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Indexing Citizenship: Semiotic Mediation of Participatory Design in Contemporary Hawaii†

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Abstract

Architectural and urban design are now widely incorporating the method of what is called participatory design or citizen design and getting stakeholders involved in the very process previously left solely to experts. Based on anthropological qualitative research in Hawai‘ i, this paper discusses how a corporation seeking to represent corporate citizenship developed an affordable housing community while incorporating voices from the community. Using concepts and insights in anthropology and particularly that of semiotic mediation, this paper analyzes how certain design elements are selectively formed as signs capable of mediating future interpretations of and claims to citizenship. Through an analysis of interactions that took place using transcripts and observations at community-wide events and corporate meetings, what is revealed is that different groups including the corporation, local residents, and employees in search of homes nearby workplaces, differently contribute to the making of the design of the future community. Occupying different statuses and roles within a semiotic participation framework, they respectively contribute to the construction of the overall design as a composite sketch of signs indexically “pointing to” different ideas and preferences, which can be construed as meaningful by different participant groups. It is argued that these efforts are processes whereby design elements are made grounds for future claims to corporate citizenship and cultural citizenship.

Keywords: *Corporate citizenship, cultural heritage, participatory design, anthropology, semiotic mediation*

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하와이 참여 디자인 사례에서의 기호학적 매개와 시민성의 지표화

고경난

국문요약

근래 건축 디자인과 도시 디자인에서는 참여 디자인 혹은 시민참여 디자인이라 불리는 디자인 설계 방식이 하나의 주된 경향과 실천으로 확산하고 있다. 본 연구는 미국 하와이에 소재하는 기업에서의 인류학적 현지조사를 바탕으로 참여 디자인 방식을 채택한 한 기업의 적정가격 주택단지 개발 프로젝트에서 기업시민성에 대한 주장, 그리고 주변 사회 구성원의 문화적 시민성에 대한 표현의 바램이 재현되는 양상을 살펴본다. 퍼스 기호학을 응용하는 기호인류학은 기호학적 매개 개념을 언어와 비언어, 물질성과 비물질성의 이분법적 구분을 초월하고 기호 간 관계의 구성과 의미작용을 분석하는 데 적절히 사용하고 있다. 본 연구는 기호학적 매개 개념을 통해 참여 디자인 과정에 참여하는 기업을 비롯한 주변 사회 다양한 집단이 다양한 주택단지 디자인 구성요소를 그들의 관점에서 유의미하고 더 나아가 특정 시민성을 지표적으로 재현하는 도구로 만드는 과정을 분석한다. 자료는 기업 내 회의에서 수집한 대화와 지역 공동체 구성원에게 개방된 참여 디자인 과정과 행사에서의 관찰을 사용한다. 자료 분석을 토대로 본 논의는 해당 디자인 사례에서 주택단지 이름, 건축 양식, 주택과 도로의 관계 등의 여러 요소가 각기 다른 참여자 집단이 그들의 입장과 선호를 기호학적 의미에서 시공간적으로 '가리킬 수 있는' 도구로 구성함을 밝히고, 이 언어-비언어 간 기호학적 변환이 디자인 요소를 기업시민성과 문화적 시민성을 의미하는 매개적 기호로서의 재구성임을 설명한다.

주제어: *기업 시민성, 문화적 유산, 참여 디자인, 인류학, 기호학적 매개*

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I. Introduction

Interest in the concept and phenomena of mediation has been spreading across the social sciences. There has been growing recognition that constructions of and claims to citizenship are "mediated" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2006; Chouliaraki 2013; Von Lieres and Piper 2014) events and phenomena, discursively affected by images and talks circulating across various media channels (cf. Jonnalagadda 2018). Meanwhile, in design studies, there has been calls for attention to the relationship between design and citizenship. In an introduction to a special issue on how "design *mediates* and defines relations among states, societies, citizens, and non-citizens and … speculate on how particular designs of citizens and non-citizens might be re-imagined and re-designed," Weber suggests that attention be paid to ways in which design is made "a 'language of thing'" (2010, 9-10, emphasis added). But while there has been an upsurge of coverage on various modes, methods, and processes involved in the dialectic between design and citizenship, studies integrating the mediation concept or are investigative of meta-communicative constructions of design are rare. This void is unfortunate particularly since a large number of recent works focus on on-the-ground practices variously referred to as "participatory design" (Bannon and Ehn 2012; Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2012), "citizen design" (Mueller et al. 2018), and "citizen engagement" (De Lange and De Waal 2017), which reveal processes not only of sociocultural or political character but also communicative.

