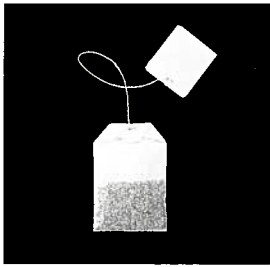


DESIGNING DESIGN

KENYA HARA

Lars Müller Publishers



Tea bags were commercialized in the early 20th century, with one spoonful of tea leaves packaged in gauze. Today, major industrialized nations use tea bags more than loose tea leaves. The right-hand photo is a CD player designed by Naoto Fukasawa. Just like a kitchen fan, the disc begins to rotate when the string is pulled.

Naoto Fukasawa and Tea Bags

Naoto Fukasawa is a product designer, but he works in a delicate, elusive place that other designers don't even see. It's as if his designs affect the unconscious realm, so that people using things he's designed are hardly aware of design's function. A designer like this, capable of not only creating hit products, but also inducing the user to take certain actions, without allowing us to recognize exactly where his strategy operates, is a menace! Before his mastery is exploited towards some evil end, we need to work hard to unlock the secret of his design.

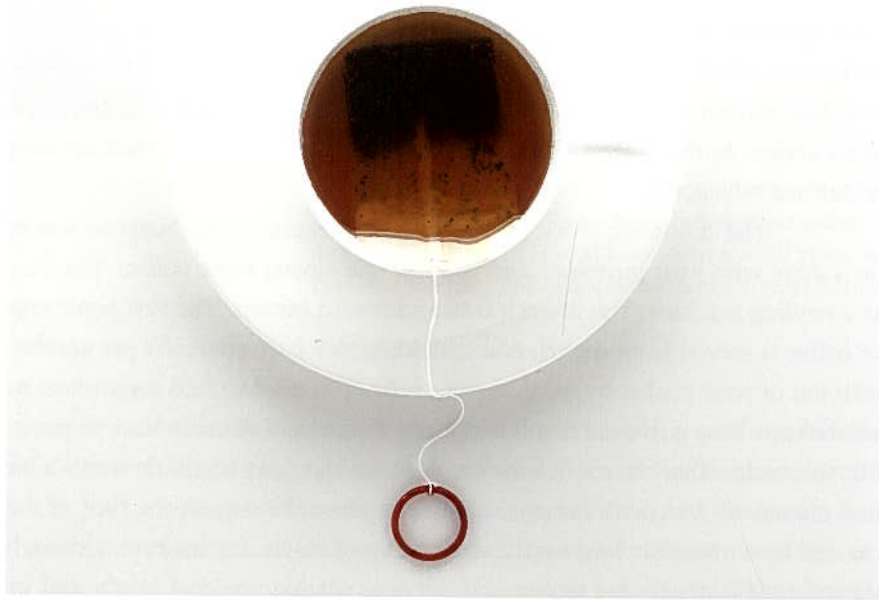
Say you need to design an umbrella stand. Some sort of tubular object immediately comes to mind. But Fukasawa insists that we should eliminate this idea. He says all we should do is cut a groove 8mm wide and 5mm deep into the concrete floor at the building's entrance. Visitors looking for a place to put their umbrellas would be quick to look for a spot to stick the top end. As if the umbrella itself were on the prowl for a place to stand, it would no doubt easily discover the groove that had been set there in anticipation, and all the umbrellas would stand in a neat row. And yet people using it may have no idea that the groove is an umbrella rack. The orderly row of umbrellas would be the result of unconscious behavior. Fukasawa rests his case: the umbrella rack design is complete unto itself.

The Fukasawa method is to examine our subconscious behavior and design for that. This manner of thinking reminds me of an emerging cognitive theory called "affordance." Affordance is the comprehensive understanding of both the subject of an action and the environment that "affords," or allows for, a certain phenomenon. For instance, standing seems to be a behavior imbued with the will of the subject (the standing person), but in re-

ality, standing wouldn't occur if there were no gravity and no decently solid surface on which to do it. Under a weightless condition, we would float. Even in a deep swimming pool full of water, standing does not come into existence as an action. In the case of standing, both gravity and a solid surface are said to "afford" the action.

