

Poetic Emotion for Environmental Design

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This extended essay will focus on how emotional connections can be created in multiple areas of design, specifically through the use of poetic language – visual & written, Japanese aesthetic concepts, as well as the effects of this on the environment. The intention to use poetic writing in this paper is because it presents an alternative way to look at and explore design through written literature – one that is not from an analytical point of view but an emotionally descriptive one. To do this, this piece of writing will feature books, studies and research papers from authors of emotional design, sustainable design and much more. Some of these include Johnathan Chapman, William McDonough and Michael Braungart to name a few. In addition to this, this paper will also feature designs and work from a surface pattern designer, a concrete poet and an ancient haiku poet.

Poetic writing and poetic visual language, as they are presented in this extended essay, refer to not only poems but also metaphors, symbolism, narrative and storytelling that have a focus on emotion. Very much like how Welby Ings uses the phrase in her paper “Resonant voices: The poetic register in exegetical writing for creative practice”. (Ings, 2021, p. 123).

Emotion can be communicated in a vast number of areas within the context of design. Of these, this paper addresses narrative & storytelling, concrete poetry, haiku, Ma and wabi-sabi.

There are many similarities between poetic writing and design compositions. Both poetry and design seek a relationship between objects, people, and the environment. Due to these connections, it is thought that poetic designs can affect people. As Yu-Ju Lin, Mei-Ting Lin, Jun-Liang Chen, and Po-Hsien Lin suggest in their paper “The Study of the Conversation Poetic and Creative Design” incorporating poetry in designs could result in a successful way to heighten the emotions felt by the user. (Lin *et al.* 2014, p. 15). Furthermore, the article “Humanizing Design through Narrative Inquiry” by Sheila Danko points out the likeness between design and telling stories, when she states that in both areas one needs to arrange tumultuous pieces to format a coherent outcome. (Danko, 2006, p. 12). This demonstrates that using poetic writing in design would work well, together and for the purpose of forming an emotional connection between the product and the user, from the communication of these shared social understandings and heightened emotions.

An area used by both design and poetic writing is storytelling and narratives. Stories and narratives help us all to learn more about ourselves as individuals, and the journeys in our lives, as well as the world we live in. Commonly used in surface pattern design is the method to tell a story purely through visual representation in design compositions. This is achieved through the use of visual language and formal elements to create symbolism that is recognised by the desired target audience. One could describe this symbolism as a visual metaphor. George Lakoff

and Mark Johnsen write in their book “Metaphors we live by” that a metaphor is meaning presented through symbolism. (2003, p. 249). Thinking of symbolic representations in this way goes to show that surface pattern designers are always using metaphors, visually, thus showing another similarity between design and poetic writing.

To demonstrate how narrative and emotion can be conveyed visibly through visual metaphors in design, this paper will look at a collection of surface pattern designs by Cynthia Jacquette, as seen in figure 1. (Jacquette, 2018). These designs were motivated by her Polish family history and the little she knows of it. Jacquette decided to search for Polish visual motifs and redraw them in her own style, trying to assemble the bits and pieces of information she could gather. She deliberately chose to place these motifs in a composition that is not perfect and not precisely symmetrical, to represent that she still does not fully know of her ancestry and that her story still has lost pieces to be found. (Pattern Observer, 2021). Although the story in this example is very personal to the designer, anyone who recognises these motifs and shares the experience of not knowing much and trying to learn more about their lineage would understand. For these people, the designs in this collection could stand out to them as they relate to the emotions conveyed due to the interesting design decisions of motifs and placement to symbolise not yet having a flawless picture of their lineage. Conveyed to the viewer here are the personal emotions of feeling incomplete and a little lost. Relating to these experiences and feelings can cause the viewer to attach themselves and their own story to the designs, creating an emotional connection.



Figure 1:
(Jacquette, 2018).

Moving away from fully visual, this essay will now look at concrete poetry. Concrete poetry is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as poetry that uses partly visual measures to communicate its meaning. This could be through using words or letters to create patterns, spaces, shapes, and more using typography. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). So then, this indicates that words here are no longer just words, they become part of the visible design.

