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Master of Fine Arts Thesis

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Trace Collectors

The Bond

“On the days when you feel ashamed of your scars, your mind only registering how ugly they are rather than the beauty they prove of you having survived, remember that there is an entire art form dedicated to filling the cracks of broken things with lacquered gold. An entire art form that proves that even the broken and damaged history of an object is beautiful and should be treasured. Remember how much more you are than an object. Remember your survival, your journey, your scars deserve to be treasured too.” —Nikita-Gill (Gill 65)

I understand losing as existing; damaging and breaking as a record of existence.

Everything that is around us is used, broken, touched or cracked—this damage reveals existence. These damages are inevitable; these traces are time and experience mostly considered as scars. However, as Nikita-Gill describes the golden cracks from a Kintsugi bowl (Anderson), such scars deserve to be treasured; the bowl acts as an archive that records our unique moments, history, events and life. The true value of this art, lies in the bond between an object and user that is created through existence.

How would you define possessing an object, and how do you break it in? Do you feel emotionally attached to an object when handling it? When is it that you deeply feel in your heart that something really becomes your own? When a friend is disappointed that their new possession is scratched and damaged I tell them, “That’s how it becomes yours.” Objects contain traces of use, evidence that allows a perceptual transition from the objects’ neutral state as matter into something more meaningful.

All kinds of objects surround us, from tools, handles, jewelry and basically everything that exists and has contact with us; we leave traces and add scars on them throughout our life. My research starts from opening a “contact zone” which Glenn Adamson, in his book “Fewer

better things,” describes as a moment when we truly focus and investigate in the objects material origin and intelligence they embody (Adamson 82). I create opportunity for chance that can be experienced by individuals on various; I collect these traces as evidence of experience that objects embody.

The First Experience

Most of us hope that our new precious possessions will not be damaged and will last forever in their undamaged condition, but this is impossible. As a matter of fact, the objects could gain more value through collecting traces of use; a sentimental value; a bond that makes the users emotionally imprinted on an object which is not only different, but exceptionally priceless, compared to any monetary values assigned. Since existing and getting used over time is how traces are accumulated, these processes of leaving marks which could be unintentional or even with specific intentions are pervaded as an essential point that takes place in our daily life far more than we recognize.

Soldiers are known to step on their brand new stiff combat boots with their well-worn, dirty shoes to break in new equipment for mobility and comfort. This can be considered an intentional way of leaving traces to connect and conform with the object by ruining it from the undamaged state. This intentional act is a way to claim ownership and authority over an object, just like writing a name on the edge of a book or on the sole of your doll.

Feeling the state of balance and comfort while driving, after the first dent or a scratch with a brand new car, or a tiny crack on your cellphone screen could be an unintentional example which also could be a way that builds a relationship with an object. These first

experiences and events when damaging a possession, functions as a trigger and a starting point for a new bond and a new memory that will be created between the object and users.

Taxonomy of Traces: Add, Remove, Material Contact

In the book *Lines*, author Tim Ingold breaks down traces by sorting them into *Reductive* and *Additive* (Ingold 44). Traces are any enduring marks that are left in or on a solid surface. A pencil drawing on paper forms an additional superimposed graphite layer upon the surface, in this case categorized as an *Additive* mark, like a stain. Doing a paint job on a wall of a house or even paint stains on your apron are example for this concept. Both intentionality and unintentionality in creating value and bond.

Traces that are inscribed or engraved into a surface can be sorted as *Reductive* marks, since they appear by removing material from the subject. However, I would not consider dents as *Reductive* traces, I would describe dents as a *Compound Transitions* that can remove or add space simultaneously. Dents leave numerous types of traces; they create new structural space through impact by reshaping the materials rather than removing them.

Traces beyond *Additive* and *Reductive* marks can be categorized into a third section: *Material & Nature*. Cracks, cuts, and creases happen when a specific material has endured an excessive amount of stress. These traces are distinct, not only from material characteristics but also by natural factors like humidity and temperature. Oxidation is an exciting example of transformation that happens by material characteristics and nature. When specific materials

such as copper and steel reacts with air, sulfur and moisture the materiality and condition will be converted. Rust could corrode the material and destroy the molecular structure and even the color of the surface can be tarnished. That granted, what and who could be the subject that creates these traces?

We humans leave traces everywhere and so do objects. I would describe this process of creating traces as an *Interactive Contact* that happens over time; it's about coexistence; it's about multiple subjects competing to survive through time. Brief and minor contacts leave traces, even if they are not quite visible to our eyes. Take a closer look at the edge of your favorite book or surface of your favorite pen, does it still maintain the same condition as when you first received it? These subtle, overlooked traces act as an archive—a collection of our shared experiences with an object. Every existence and contact is the subject that generates these valuable marks.

