. That is why many approaches in Zen comply with Slow Design goals. We notice mindfulness, aesthetics and design with environmental concerns coming together in one tradition.

Design Idea

As a society we are now at a stage of human experience that every single component of large systems exists in the relationship to others and with the whole system. All the processes throughout the industry and consumption are inter-connected. That is why having a positive change in any component can affect the whole system. Sometimes a single experience or product has an impact beyond the limited number of users. This is what Thomas Friedman discusses in his book on the need for a green revolution. He thinks that improving customers

sustainability by companies can cause major shifts and positive impact on the environment.

(Friedman 383)

Considering craft projects, we see that every time a craft is made with mindfulness and care for the planet, or every time someone makes a craft and has a meaningful creative experience, there is

some positive change happening in the world. While exploring Slow Food, we learned that cooking is a form of craft. Therefore, we can view the food culture as taking another form in craft.

The idea of knitting while sitting around a table was informed by Persian and Japanese cultures where people sit together and spend time eating, socializing or just using a shared heat source. In essence, they use area under the table as a fireplace.

Final Thesis Statement

**“CELEBRATING SLOW
MOVEMENT: DESIGN
OF A SENSORY
EXPERIENCE
THROUGH AN
INTERGENERATIONAL
PLATFORM”**



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Making crafts can have benefits other than just producing more artifacts. The repetitive nature of making crafts makes it easy and inclusive. Everyone can get involved and learn how to make them. Juanne Turney admits this quality is



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a means of creating space for contemplation, mindful activity and self-healing. (Turney) Later she defines how knitting is passed down through generations just based on being simple and meaningful. We see that knitting practice is a good experience to share, and promote values of the Slow Movement.

Final Design

The following images illustrate the sketches, prototypes and final artifact. The final design is a set of benches and a table designed for bringing people together in order to teach and learn



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knitting. In the center of the table, there is a swift and yarn can be pulled out of the hole in the center.

At the gallery exhibition, there was an artist statement installed on the wall next to this

furniture. This statement read as follows:

For many among us, the goal of numerous activities in our daily lives is simply to get somewhere or acquire something. However, there are other moments in our lives that we're able to slow down, focus, and contemplate patience and gratitude. These are the rare times that we're able to experience simple things.

What are our most common obsessions these days? Social media? Smart phones? If we were to consider our surroundings, these are the patterns we face on a daily basis. In the most positive way we should forgive each other for these habits and addictions.



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After all, some are just a reaction to loneliness or filling a need for connection in an age of omnipresent communication.

From a consumption point of view, we notice mindless acts of 'wanting more' which affects many aspects of life on our planet. In general,

many of these resource and consumptions problems are the result of a lack of mindfulness.

What are the shared characteristics of all of these grandmothers? Is it that they're knitting, or what they might be doing while knitting? To me, knitting appears to be a socially acceptable excuse for slowing down.

The interesting part of this activity is that research shows that crafts such as knitting trigger a meditative experience.

Let's observe this act in a different way. Most



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of these artifacts are made for someone else. Such as a hat or sweater for a grandchild. So the essence of knitting is kindness and generosity. There is a great deal of time and patience that goes into the 'process of making.'

That's why knitting itself is a complete manifestation of Slow Design, which is the core message of my MFA thesis.

I would like to invite people of different ages to meet at third places that provide the beauty of slowing down and allowing them to engage in a craft-based experience. The atmosphere is friendly and the tables and seats I created are short which draws people in and makes them sit together. The knitting kit in the center of the table serves as a focal point much like a warm fireplace serves to bring people together.

The essence of slow design, and appreciation of every moment to celebrate all natural resources and our own well-being can be experienced in a supportive environment. If people have a good experience, they will be encouraged to contribute to the Slow

movement, which in turn is good for everything on planet earth.

Simplicity in the body of this piece of furniture is obvious. The whole furniture is made from natural wood material and the simple form reduced the amount of waste while producing it. Despite the simple design, there are small details in the making of the furniture. All of the sharp edges are chamfered for safety and aesthetics. The table and benches are not painted, therefore the surfaces may wear out over time, which relates to impermanence as one of the characteristics of Wabi-Sabi.

The furniture is all hand crafted and it is not designed for mass production. It was installed in a gallery as the first public unveiling.

The seating and the table are shorter than standard for task seating and it was inspired by the Japanese and Persian cultures. The height of the benches is the least for adults. Some may question the possibility of the level of comfort for elders, however as guests interacted with this piece in the gallery, they found it functional for themselves, and they made an emotional connection to the experience. As the prior inquiry demonstrated, elders prefer meaningful experiences to material things. Also, this experience is supposed to cover a

broad age range of users in a friendly way. The simple and direct message of the final artifact is communicated with minimal and simple design.

To get additional feedback from users in a third place, this piece of design was presented at the Westcott Neighborhood Art Trail in Syracuse.

During a weekend creative event, several visitors interacted with the piece. As many expressed curiosity about the handcrafted table and the yarn, they were invited to join and experience the tranquility of just knitting. If they needed



instructions, it was provided or they could ask a friend or another visitor. Many were attracted by the mechanism in the center.

Frank (age 63): “This is neat! I create sculptures. I do not have knitting skills but I enjoy challenging myself and being in the moment.”

There were younger visitors who came and just took their seats. This was an intuitive reaction.

Sarah (age 8): "I am an artist." I asked her to try knitting with the needles but she did not know how to. Her friend Lena (10) was there and did a demonstration for her. Then Sarah's father showed up and we had a conversation about the meaning of this piece. Seeing a table with



benches around the knitting kit in the middle, made the visitor pause and ask about it. After an initial verbal description, they could communicate better with the piece.

Direct human interaction, meditation in action, simplicity, sensory experience in a local community, intergenerational sharing, natural material and craft making all come together to slow people down and spread the word of the Slow Movement. As users interact with it, they benefit the values of this movement, and become participatory Slow Designers.

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