

# The Sequence of Transformation

Aram lee

# The Sequence of Transformation

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## **Preface**

# Understanding Objects Is Understanding People

## Preface

# Understanding Objects Is Understanding People

Are there qualities in objects or people that are completely alien to us?

When I moved to Germany, I brought my rice machine, which was a wedding gift from my mother. The machine was very new, and when the rice was finished, it would announce in an electronic voice that sounded like a woman that it was ready. Additionally, before it started to cook, it would say, 'I will make really amazing rice.'

When my friend, Torben, visited my house, he asked me what this strange machine was for. I told him, 'This is a rice machine for making rice.' He laughed and then said, 'Hey, it's strange that you have a rice machine because you can cook with a pot. Why did you bring this huge machine from Korea?' I thought this was a joke, but he was quite serious and asked me again. Suddenly, I felt stupid for having brought this huge machine 5,338 miles from home. I felt that there was a gap between us due to my favourite

machine. I became a stranger to him, or maybe he became a stranger to me.

My rice machine was a thing of daily necessity to me, even more important than a chair (we usually sit on the floor). I said to my friend, 'I don't understand why you have an egg cooker. This doesn't exist in my country. You can also cook an egg with a pan, right?' 'Yes,' he said. 'If I have a rice cooker, I can make an egg with it, and if you have an egg cooker, you can make rice with it. Thus, the identity of an object cannot be defined by itself; it is defined by our interpretation of it.' 'So, it is a transparent machine.' We laughed at this together.

As a stranger, I mostly encounter friction in my daily life here through the material world, not within myself, like with the rice machine and egg cooker example. **I have realized that understanding objects is understanding people.**

We are questioning more than ever before what and who strangers



Rice cooker



Egg cooker



are. When we see the world, we define others more strictly as strangers. We define ourselves as normal, but we regard 'strangers' as unfamiliar things, like gods or monsters. The figure of the stranger – ranging from the ancient notion of the 'foreigner' to the contemporary idea of an alien invader – frequently operates as a limiting experience for humans trying to identify themselves in relation to others. Is 'otherness' visualised as 'uncanny' or 'ambiguous'?

I am focusing on objects in relation to people, not people directly, because objects are part of people's cultural language. They are social absorbers. Thus, objects have the ability to convey their context and the characteristics of the people who use them. When objects come into other contexts, what kind of friction occurs through misunderstanding, transformation and distortion?

This fundamental question motivated my design research.

## Diaspora, Globalization, and Design

Nowadays, many products are made in Indonesia, China and South Korea. What does this mean?

The need for cross-cultural ethnic-cultural product design is, among other things, reflected in the different products people use, products with similar functionalities that people use, and different ways people use these products. The extent to which cultural diversity is reflected in differences between products depends, of course, on the kinds of products we have in mind. The very nature of the production process of mass-produced industrial products does not allow for much variation between batches, and consumers worldwide apparently use these products roughly in the same way. However, ethnic-cultural variation seriously conflicts with the uniformity principle of mass production.

Globalisation has led to a situation in which a design from one culture or context often has to be used to develop



Example of Understanding each other: Exchanging clothes

a product that will be used in a totally different cultural environment.

In Yiwu City in China, the entire area produces Christmas ornaments for the West; the local culture entirely revolves around Christmas ornaments. However, in China, which has the largest population of Buddhists, making Christmas ornaments does not relate to the local culture. Our material world and system do not care at all about where they come from or their purpose.



Worker in a Yiwu factory processing Christmas decorations in Yiwu City, East China's Zhejiang Province, on December 4, 2014. Some of the factories in Yiwu are still processing Christmas orders.

## Unknown Objects — No Ghost Just A Shell

Nowadays, many objects around us are decontextualised. The identity of objects has rapidly changed and become mixed. Therefore, we have become culturally and socially disconnected from them. No one wants to celebrate their birth with a thousand things made within a minute on a cold conveyer belt. However, some descriptive objects can cause users to strongly connect with society. They are obvious social consequences; they can tell a story with their visible, physical and communicative abilities. Thus, they have a powerful potential to mediate between people and society.

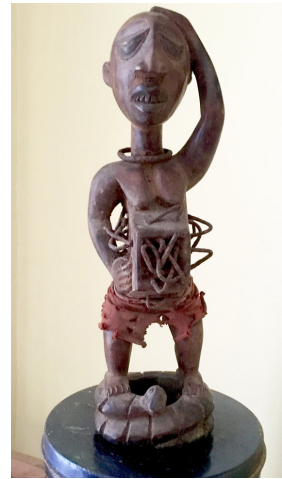
“There is still the refusal to accept that beyond the meaning we give or that people give to socialized cultural objects, there is the meaning that objects give to themselves, which we haven’t created. But we have to have the courage to take that step. To recognize that beyond the fact of

Ownership  
Misunderstanding  
Impression  
Spectacle  
Ambiguity  
Commodities  
Ghost  
Fantasy  
Rumor  
Myths  
Muse  
Fashion as style  
Taboo  
Hatred

The Role of Unknown Objects  
when they move to a new  
context, Aram lee

being able to charge up the object, (...) the object in and of itself possesses a force, a life that signifies, and does so independently of our coalition, of our needs, of our wishes, and our aesthetic concerns to make objects go in those directions that we indicate to them.” Issa Samb

Regardless of the wishes of an object when people move, objects also move with them. Supranational neoliberalism causes the immigration of objects and people and deterritorialisation. The narrative and value of communities of objects change in quality and may disappear during such transplantation. It seems that the loss of narrative is the fate of strangers and their things. When objects move, their story is totally removed, leaving only an empty shell. Due to cultural communication with people in society, **objects are formed in a context. Objects accordingly beckon to people who understand them in a particular way.**



Dual Context: African Shaman Object in Africa / African Art in Europe



The chair of Le Corbusier in India, Amie siegel, <Provenance>



The chair of Le Corbusier in Europe



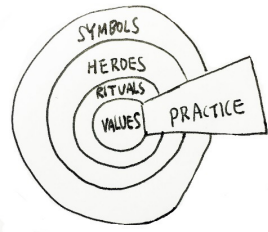
Budda as a decoration piece

Once removed from time and space, they are transformed in the meanings that they may be said to carry: they become moments of ownership, misunderstanding, impressions, spectacles, ambiguities, muses or commodities.

