

Design and Emotion

Reviewed by Corinne Quin, Goldsmiths College, University of London



This book tells us that emotion in design is commanding more and more interest in the design industry. It's right. Whether in design research, marketing, or product design, the issue is very much a current affair. New approaches to design recognise the importance of the relationship between the product and the user, and analyse the process behind what makes us want, feel attracted to, and to feel emotion towards an object.

It is difficult to feel emotional about this book. You'd expect there to be something emotional about it – in its appearance, its layout, its narrative, in the book as an object. At least that's what you'd expect for sixty pounds. In reality the book is a black and white collection of essays scattered with small pictures, charts and diagrams. There is little graphic thought and is easy to feel uninspired as each page looks very similar to the next.

But this book wasn't meant to sit next to fashionable, glossy-pictured books in a design bookshop. It is a collection of eighty academic essays from a design and emotion conference in 2002, edited down and bolted together under various headings in a hardback book, marketing itself as "essential reading for all involved in new product development."

At the beginning of the book we're introduced to "Keynote Stories" –

four essays that breakdown the cognitive processes of emotion and talk of the importance of understanding emotion for the future of design. These essays are a great introduction into the subject, and are relatively short which makes them perfect for photocopying as hand-outs. Following chapters range from "Experience Driven Design" to "Attachment", "Product Character" and "Theoretical and Ethical issues". They introduce a range of different considerations including the basic principles of semiotics that all students should be aware of.

The essays are rigidly structured, beginning with "Introduction" and closing with "Conclusion" like a write up of a school science experiment. On the one hand, the essays might have been more enjoyable to read if they weren't dissected like this, but on the other hand, (bearing in mind the sheer number of essays) the format works, making the information easier to take in. This element of structure would definitely help students understand the writing.

Many books on design and emotion often use examples of existing products to illustrate their point, but refreshingly, most of the essays in this book are case studies of the actual application of these ideas to research projects and design products. These experiments tend to be small, and some are quite

tedious, such as the contemplation over the colour choice of a pill dispenser, or the redesign of the packaging for a colour fan index. It is easy to find some of this research a little dry and unexciting - you might find yourself asking how significant some of these experiments really are; but it must be acknowledged that these case studies, even if they change little about a product, are small efforts that consider the emotional effect of design and the relationship with the user. These efforts count, and within this book each contributor has made a small attempt towards researching or applying their idea in the real world.

This book contains some very valuable writing on so many aspects of emotion and design, and would prove a great support to students – though information would probably be more easily digested if relevant essays were photocopied.

There are perhaps too many glossy design books that overload us with pictures of emotionally evocative design pieces, and not enough books that are genuine attempts to apply real experiments in this field. It is important that people are writing about their research, and it is important for both design students and teachers to have an interest and awareness about the subject that extends beyond the classroom into the real world.

Design and Emotion

Author: Deane McDonagh
Publisher: Taylor and Francis Books
Price: £60

Appropriate Content	✓✓✓
Pupil/Student Use	✓✓
Teacher Resource	✓✓✓
Visuals	✓
Overall Style	✓✓

Generic Use	
One of a series	
Photocopiable	✓
Pupil/student activities	
Cross-curricular	