CASD PROJECT — *CRISP Magazine #4*

Using the strategic role of design to strengthen the competitive position
of Product Service Systems and industrial design providers.

THE DARK SIDE OF JOY

How negative emotions can contribute to our happiness

Sara Ferrari & Steven Fokkinga

In October 2013, Italian designer Sara Ferrari started a six-month collaboration with Steven Fokkinga, a Dutch design researcher in the CASD project. They explored the use of negative emotions in rich product experiences, which led to three concepts.

Steven— You had been happily working as a designer in Italy and London for eight years. What made you decide to come to Delft and work with a researcher?

Sara— I had actually never heard of Delft before! Working in both England and Italy, I realised there were quite a few differences in our approaches to design. In Italy, designers place great emphasis on craftsmanship and making things beautiful, while in Northern Europe the focus is more on understanding the user, and conceptual design. I wanted to combine these two approaches. Italian design professor Roberto Verganti suggested I go to a place where research and design come together, and recommended TU Delft. I contacted Paul Hekkert, who suggested I start working with you.

Sara— What did you think when you were asked to work with a designer?

Steven— I was excited. As design researchers, we develop knowledge and approaches to design, which means our 'users' are essentially the designers. Just as we advise designers to get to know their users, we in turn should spend time with designers. At our university, we work a lot with design students, but this relationship is different. These students are still learning design and are inclined to immediately try out new approaches without first challenging them from their personal design experience. Experienced designers, on the other hand, already have certain approaches and know what it's like out there in the real world, which leads to some good debates.

Sara— Why are you researching negative emotions in design?

Steven—I have long been interested in how man-made things can inspire human experiences. When I was studying design at Delft, I got interested in how movies and other art forms can evoke such strong experiences;

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WHY INNOVATION SHOULDN'T WAIT FOR VALIDATION

Sara Ferrari and Steven Fokkinga's collaboration combined the strengths of a researcher and a designer. In Katinka van der Kooij 's article, she discusses some benefits and challenges of such forms of collaboration.

could consumer products do that as well? Looking at the differences between the two, I noticed that movies, books, and music almost always use some kind of negative emotion — fear when reading a thriller, anger directed at the movie's villain, or sadness when listening to gloomy music — whereas products only try to evoke positive emotions. As a result, products miss half of human emotions. Many psychologists and philosophers argue that negative emotions are just as important for well-being as positive emotions. I wanted to see whether functional products could also evoke negative emotions, but in a pleasant way, just as movies do.

Steven—What did you think when you first heard about negative emotions in design?

Sara— I recognised its potential from the beginning! I have always felt that negative emotions have an important value. When I'm under the stress of a deadline, I am more productive, so I sometimes impose deadlines on myself as a strategy. A slight feeling of depression can help you analyse the world from a distance, and to see things in a different light, which makes you more aware of life in general. In that way, these negative emotions make me happier. I wanted to use these ideas in my work somehow, but I had never tried or thought about how I might achieve that. I was thrilled when I found out someone was actually researching the same topic.

Steven—When we first started to work together, how did you experience the process?

Sara— At first, I was lost. I thought that doing design research meant questioning what products mean to people, and how this meaning might change with time and within a certain culture. But it's not like that: academic research has a lot to do with creating methods and writing papers; it's about creating knowledge with less focus on how it could reach designers like me. The most challenging part of the project for me was to find a way to translate your research so that I could use it in my design process. I started by reading the papers you had written, and sketching some first ideas based on them. However, the process really took off when we started having long conversations about products, experiences, other design projects, as well as working sessions in which we explored product ideas together. ➔

EVERY GROUP OF DESIGN RESEARCHERS SHOULD HAVE A DESIGNER-IN-RESIDENCE!

Sara— What about you? How disruptive was it to work with a designer?

Steven — It was inspiring to see from close up how a designer works and thinks. You usually start thinking about a specific product, and what that product means in people's lives. In Delft, we increasingly consider the effect you want to achieve first — such as a certain experience or the effect on people's well-being — and only then do we start thinking about what kind of product, service, or product-service system would be best to achieve that effect. When we started out, you were confused about why I wasn't talking more about products, and I wondered why you kept talking about specific objects.

Steven—What are the results of this collaboration?

Sara — I was euphoric when, after several iterations of designing, evaluating, and discussing, we found our starting point: "Emotional paradoxes!" An emotional paradox combines a specific negative emotion with some kind of benefit, such as "the excitement of distress," or "the fun side of annoyance." We explored this concept in three ideas: a piggy bank that makes people more aware of the notion of saving, a set of shot glasses that make people have fun, and a calendar that emphasises the beauty of passing time.

Steven—What role did the emotional paradoxes play in your design process?

Sara — I realised that products can take on a new role: they can serve as carriers of experiences and activities rather than purely being objects of desire and attachment. This is an important change in thinking we have to make when we design for well-being. Take Mr Piggy, the piggy bank, for instance. It's made of plaster and has been designed to eventually break. When it is empty, it is stable, but when it fills up, it gets more and more wobbly and eventually, when almost full, it tips over and shatters on the floor. I think that Mr Piggy's self-destructiveness highlights that, once a product has served its purpose, given the right experience, the object itself does not have to remain.

Sara— How do you see the negative emotions working in Mr Piggy?

Steven —Everyone is familiar with the image of someone saving money with a piggy bank and then, one day, smashing it to see how much they saved. But in that experience, there is excitement only at the very end. With Mr Piggy, each time you save a coin could be the last. This loss of control causes anxiety, but also adds a thrill: it really makes that moment of dropping a coin more significant. Another thing I like is that people will have mixed feelings about the piggy finally shattering: on the one hand, it means they have lost an object. But it also means they have finished saving, and can now spend the money on their goal. I think it can help people reflect on the role money plays in their lives.

Sara—Were you happy about how your research was translated into products?

Steven — Yes! I noticed during the project that we, as experience design researchers, sometimes focus primarily on the conceptual part of the design and less on the detailing and the materialisation. It was nice to see how the concepts became better and more concrete with each design iteration. In the first versions, the piggy bank was made of porcelain, but then you came up with the idea to make it from plaster — a cheap and fragile material. That was not just a manufacturing or cost decision, it also changed the meaning of the product — people would find it easier to give in to the prospect of shattering an object made of plaster, also because they could still use the broken bits as pieces of chalk. A lot of the product experience is in the details.

🔗 EXTERNAL LINKS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Movie
http://vimeo.com/103919271
http://vimeo.com/103919605
http://vimeo.com/103919606

Sara Ferrari & Steven Fokkinga
www.studiolab.ide.tudelft.nl/studiolab/fokkinga
www.saraferraridesign.com

Mr Piggy Perspective — a rendering of Mr Piggy, an unstable piggy bank designed to break when full of coins.

Steven—You are now back on working on your own projects again. What will you do differently in your work after this experience?

Sara — My experience in Delft was proof for me that research can actually be translated into products, and can help to create richer experiences for users. I'm now even more motivated to adopt a human-centred approach, and talk and read about research. As for the products, we are working to bring them to the market! Alessi has picked up one of the products: the Dot. calendar. The other two are being considered by other companies.

Sara—Are you thinking differently about research and design?

Steven — What I took from our collaboration is that you should not instruct designers with absolute knowledge or approaches. You have to find ways for them to play with it and make it their own. I would like to keep working at the crossroads of research and design, as we have been doing in CRISP. I also think that every group of design researchers should have a designer-in-residence!

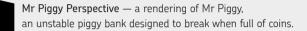**Glasses steel version** — a rendering of "Alla Goccia" glasses, showing the little coasters in the three different designs.

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