Using insights from anthropology and semiotics and through an in-depth qualitative case study of participatory community development project in Hawai‘ i, USA, this paper applies the semiotic mediation (Mertz and Parmentier 1985) concept in linguistic anthropology and analyzes how constructs of citizenship are embodied, represented, and reproduced through architectural and urban landscape design. The spread of corporate citizenship, social responsibility, and sustainability discourses have had impacts on various institutional activities in the recent decades of the twenty-first century; and in the State of Hawai‘ i, affecting corporate development and land management projects from early stages of their conception to implementation (Koh 2015b). Using an ethnographic case of an affordable housing, urban design project undertaken by a major agricultural and land holding company here referred to as "Hawaiian Lands Company, Inc." (a pseudonym, hereafter referred to as "Hawaiian Lands"), this paper examines a key aspect of participatory design whereby some design elements or features are discursively motivated as well as design-wise shaped as signs indexing corporate and cultural citizenships, to different parties involved in the design activity. This process is one whereby participation and verbal inputs from corporate participants and community stakeholders are 'translated', design-semiotically, into locally or contextually meaningful design forms, which thereupon allows the corporate developer to lay grounds for claims to *corporate* citizenship and for the community members to interpret and embrace design as representing *cultural* citizenship (cf. Miller 2002; Lo and Kim 2011).

There is widespread and persistent use of the dyadic division of signs into material and immaterial and linguist and nonlinguistic in the broader humanities and social sciences; some of which are obvious theoretical employments while others adopted for methodological or analytic conveniences. But while such distinctions or perhaps their taken-for-granted uses have allowed for much accumulation of our knowledge on the interactions, interrelations, or internal structures of different communicative tools in flux and play, adherence to typologies and dyadic categories as meta-descriptions of "things" have hindered more nuanced explorations of signs' relations to society, inherently of fluid and contextual nature.

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Recognitions of inadequacy, insufficiency, or to some even inappropriateness of the all-too-often and common use of material/immaterial and linguistic/nonlinguistic divides have, to a certain extent, undergirded more recent studies shifting focus to "materiality" (Heylighen and Strickfaden 2012; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2017) of semiotic formations, "mediality" or the means of mediation (e.g., quality) enabled by certain medium (Cavanaugh 2017), or more generally, multi- or trans-"modality" (Murphy 2012)—that is, in researches where shifts, transformations, in-betweenness, or dynamic interactions between words, qualities, ideas, and things come into empirical focuses; and wherein the interests of semiotically-inspired anthropology and design can also overlap (Murphy, Ivarsson, and Lymer 2012).

Applying concepts from Charles S. Peirce's semiotics and particularly the notion of mediation, this paper hopes to provide an example of how interactions between language, ideas, and things—all "signs" in Peircean semiotics—which are observable across participatory citizen design projects, can be discussed with analytic concepts that link rather than divide the empirically seamless events and phenomena. In the following sections, I first discuss the ethnographic situation in which the affordable housing project of Hawaiian Lands is undertaken. I discuss the several stakeholder parties involved in the participatory designing of the future neighborhood community and explain how these different groups assume different statuses and roles in a semiotic "participation framework" (Goffman 1981)—that is, each having says on different components and constructions of urban design. In the next sections, I examine the manner in which elements of design are selectively formed, shaped, or constructed as mediating devices indexically pointing to different views and preferences of respective parties. In sum, what will be depicted is that some design components are creatively formed and embedded throughout the citizen design stages so as to produce different interpretive effects, which are meaningful to different groups of participants and all of which may function as signs indexically representing varying imaginations of citizenry belongings.