The following story cites Fukasawa's explanation. Suppose you're on a drive with your girlfriend and you feel like having some coffee. You stop at a vending machine. You insert a coin and press a button. The first paper cup of coffee is served from the machine. Holding this cup, you can't get another coin out of your pocket to put in the machine. You need to find somewhere to set the cup. Your girlfriend is still in the car. There is no suitable place to put it. But you realize that the roof of the car is at just the right height. It seems a bit bad mannered, but, with no alternative, you place the cup on the roof of the car and insert another coin for the second cup of coffee. In this case, although the car roof is clearly not designed to serve as a table, its ideal height and its level nature "affords" the action of putting down the cup of coffee. This results in the generation of an action: placing the cup on the roof. This attitude of both comprehensively and objectively observing the variety of environments and situations that are tied to various actions is called affordance. Fukasawa doesn't deduce a solution with the strict guidance of the theory of affordance. However, his focal points are close to the concept.

Consider the CD player Fukasawa designed. It looks almost exactly like a wall-mounted fan. The CD is inserted in the center. If you pull the cord that on a fan would be the on-off cord, the disc begins to spin, just like a fan. We know it's a CD player, but our previous experiences and memories of fans, entrenched in our minds, cause us to prepare ourselves for that object. Particularly the skin on our cheeks, with its extraordinary sensitivity, begins to activate the "sensor" of the sense of touch, standing ready for the wind we expect to blow. What comes wafting over us is not wind, though, but music. Thanks to the use of the fan-shaped design, this product, although its performance as audio equipment alone may be a little lower than average, may in fact provide relatively better performance by inducing the users' sensors to stand ready for the flowing music. Fukasawa's methods attempt to establish this kind of magical relationship between the object and its design. Whatever the case may be, the MUJI CD player, which boasts a concept that differs



completely from that of conventional audio equipment, has been a popular product around the world.

Fukasawa's re-design subject was the tea bag. Nowadays 90% of the world's tea ends up in tea bags. What kind of approach would Fukasawa take on such a standard design? Let me introduce two of his three proposals.

The first is a tea bag with a circle (like a ring) on the end of a string. The ring is the color of perfectly brewed tea. This isn't to tell the user to brew the tea till it turns this color, however; no unsolicited advice is intended here. Fukasawa imagines, though, that as they use the product, people would gradually become conscious of the relationship between the color of tea and that of the ring. It would engender comments like, "I like my tea brewed until it's



darker than the ring," or "I think I'll have weaker tea today." He doesn't mean to specify the meaning of the color, but prepares for a meaning to grow from it. In short, Fukasawa designs the potential for affordance.

Another of Fukasawa's design solutions is a marionette-shaped tea bag. This concept comes from the motion of dipping a tea bag in hot water, which reminds him of a marionette dancing. The handle on this human-shaped tea bag looks like a marionette handle too. When the bag is dipped in hot water, the leaves swell to fill the bag, creating a deep-hued doll. Repeating the dipping action, the user is engaged in a wondrous world of puppet play. Thus, design intrigued with the unconscious emerges through the medium of an action.



Naoto Fukasawa: Juice Skin

These fruit juice packages are the work of the product designer Naoto Fukasawa. As his design is very easy to understand, it probably needs no interpretation from me. The banana juice package is particularly superb. For this, Fukasawa used the familiar Tetra Prisma® Aseptic package. The gentle angles of the packaging reveal something in common with the feeling of holding a banana. When a stem is added to the flap, it can't be seen as anything but a banana. Fukasawa has dexterously edited only the unique features of his subject.



The series includes kiwi juice. If you were to shave the fuzz off of a kiwi, you would be left with a dark green-skinned fruit. When fibers are applied to paper using flocking technology, a very kiwi-like texture is produced. The attached straw makes it even clearer that this is a package of juice. There's soymilk too. Its package has the rough cheesecloth-like texture of tofu. No doubt drinking from this package would feel very strange, as if you were drinking soymilk directly from a piece of tofu.



To design is to “build” a structure with an image inside the mind of the recipient. In this case, the materials are not only external stimulation but also massive amounts of memories awakened by stimulation. Designing highlights subtle differences between recalled memories and reality.