Creation and Value and Traces

While traces gather through contact and use, they also accumulate as the result of creation. *Interactive contact* is represented through the concept of the craftsman's creative process. I make an initial investment in an object's value: it begins in my hand as a maker and continues on my body. I believe that the craftsman/artist/maker first brings life to a raw material by having contact with it. In the process of making an object, the producer will try to assign value to it by creating new works, whether it is subjectively comparable, a practical object or contemporary art work. From this perspective, the question, "How is value

given/acquired/assigned and where does it begin?" could be partially answered. The value is started and given from a maker or a producer.

From the producer's point of view, the process of physically creating a work can be considered similar to leaving a value/trace which had not existed in the world before. Craftsmanship is defined as one measure of how skilled a person is in using a certain material and also how much effort has been spent in the making and *interactive contacting* process. This involves not only the physical form but also the intent and meaning of why the object was created. If so, is every object considered highly valuable?

In order to answer this question objectively, we have to approach from the user and audience's view and then try again to focus on the starting point when the value begins from the point of possessing it. Value is not an idea that can be concluded by craftsman or a producer but maybe started; value might be an idea that is consistently added throughout time by anyone. An intact new ring that was just purchased from a shop or from a maker for a wedding ceremony might have value in currency. However, compared to the value of owning and wearing a wedding ring, it no longer matters how expensive it was before. The sentimental value of a wedding ring that has been owned by a user throughout time with all kinds of traces and stories embedded, cannot be converted into monetary value.

Accumulation

In the process of collecting and recording marks/value, I consider various formats of objects that exist in the nearest space to our body. Based on the spontaneous forms created through rolling down metal to a flat blank sheet, I allow cracks to emerge on the edge, and then collect my own traces and movements for a certain period of time that happens within me. Functioning as a keychain or even acting as a card in my wallet, it records my own traces by existing as the closest object I carry. After a certain period of time in collecting these traces, the sheet will be transformed as art jewelry to display my sentimental bond with the object and also to provide an infinite room to add endless value as a new object, settled on my body as a medium that stands between me and the world. I consider the whole process of creating this work as me leaving and recording traces on objects. The visual evidence that transforms the vulnerable soft surface and form of the 'Accumulation' series is an archive—witness which preserves the embodied histories, bonds, and occurrences between user and object.

The movie *The Red Violin 1998* (The Red Violin) is a fictitious movie inspired by the Stradivarius, a violin made by Antonio Stradivari about 300 years ago in Italy. The story goes in the form of an omnibus format mainly focusing on different owners of the Red Violin, starting from where it was created in Italy to Austria, United Kingdom, China and finally to the violin auction in Montreal, delivering each different stories. Unique traces get imprinted on the red violin, chipped out parts and faded colors, causing a conflict between the multiple owner's decedents to win the instrument in the auction house.

The violin has been passed on from generations to generations creating new precious events and memories that happened with the new owners. These traces are minor and sometimes quite visible. Sometimes the violin is damaged in a very distinguishable way, like through a big impact from a gunshot, or sometimes it is visually insignificant but the slight transformations created through use over time become/comprise the evidential archive of stories and memories that determines the powerful and sentimental value. This sentimental bond is what makes the object unique and priceless.

Translation and Reinterpretation

Another way I explore the question of value and traces is through the reinterpretation of heirlooms that are passed down to generations in all family traditions. Family heirlooms connote an irreplaceable value of the ancestor's story and life. In the fiction *Thousand cranes* the author Yasunari Kawabata develops the whole story that happened around the main characters by focusing on the family heirloom tea bowls (Kawabata). The evidence and marks that are left from the previous users are the key processes of how value/trace gets accumulated upon objects.

On the rim of the bowl, she had said, there was a stain from her mother's lipstick. Her mother had apparently told her that once the lipstick was there it would not go away... a stain may have been left from the lips of owners before Mrs. Ota Mrs. Ota, however, had probably used it most. It had been her everyday teacup. (Kawabata 135)

The 'Heirloom' series exemplifies this concept. A cup is the medium which will be handed to a user and to the next user collecting unique different marks from each different individuals. In other words, the participants are also the medium in this process of this work, which then transforms the cup to become a *contact zone*. I elevate these accumulated traces that came from our hands; materializing the traces that are invisible into visible by engraving the trace lines and filling them with different colors to distinguish the different users. After highlighting the visibility of traces by filling the lines with materials like enamel or India ink and restoring them back to the surface level, will then be handed to the next user. With each new user this process is repeated again and again, potentially forever, imitating the way an heirloom object is passed down through generations.

I have observed many occasions when a story is embedded in an object while a user was having a special or even an intimate experience. Time passes, and we observe the scratches and stains on our objects without recollection of the moment they arrived: they simply appeared, accumulated like a family tree or timeline. We can't say for sure what caused each mark, but collectively they signal the conditions of their existence.

