DESIGNING MEANINGFUL OBJECTS

DANIEL ORTH

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University of Technology Sydney

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Daniel Orth declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctoral degree, in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of Technology Sydney. This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Signature:

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Daniel Orth
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MATERIALISING MEMORIES

This thesis was completed as part of the Materialising Memories research program under the supervision of Professor Elise van den Hoven and Dr Clementine Thurgood. Materialising memories is a research program that investigates the effects of physical and digital media on memories in everyday life. It explores how personal media, such as photos, audio and visual recordings, are used and why people want to relive or forget memories. Using a design research approach, Materialising Memories investigates how physical and digital media can support and facilitate remembering and forgetting in the everyday, particularly during and after major life events, and for those with memory impairments. The program investigates remembering and forgetting—both results of the same process.

prof.dr. Elise van den Hoven MTD
Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, University of Technology Sydney
Department of Industrial Design, Eindhoven University of Technology
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee
ARC Centre of Excellence on Cognition and its Disorders, Macquarie University

dr. Clementine Thurgood
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis investigates the ways in which designers can create both physical and technological objects that are meaningful for their users. Through four empirical studies, this research project generated insights into the relationship between meaningful objects and a person's self-identity, the differences between attachments to physical and technological products and the ways in which objects are imbued with personal meaning. These insights informed the development and evaluation of a design strategy for promoting product attachment. The strategy involves a process of designing objects with material or interactive properties that are associated with concepts that have been identified as meaningful to the intended user. The process was implemented and evaluated with evidence indicating it brought meaning to the resulting designs in several instances. Insights highlighting the unique characteristics of attachment experiences between people and their technological possessions were used to adapt and subsequently re-evaluate the value of the design process in the development of technological products. Critical reflections on the process and resulting design reaffirmed the potential value of designing objects with meaningful associations as a strategy for promoting product attachment in the digital age and combating unsustainable material consumption.