II. Name as Locus of Corporate Citizenship Claims

The embracement of discourses of corporate social responsibility and sustainability at the corporate level of Hawaiian Lands, a medium-sized land holding corporation with key businesses in pineapple production, resort operation, and land management and development, brought on major and minor changes within the company as to how it conceptualized, carried out, and presented its work. In the land management and development segment, the company had few development projects under way which involved developing full-scaled communities with homes, public areas, and commercial areas, which were conceived of as projects "reflecting" different parts of the corporate vision including "sustainability" and "citizenship." One project was Makani (a pseudonym, meaning 'wind' in Hawaiian), an affordable housing project that proposed to sell more than half of roughly 350 homes built on 300 acres of land to families that earn between 50% and 120% of the island's median family income.

It was explicitly stated and also widely announced through mass media channels that this development would be an opportunity for the corporation to practice social responsibility and corporate citizenship—that is, vis-à-vis other developments that rather highlight sustainability (cf. Koh 2014). The appropriateness business-wise was due to the location of it being in close proximity to one of the company's key business operations (i.e., its golf resort business); and also being within the areas of land the company owned and hence linked to the issue of corporate branding (see also, Koh 2015a). Also, the nature of the development was for moderately priced homes in one of the most expensive areas of the island and the State, at a

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location where those who the corporation calls “neighbors” struggled to find decent homes, including the company’s employees. It was therefore considered perfect venue to practice and demonstrate its “citizenship.”

The challenge however was how to represent the “corporate” side of corporate citizenship. Nearly all of Makani’s designing and planning would be done collaboratively through public, private, and civil society discussions and negotiations, throughout a series of “community planning meetings,” “hands-on community design sessions,” “County hearings,” etc., scheduled to unfold over the years. During almost two years of anthropological research inside the corporation—a period that overlaps with the planning and participatory design of Makani—I engaged in several regularly-held, corporate-level, committee meetings attended by top corporate officers. In these discussions one topic stood out; it had to do with naming and logo making (Table 1).

Table 1. Translating Corporate Logo Graphic into Community Name

1	CD	Well we decided [in our last meeting], we were gonna **affiliate** [golf resort] with the case of Makani but that it wasn't necessarily, uh, linked to other communities.
2	CD	So that's where we ended at.
3	CD	It was by no means unanimous.
…		[omitted]
15	JT	I think we’re folding it here to Makani and confine [the sustainability message to another project] Mailē.
16	SC	Mailē.
17	CD	For the first time Mailē would be, uh it's a sustainable community on [island name].
…		……
19	BK	I thought about the resort **logo** being incorporated [into Makani's logo]. It seems to be a bit of a
20	BK	disconnect between the location of Makani which is near the airport and [area name 1]
21	BK	and if resort community include everything [area names 2, 3, 4,] I was concerned that people may **perceive** that all of those areas may be a part of the greater golf resort region.
22	BK	So I'm a little concerned about putting the [resort logo and **marking** the Makani location] as a geographic kinda thing.
23	RB	Yeah I think one thing we talked about too was the definition of the **word** [Makani] itself, I mean that's what it stands for. Wind.
24	RB	And the **association** between the two would just carry on.
25	CD	But that's a subtle association in a way, to your point.
26	CD	I mean we're still getting the **connection**, uh, to the resort with the [resort] logo
27	CD	by saying wind in Hawaiian [in Makani project name]
28	CD	but not necessarily using the image [i.e., the graphic component of the resort’s logo].
29	CR	I think that was the whole reason with that **name**. **Gaining the subtle connection**.

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In a meeting, the CEO, presidents of subsidiaries, and several key department directors talk of how Makani is positioned relative to Hawaiian Lands' other development project and also, an existing business operation, which is the golf resort (lines 1-17). This is done in the context of deciding the detailed formation of the linguistic and graphic components of Makani's name and logo. As highlighted in the transcript (in bold), the name and logo are here upheld as communicative *means* by which "affiliation" (line 1), "association" (line 24), and "connection" (line 29) is and can be made—between Makani as a geographic region and a development project, and the region and operation of the company's golf resort. Both linguistic and nonlinguistic elements, word and graphic of logo (i.e., "wind") in other words, are upheld and made *mediating* devices that can form interpretive linkages among various groups having stakes in the project. While certainly not equipped with semiotic knowledge, these individuals are indeed engaging in meaning-making in practice.