In the paper “Visual Text: concrete poetry, hyperfiction and the future of the narrative form” by Rebecca Sharp, Peter McKinney, and Seamus Ross, they help the reader to understand concrete poetry better. (2003, p. 3). These authors reveal that concrete poets willingly pay attention to and try to use the space surrounding the text to convey visual significance in the pieces, unlike other types of poetry where the background space is ignored. (Sharp, McKinney and Ross, 2003, p. 3). This means that concrete poets may use the negative space to resemble something, with the intention to create a hidden meaning the viewer would need to search for.

To display how concrete poetry can convey information and emotion to the viewer, this essay will look at “Star/Steer” by famous concrete poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, seen in figure 2. (Finlay, 1966). The piece below depicts the word “star” repeated in a zigzag column with the word “steer” at the bottom. From this, one can come to the understanding of a boat using the stars to navigate while sailing across the water, due to the words and their directional placement. Besides this, a second understanding one may notice is what looks to be the side of an outline of a traditional star shape made from the space and word composition together. Both these understandings leave the viewer peaceful, inspired and filled with a longing to go sailing and stargazing, from the tranquil atmosphere created by its simplicity.

In order to create these meanings from concrete poetry ourselves, the reader is required to individually interact with the piece to discover what new, individual patterns they see from this form of poetry. (Sharp, McKinney, and Ross, 2003, p. 3). This, with the use of negative space, words and more simplistic shapes can be a useful tool for emotional connection, as it allows the viewer to directly connect with the design and interpret it for themselves, to create their own personal meaning they like. Thus, attaching themselves to the design, resulting in them feeling affection for and closer to the piece.



(Finlay, 1966). Figure 2

Next, this essay begins to explore a fully written method of poetry, Haiku. Haiku 俳句 is a form of ancient Japanese poetry consisting of only three lines. In the 2022 book by Stephen Addiss “The Art of Haiku: Its History through Poems and Paintings by Japanese Masters” he describes some of the very important factors of haiku poetry. (2022, p. 2). First is the strong theme of nature through observations, written in commonplace language. Haiku poets use inspiration from nature to create the poem’s imagery and specifically choose everyday language to achieve a sense of juxtaposition. (Addiss, 2022, p. 2). Utilising this is very successful here, as the mundane language highlights the awe-inspiring beauty of these scenes in nature.

The observational viewpoint is particularly interesting as it aids the reader in feeling like they’re also there, present in that moment, and helps to picture the scenery around them. (Addiss, 2022, p. 4). Transporting them to a different time but still able to relate due to the immortal ways of nature. This can inflict the reader with wonder through this experience created by a piece of poetry. One can feel this sense from the haiku poem included below by Yusa Boson.

Next, this writer informs us of the deliberate decision made to not define any of the intended meanings in the poems. (Addiss, 2022, p. 3). Rather, as mentioned in the 2019 article “Poetics of Japanese Classical Haiku” by Nguyen Thi Mai Lien, they use space that holds many possible meanings that the readers get to construe for themselves. (Lien, 2019, p. 106). This allows the reader to assist in the poem and experience creating their own message, by interpreting it in their own personal way. (Lien, 2019, p. 106). The use of space in haikus allows the artistry of nature to speak for itself, among the silence of space. This can result in the reader feeling an overwhelming sense of awe and adoration for both nature and haiku poetry, helping to form an emotional connection from the reverence felt.

Yusa Boson – Haiku Poet (1716 – 1784):

菜の花や 月は東に 日は西に

The canola flowers.

The moon in the east.

The sun in the west.

(Masterpieces of Japanese Culture, 2022).

It is thought that there is a clear link between haiku poetry and the concept of wabi-sabi. This is due to how the subjects of haikus usually feature aspects of nature as the most prominent topic, including day-to-day details of the changing seasons, flowers, animals, and more. These subjects are tied to wabi-sabi as they too center around the theme of transience. (Venzo, 2019, p. 223). As haikus capture a specific, single moment in time, through observing nature, it is not something one can replay. Additionally, it is unlikely that one will ever see another scene exactly like it again, hence this transience bringing out further beauty than that of just the graceful scenery alone.