The 'Trace & Month' series are my research of how and when the marks of wear are gathered and overlapped together in a monthly time within my mundane life. Starting from a raw material, they will collect traces from me and then be transformed into signs and languages through my observation and intervention. I make new objects that carry my interpretations; by engraving the visible traces and filling them with colored materials, only I can understand the true value and record of time. The collected traces are unique—sharing a memory with me that

escalates the history of coexistence into visual signs and drawings—a truly and exceptionally priceless existence.

Collecting Device

The collecting device project, which I call 'Trace collectors' are wearable objects that can collect the traces of one's movements in the world. Based on forms that can be used within us and are vulnerable, thus effective in collecting various categorized traces. A circle shaped button is die formed, creating a volumetric half dome to efficiently collect dents on thin soft metal. Fine silver is raised out to the surface, heating the material and cooling it back, until the silver turns milky white. This will transform the surface soft enough to collect traces even from fingernails, allowing the wearer to use the material as a blank sheet upon which to collect daily marks.

Our actions, movements and routines in life, will transform the blank and soft material by slowly hardening the material, leading the device into a permanent stiff structure, a result and signature within the contacts existing next to the owner. I construct and distribute a collection of these objects that function as a blank sheet of soft annealed fine silver, able to collect various marks. From the point of when the object is handed out to record the dents and marks, created from interactive factors to the wearer, it will transform into a collecting device. This will enable my experimental research to highlight the overlooked traces, and catalog them into a unique language. Attaching the device on our body, leaving it as a blank sheet that can be

easily touched and damaged, will record the precious actions and movements we make while consciously or unconsciously damaging the object.

Vessels and Cups

A cup is not only a receptacle for liquids; it is much more than that. It is a witness of our conversations, an archive of our experiences. – Maki Okamoto (“The Cup”)

Cups and Vessels are one of the traditional objects that are close to our hands. Since humans had to contain food to survive, vessels have been created as one of the most essential and first craft works in history. However, I reinterpret cups as a social device. We drink coffee, tea and wine while we socialize, while we share in conversation, which is essential in life. The familiar but interesting shape of an open cup simply dividing inside and out by holding the space with just one simple layer, brings the temptation and desire to be filled. (Kjørup et al. 116)

The action of holding on to a cup at a party or social meeting in Western culture, or drinking a tea out of a tea bowl in Asian culture, is a necessary action we participate in while conversing. My research in this concept started from a question: can socialization of human interaction be captured as a trace in a vessel form? My ‘Conversation Collector’ is a simple recording device that gathers action/movements/humanity and what happens during our socializations. The exterior surface of this projects record the traces like fingerprints, scratches and stains from fingernails which can occur by just holding and drinking during a conversation. The interior surface gathers the stains of different liquids that reference the depth of

conversation and relationships that are documented through different occasions. These *Additive, Reductive* and *Material & Nature Compound* traces are the records of our humanity and sentimental interaction.

The accumulation of my research is a collection of ordinary objects we see every day, proving their existence. Aiming at what a value is and how it can be created and accumulated, I try to focus on the closest objects and actions commonly overlooked. Take a closer look at the things that are near you; at the stuff that matters. We fail to see the things that are closest to us, the repetitive routines with the most familiar and everyday objects. We should not forget to value what is created in the most common space and in the most common manner. Through this work and research, I draw attention to the truly unique traces that gather upon familiar objects and share a memory with the user, accumulating sentimental value and highlighting the most overlooked and intimate forms of contact.

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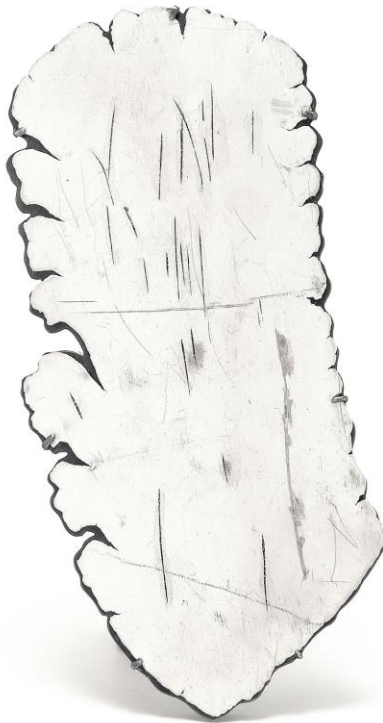
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Accumulation #1 (brooch), fine silver, sterling silver, 2020



Accumulation #2 (brooch), fine silver, sterling silver, 2020



Accumulation #3 (brooch), fine silver, sterling silver, 2020



Heirloom #1, fine silver, india ink, 2020



Trace & Month Series (brooches), fine silver, sterling silver, enamel, 2019



Trace Collector #1 (brooch), fine silver, sterling silver, 2020



Trace Collector #2 (brooch), fine silver, sterling silver, 2020



Conversation Collectors, fine silver, coffee, india ink, liver of sulfur, 2019