The linguistic construction of the name due to its semantic meaning of wind in Hawaiian (lines 23-27) would allow for "subtle" (line 29) reference to the resort, it is argued; and the basis for such is that the golf resort's logo is—in fact—*already* using the image of wind as a graphic component. Rather than replication of the identical graphic component, an indirect or less transparent sign relation between sign form and object/meaning is sought here, with intents to prevent possible marking and interpretations of "[Makani as] a part of the greater golf resort region" (lines 21-22) while also bearing capacities to work as signs of corporate citizenship. But what is the explanation for this rationale?

Table 2 follows the trajectory to a goal of "not creating a resort by creating a community." This decision made sense because the final design of Makani is to be derived through a series of approvals and collective designing phases. Legal as well as social approvals from governmental stakeholders and community residents were ongoing procedures and the corporation was in the position of having to "sell" or more precisely persuade various groups of the necessity of the development activity (lines 34-41). As a meeting participant explicitly points out, the problem did not concern "selling the units [but] getting through all the loops" (lines 37-38). But the detailed design of the community development project were susceptible to a framework of engagement whereby different groups (italicized, in transcript) occupy different Goffmanian participant statuses and roles and contribute accordingly (1981); and hence, in such a framework of semiotic co-construction, the corporation could not occupy the status of the "author" but rather of a major "principal" (ibid, 167) at most, who endorses the content of design ("speech," in Goffman's terms).

Hence the endeavor here to make "subtle" semiotic association between the name and the corporation (line 29); and thus, this "subtlety" in Peircean semiotics terms can be explained as multimodal translative activity whereby text-level conversion of the nonlinguistic sign of wind in the source logo (i.e., of the resort) into the linguistic word in the target (i.e., of the development project) *retains* indexical meanings/objects (line 44) while also allowing space for flexible semiosis to at least some interpretants, such as the "employees" (line 50) or those already capable of interpreting the wind image in the resort's logo and know how it is verbalized in Hawaiian. As one meeting participant above comments, most people in Hawai‘ i are not aware of the Hawaiian word Makani (line 43); but the employees are, due to discourses already circulating inside Hawaiian Lands, and to those employee stakeholders, the meta-semiotic association of the two (i.e., the resort and the development project) can *remain a*

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Table 2. Name Form Capable of Producing Different Interpretative Effects

32	BK	You know, it's somewhat of an affordable project and if I was a *homeowner*
33	BK	I shouldn't say it that way but you know... I'd not object [the **association to** the resort].
34	CR	Yeah, but the project is, you know, it's in the stage of
35	CD	But we haven't sold it to the *politicians*.
36	CR	Yeah.
37	CD	That's where we're selling [in need of persuading]. The problem is not selling the units,
38	CD	the problem now is getting the, uh, getting through all the loops.
39	CD	As soon as you get the thing where the *council members* go, "what is this, is this the resort"
40	several	<laughter>
41	CD	Then they'll say, "wait a minute, this's resort housing and not affordable housing"?
42	JT	Oh come on guys. We're stretching it a bit.
43	JT	How many people know Makani means wind in Hawaiian.
44	JT	By doing this, it doesn't bring any **value** to Makani, but it does **separate** from the Resort.
45	BK	Um hum.
46	CR	Going back to higher-level question, what's the purpose of the name, the, logo, and the tagline.
47	CR	What is our objective for doing that.
48	CD	I think the number one objective is to, uh, is to move from, from a kinda disintegrated sets of neighborhoods, to an integrated community.
49	CD	The people who live there could work at [area name] that they can walk or bicycle or take trams to, you know, go to schools or offices or whatever.
50	CD	You know, it's partly, uh, *employee* housing.
51	ST	Not creating a resort but creating a community.

possibility. Semiotic "transduction" (Silverstein 2003) accomplished here by these corporate developers is therefore a method of representing, and creating grounds for future discursive claims to, "corporate" citizenship.