Moving away from poetic literature, we will now investigate Ma. Ma 間 is a term described as an ‘ambiguous’ Japanese aesthetic concept that can be said to mean space, ‘pause’, or ‘interval’. We know this from the paper “Being awake to Ma: designing in between-ness as a way of becoming with” by Yoko Akama. (2015, p. 265). Additionally, this writer gives the reader a few examples of Ma when they state that Ma is the ‘rest’ in a piece of music, and the negative space in visual designs. (Akama, 2015, p. 265). Lauren Pruinski goes on to tell us in her paper “Wabi-Sabi, Mono no Aware, and Ma: Tracing Traditional Japanese Aesthetics Through Japanese History” that Ma appears as grace in the bareness. (2012, p. 29). These show us that the spaces we leave blank or for silence are just as necessary to the finished piece as the parts we do not, since they allow the audience time to deeply appreciate all that they are seeing, reading, or hearing with added elegance.

The Japanese symbol for Ma and its meaning is itself very poetic. This is due to the portrayal of a doorway, 門, and a sun, 日. The door is slightly open suggesting it is letting the sunlight stream in through the crevice, as described in the paper “The Culture of Ambiguity: Ma in Japanese Culture and Design Movement Posters” by Hung Ky Nguyen. (2020, p. 76). The moment this captures here seems like an illustration of a scene where one would experience Ma itself, by reason of the stillness and the silent reverence of truly feeling awestruck at nature.

One can see a clear link between Ma and haiku poems - the minimalist quality and use of space. The article “Haiku and the Seasons: an exploration” by Beverly George states that Ma is present in the space surrounding haiku poems, granting room for the reader to interpret and dream up their own meanings. (George, 2008, p. 4). From recognising this, one can be led to question if

Ma is also present within concrete poetry, because of the amount of space in this form of poetic writing.

From this, it is apparent that Ma can be used as a tool, in design along with in day-to-day, to carry emotion and aid in helping an emotional connection to form. This is by cause of Ma's silence, that used correctly, is full of feeling. It can deliver a rush of emotion to the audience as well as giving them time to absorb it all and build their own attachments.

Another area this paper will now discuss is wabi-sabi. Wabi Sabi is a concept that is more easily felt than explained. Andrew Juniper describes wabi-sabi in his book "Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence" as a Japanese aesthetic and ideology. (2011, p. 1). He reveals that the term wabi-sabi refers to characteristics that are transient, natural, humble, unbalanced, and not quite perfect. (Juniper, 2011, p. 2). This explains that the idea of wabi-sabi is to see the gentle beauty in the unfinished, impermanent, pure, and organic - just like the imperfections that can often be seen in nature. However, it does not only represent a visual ideal, but also can be an outlook on life itself.

Juniper writes that wabi-sabi can be applied to and found in multiple areas. In this book, he tells the reader 'It can be found in the arrangement of a single flower, the expression of profound emotion in three lines of poetry, or in the perception of a mountain landscape in a single rock.' (Juniper, 2011, p. 2). The author puts an emphasis on the simplicity of this aesthetic concept here, through the repetitive use of the word 'single', which is effective at communicating how wabi-sabi notices beauty in the little, delicate, simple things. This sentence is especially useful as these examples not only help the reader to understand, but also convey the soft emotion embedded in the concept, due to the appreciation for nature these visuals help to create.

Wabi sabi also relates to emotion through the philosophical way of thinking. As they find in the 2020 study "Wabi-Sabi and Aesthetic of Love in Lang Leav's Love and Misadventure" by Muhammad Adek, Nesa Riska Pangesti and Asmawati, this worldview of seeing the charm in the imperfect can be practiced in our everyday lives. (Adek, Pangesti, Asmawati, 2020, p. 160). This means that undesirable experiences can be seen as something not bad but just as beautiful. As a result, adopting the wabi-sabi approach to life can bring joy to the individual as it changes one's mindset to see the positives even in the negatives. This indicates that this thought would also apply to the way we view products, helping people to see beauty in pieces that are not completely perfect and encouraging us to be kinder to ourselves as designers, others as well as our items. Therefore, helping customers feel more emotionally connected to objects through the affection evoked through the little imperfections in them.

Emotional design is where emotion and design come together. Defined in the 2012 paper "Emotion Design, Emotional Design, Emotionalize Design: The Review on Their Relationships from a New Perspective" for The Design Journal, by Amic G. Ho and Kin Wai Michael Siu. The writers explain this as goods designed with the ability to evoke emotions as well as focusing on the owner's needs and the interaction between them. (Ho and Siu, 2012, p. 16). This means

that designers would need to carefully consider ways of communicating the feelings they wish to convey to their customers through their work, along with how users experience their products, to achieve this.