III. Inscribing tradition and embodying cultural citizenship

Over 350 employees and interested island residents gathered for an update by Hawaiian Lands and representatives of the urban design consulting firm it worked with (Figure 1, left). The event started with a traditional Hawaiian blessing delivered by a well-known native Hawaiian cultural expert in the island, and then moved onto presentations by corporate staff and designers. The purpose of this community-wide event was to share information as to where the project is in the stages of development, reveal what the designers have prepared for upcoming entitlement procedures at the County level, and lastly to ask for continued

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community participation during the public approval processes (e.g., sending support letters, attendance at County commission hearings). Many of those present, said one presenter, are the actual "community designers [of Makani who put in the] collaborative effort." It was hence important, he continued, to "notify [them] of progresses made and the road that lies ahead."

Figure 1. Participatory Design Process (Author's photographs, identifying information blurred purposefully)

Polished design renderings were shown and displayed as posters around the hall. The significance of this community-wide meeting was twofold. First, it provided an opportunity for interested publics to check and confirm how ideas conveyed during participatory design activities are used in actual design renderings. Secondly, it was an opportunity to build a momentum off of the consensus reached here and to move the project forward to public-level negotiations. The tagline of the Makani project was also presented which reads, "A New Traditional Community" (Figure 1, right).

What was the look of the oxymoronic phrase "new traditional" design, which again was the outcome of earlier community-wide meetings and workshops where a team of designers and several hundreds of "island citizens" (citing a wording in a Hawaiian Lands' corporate newsletter) worked to codesign the form of this affordable housing community? If considerations about representation of corporate status and role centered around the semiotic construction of the name, this time, for interested island residents and employees, the concern was on the representation of cultural belonging via visual and physical elements, such as the layout of streets and paths, the structure and orientation of homes and buildings, and the types of common spaces and facilities.

There were keywords, the designers said, that have been reiterated by participants throughout the participatory design meetings, including *ohana* (extended kin group, in Hawaiian), *aloha* (love, affection), and walkability. For example, interested residents expressed desires to "have a sense of place [with] design allowing community members to walk and interact with neighbors and encourage the spirit of *aloha*." To them this entailed putting into place "Hawaiian style homes, lots of trees, open spaces, playgrounds near schools."

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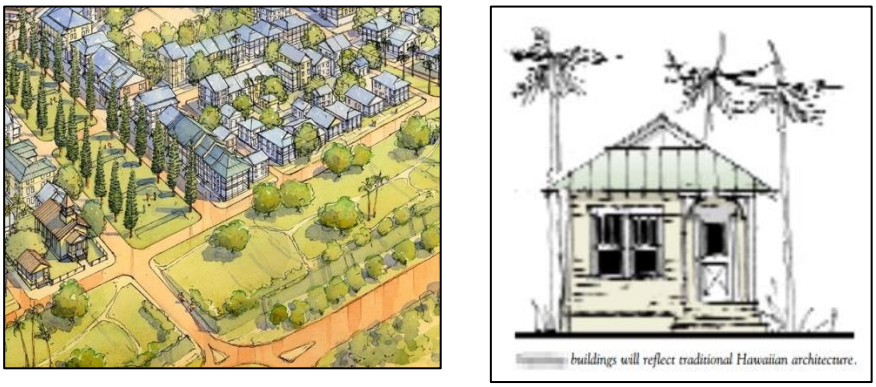

Figure 2. Representing Cultural Heritage in Design (Images from the "Makani" newsletter, identifying information blurred purposefully)

Synthesizing such comments, the designers derived what they called "five design principles" to work with, in order to draw out the plans partially revealed above in Figure 2. Contextually- and culturally-specific cues of (a) "a compact, sustainable community," (b) "affordable housing with dignity," (c) "mixed use for livability," (d) "true Hawai' i," and (e) "connectedness" work as cues/objects of visualization. Figure 2 (right) is an example of "traditional Hawaiian architecture" visualized, which is said to have also been inspired by local architects' knowledge of traditional Hawaiian methods of architecture. The overall neighborhood would adopt what is technically called the "traditional neighborhood design" model, which incorporates a mix of residential, commercial, and public spaces, parks, bike and pedestrian-friendly paths and in higher density (versus separation across spaces), which in turn encourages neighbors to meet and greet each other more frequently. It would, they asserted to the agreement of gathered community participants, "revive" the neighborliness that characterizes traditional Hawaiian lifeways.