In today's advanced society, people are more and more hungry for emotional communication. Customer behaviour has turned from rational, need-based, to now emotional, with a focus on aesthetics, atmosphere, and pleasure. Consumers are 'seeking to enjoy'. (Zheng and Li, 2018, p. 44). The phrase 'seeking to enjoy' that YuQian Zheng and YanMei Li use in their article, Visual Merchandising and Emotional Design, portrays the desires of consumers today in an accurate and interesting way, as it suggests that customers now need to enjoy something in order for them to purchase it. This would indicate that as long as consumers are still enjoying what they buy, then they are unlikely to get rid of these items. Such information can be useful for designers to know, as this can inspire them to design with the customers' long-term pleasure in mind while being more beneficial to the environment, as this would limit the number of products that get discarded.

Paul Hekkert and Deana McDonagh inform the reader in their paper "Design & Emotion", for The Design Journal, that designers can intend for specific emotions to be elicited in the product's user. To name a few, these can be affection, astonishment admiration, and more. (Hekkert, McDonagh, 2003, p. 1). Feeling these positive emotions through design can influence the owners to keep hold of these products for longer. We know this because not only will the customers be enjoying them more, as mentioned previously, but when Johnathan Chapman writes about product durability in his book "Emotionally Durable Design Objects, Experiences and Empathy" he explains that a connection and fondness are just as essential for longevity as the quality of materials used to make them. (2015, p. 13). Chapman's clear view of the emotional connection between the user and the items can be helpful for designers to understand the extent of just how crucial it is believed to be, in order for consumers to keep their products. Therefore, this could spark interest in designing with this idea in mind, resulting in many more products containing an emotional connection, stopping a large amount from being thrown away.

It is valuable to note, for designers who want to convey emotion to the audience through their designs, that they ensure to think carefully about who exactly their audience is. This is due to the fact that, as Hekkert and Pieter Desmet say in their paper "Framework of Product Experience" people differ culturally as well as individually. (2007, p. 63). As the outcome of emotional design is based on the shared relationship between the object and the consumer, the feelings evoked are dependent on how well the design conveys the intended, certain emotions and meanings to the customer. (Hekkert and Desmet, 2007, p. 63). This could prove to be quite a difficult task as each person already has preconceived associations, both personally and culturally. Meaning that the designer needs to make sure they are aware of what may hold semiotic cultural connotations, for their own along with others, and what they are, to avoid confusion and portray the correct message.

The extent of consumerism we have today has awful effects on our environment. At no time before has a capitalist population ever desired and thrown away as much as we do today. Chapman describes the current severity of this issue in his book *Meaningful stuff: Design that lasts* through the metaphor 'These landfill sites are not graveyards for dead products, as it is often claimed; they are orphanages.' (2021, p. 1). The choice to use the word 'orphanages' here helps the reader to understand the reality of this situation as it makes the audience think of a more exact description of the products at landfill sites. It does this through the association of those living in there being perfectly fine and can easily still be loved, as opposed to the association of death that 'graveyards' would suggest. Through this metaphor, Chapman is telling us that consumerism has gotten so awful, it is now to the point where we are abandoning fully functioning items, instead of only broken ones.

This leads to another metaphor the author uses in his book *Emotionally Durable Design Objects, Experiences and Empathy* to describe the reason these working products get tossed away when he states, 'Their only crime being a failure to sustain empathy with their users.' (Chapman, 2015, p. 32). As this is no crime that the products can do alone this blame should fall on the designer and user. This metaphor implies Chapman believes that empathy may be the deciding factor that influences consumers to keep hold of products for longer, which would encourage the idea that it is vital for designs to connect with their users emotionally, in order for them to have a longer life out of landfills.

William McDonough and Michael Braungart explain the one-way system of production that has been used since the industrial revolution in the book "Cradle to Cradle remaking the way we make things". They inform their reader that natural resources are taken and sold, only to be left discarded almost immediately after. (McDonough and Braungart, 2009, p. 16). The metaphor they use to call this type of linear system is 'cradle to grave', representing the way materials are "born" when they're extracted and discarded in landfill "graves", all within a very short amount of time. The effect of this type of 'cradle to grave' production does not consider the well-being of the environment but is only concerned with the intention of making as large of a profit as possible. (McDonough and Braungart, 2009, p. 15).

They declare this must change. McDonough and Braungart go on to state that someday a designer or manufacturer will realise that we can not carry on with this system of making to waste, and instead will want to be a part of a better practice. After one is informed of the damage this operation causes, if they do not try an alternative method of designing, with the intention of improving this, then they are actively taking part in this poorly designed system. Doing this is what McDonough and Braungart call a 'strategy of tragedy', as not changing would be highly destructive to the environment. (2009, p. 21).

To see this change, McDonough and Braungart put an emphasis on designers to make a positive difference and design for a more environmentally friendly future in this book. The authors encourage and motivate designers by imploring them to think of a successful and thriving future, then to start designing for that right away. (McDonough and Braungart, 2009, p. 65).

This allows designers to picture a utopian world and inspires them to start designing for it, from a blank canvas, to create a fitting solution.

However, it is interesting to note that Chapman does not think designers are the only ones at fault for this unsettled culture of constantly making new products and discarding slightly older ones, but that it is also due to the consumer's continual desire for these. (Chapman, 2015, p. 17). This would suggest that it is also of utmost importance for the customers to change their attitude when it comes to consumerism, for the sake of the environment.

A possible solution to this problem is taken from the Japanese aesthetic concept, wabi-sabi. The wabi-sabi way of thinking can also help to improve the effects on the environment by changing the mindset of not only the designer but the customer. Later in his book, Juniper tells us that this philosophy can help the environment in three areas. These are: decreasing the amount of consumption, choosing more responsible options, and treating nature with respect. (Juniper, 2011, p. 150). Firstly, Juniper points out that in wabi sabi, one will not find peace through having plenty of belongings and instead suggests only purchasing what is needed, not reveling in overabundance. (2011, p. 151). Following this advice would mean that there wouldn't be excess products being bought and made, therefore, fewer would go to landfill as quickly due to customers seeking the newest model. Secondly, the author states that by deciding to buy items with a classic, uncomplicated design and of higher quality, then that one product could last decades. Not only this but that item would become more appealing as the years go on due to the visible effects of age. (2011, p. 153). This will mean people wouldn't throw away their belongings as quickly and would be more likely to keep them for longer. Lastly, Juniper writes that wabi sabi holds a deep appreciation for nature. He states that thinking in this mindset can influence people to treat it with care and respect, not to take advantage of it. (Juniper, 2011, p. 153). This would inspire one to rethink how they can make and design in a more environmentally friendly way that is sustainable for a greener future. Furthermore, it would also influence individuals to treat their items and surroundings kinder, with the purpose of not causing damage to the environment, such as by dumping waste items into oceans and landfills.

From this research, it is clear to see that thinking in this wabi-sabi outlook would make one feel a deeper emotional connection to nature and their products. This is due to the reasons listed above along with the addition of sentimental value gained over the years, that comes from keeping products with you for a long time. Therefore, it seems correct that if large numbers of society were to apply the wabi-sabi way of thinking to how they view products and nature, it could decrease the amount of consumption as well as the harmful impacts of this on the environment considerably.

In conclusion, what was explored in this paper communicates the different ways in which emotion can be conveyed through poetic writing, poetic visual language and Japanese aesthetic concepts. This was in order to strike emotion, as well as convey their point, to the audience throughout multiple areas of design. These included fully visual designs, fully worded and a mix of both, being surface pattern design, concrete poetry, and haiku poetry. Lastly, this piece of

writing also looked into the environmental effects of using feelings to create emotional connections in design.

This essay found that the benefit of using emotion in design is due to it allowing the user to feel a deeper connection to the items. The better the emotional connection users have to products, the longer they are likely to keep them, potentially all their lives, fighting consumerism and being more sustainable for the future. This is because it stops as many people discarding their products as quickly, helping fewer items be thrown away to landfills or dumped in our oceans. Another possible solution to the appalling effects consumerism has on our environment, found in this essay, is adopting the mindset of wabi-sabi.

This essay concludes with the possibility that in order to create an emotional connection between the product and the user, one must either directly relate to what is portrayed in the design or indirectly, through personal preferences or have the ability to attach themselves in a meaningful way to the products. We have seen these instances occur many times over this piece of writing, through the use of visual metaphor, Ma and the interactive aspects of concrete poetry for example. This indicates that the methods described in this extended essay may be useful for designers to employ, for the purpose of creating emotional connections between the audience and the products or designs.

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