In turn, then, each of these community design components are being interactionally—in other words, through verbal interactions between designers and interested locals and employees—selectively motivated and crafted as visual and physical semiotic devices mediating cultural meanings (i.e., "principles," described above), of utmost significance to those interested in becoming the residents of the future town of Makani. Hence, the local and employee participants would occupy, in Goffman's framework, the status and role of authors who select and approve the shape and form of design. Homes will be built to face, or be oriented toward, the streets and all have *lānai* (porch or terrace, in Hawaiian); and this architectural design is *made* meaningful as one that which guarantees invocation of "Hawaiianess" and "connectedness" of the neighborhood. Streets will be connected rather than have cul-de-sacs and there will be also be roundabout, all of which invites face-to-face interactions and circulations of people and cars. These are now signs *standing for*—or, in the native discourses, "reflect" (Figure 2, right)—what it meant by "livable," "connected," and "true" to Hawaiian lifeways. In short, things are *constructed* as indexes of the imagined traditional Hawaiian neighborhood (rather than, say, as indexical of images of "Americanness" or "eco-friendliness"), and thus having "dignity" (i.e., the object meaning) because now the design formation no longer highlights affordability but cultural heritage.

As mentioned earlier, the significance of this community-wide gathering explicitly was to update and inform locals and employees of the outcome of previous participatory design meetings and to move Makani forward to the next County-level discussions. But the actual

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significance might be that this gathering is the final opportunity to confirm whether the design visualized by the designers indeed represents the "voices" (Bakhtin 1981) of interested stakeholders including the corporation, local residents, and employees in search of local housing; voices, that is, delivered to the designers linguistically but then semiotically translated into nonlinguistic signs standing for corporate and cultural citizenship. The gathering event was hence the event of collectively confirming that design form may indeed carry and therefore mediate citizenry meanings, and thus become capable of future interpretations and claims that it embodies corporate citizenship for the corporation and cultural citizenship for the local residents and employees.

IV. Conclusion

In a corporate-issued "Makani Newsletter" reporting upon various aspects and updates of the project's development, a description of Makani's design that facilitates walkability within the community reads, "Have you ever lived or worked in a place where you could walk to buy a loaf of bread or a gallon of milk? To gather with family for a BBQ in the neighborhood park? … These opportunities are increasingly rare in modern communities … 'forgotten modes'. Makani will be the first walkable community in modern times. … The community's housing will allow working families to move closer to their jobs … increasing quality time spent at home." Such meta-semiotic and cultural claims are based on the formation of design features that, as have been explained throughout this paper, no longer limits Makani to be simply an affordable housing community but a place where the "forgotten mode" of living is reconstructed via compositional elements laying basis for interpretations that they are 'renewing' traditional Hawaiian and not "modern" lifeways. The self-characterization of Makani as being "new traditional" in its tagline becomes rationalizable in this fashion, with the assistance of signs that bear potential to function as visual indexical embodiments of cultural heritage.

Using the example of Makani's case as an example of contemporary practices of participatory design and citizen design, this paper worked with a goal to demonstrate how expressions of and claims to citizenship are not limited to discursive and political-ideological processes involving linguistic referencing and representation, but also can extend to multimodal design-semiotic processes that are processes of meaning-making at the level of everyday capitalist interactions. The collaborative design process here discussed can be describable, thus and in essence, as that of semiotically inscribing various meanings of citizenry belongings, with design components creatively creating indexical spatiotemporal connections between them and either the corporate operation or the remembered Hawaiian lifeways of locals. Political and cultural anthropological investigations of dialogic constructions of citizenship have revealed how notions of the citizen and citizenhood are subject to everyday political projects of agency-making and claim-making. This semiotically inspired approach will hopefully have offered a useful exercise as to how these insights can extend to the level of design where embodiment, entextualization, and emblematization of certain meanings are an ongoing activity.

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