Objects can be a visible border between nations. Despite the economic diversification and technological advances in the world today, the conceptual barriers that exist between nations cause them to misinterpret each other. The abyss separating cultures remains. Our conceptions of the world we live in, social identities and knowledge are largely based on sets of ideals, much like the way we understand our history. Our perception of past events that construct our ideas of culture change depending on the issues we face.

Hofstede(2005) utilises an onion as a metaphor to describe and understand culture, in which different cultural aspects are found in the different layers. This is illustrated in the above figure. The heart of the onion, 'cultural manifestation', is values. Values are

general tendencies to prefer certain relations over others; these could be relationships, such as normal–abnormal, ugly–beautiful and clean–dirty. These values are created early in life and have a strong influence on behaviour. Symbols, heroes and rituals are practices that are observable; nevertheless, their cultural meaning is invisible and depends on how they are interpreted. The metaphor of the onion symbolises that practices can change quickly, while the core, values, is more stable and changes very slowly.



Hofstede Onion Diagram,  
Cultural Manifestation on  
Different Levels



Unknown Objects in an Ethnographic Museum

“If you want to know how the West sees China, read Time, Der Spiegel, The Asian Wall Street Journal, or Museum.”

Museum displays represent certain truths about where things come from. The reason I went to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden was because of an exhibit about others and others' objects. The things in a museum are well sorted based on the scientific research on the objects in it. When an ethnographic museum tries to understand an object from other countries, it is hard to establish its real value because objects have three-dimensional identities, not a single story. An object in a museum in a country other than that from which it originated has lost its connection to the particular people who understand it empirically. Therefore, it is hard to understand an object from a single story in a museum; it remains unknown to us.

## The Dutch wife as an Unknown Object

When I went to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, I found a familiar object: An item that resembled a bamboo wife. It was not exactly the same as a bamboo wife, but a structure for the arm to make it cool (you can put it on underneath clothing). Not surprisingly, this was not familiar at all to my friend, who went there with me. She had no clue what this object was for. To her, it was a beautiful sculpture made from exotic bamboo. She understood it simply as a sculpture.



Museum Foto  
Objects from Ethnographic  
Museum in Leiden  
Serial number: 666-72a  
The collection: Korea, Japan  
Title: braided sheath  
Material: Bamboo  
Size: 16,5 x 10cm  
Year: 1800-1888  
Culture: Korean  
Origin: Korea

How is our material world so fragile?  
The materiality of an object can tell us nothing, anything or everything.

**Objects are not just made from materials.** They are made by a particular society that is complex. **Thus, they require social and cultural awareness and common engagement.**

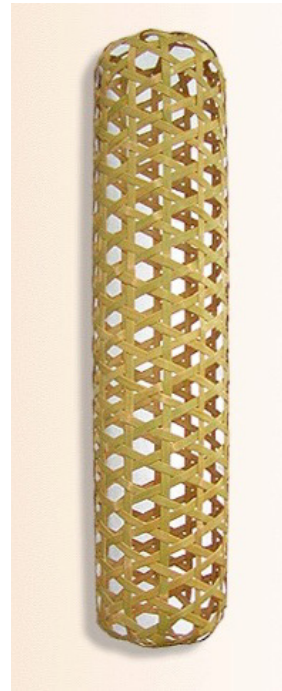
For example, an empty Coca-Cola bottle could become a flute to African people in a bushmen movie.



Movie, *The god must be crazy*(1980)

I took the bamboo wife as a case study. Why? The first reason was that it was an object that most of my friends in the Netherlands did not know about. It was exotic to them but not to me because I had seen such objects in my country. If objects are the language of people and designers create objects, what can designers do with them? Designers are concerned about the object's matter. My concern as a designer is not only designing a shape, but also designing the cultural 'language' of objects. What does an 'unknown object' mean on a cultural level? **How can designers mediate this disconnection between an object and its context?** Designers are located between objects and people. A designer's role should be as a mediator.

Thus, I began to research it.  
What is it?



Bamboo Wife

Narrative of the Dutch Colony of Indonesia

In the dictionary, the Bamboo wife is described as follows:

“In Korea, Indonesia, and most Asian countries, people know what it is. The bamboo wife is known as a Dutch wife, a hollow bamboo bolster roughly the size of a human body. It is a tool that cools the body through ventilation. It is of the proportion to fit a human body. It is a common object in Asian countries.”

This object is called a bamboo wife in Korea, but when I researched the English name, surprisingly, it was ‘Dutch wife,’ which I found very strange. I wanted to know why it was called this. Through my research, I learned it was because of a Dutch colony in Indonesia. In folk etymology, the origin of the English term ‘Dutch wife’ is thought to be from the Dutch colony of Indonesia, where Dutch traders would spend long periods away from their Indonesian



wives. It has a Dutch name due to its colonial history. When Dutch people hear the name of this object, it might seem very strange to them because they do not know what the object is. Its name and object tell a story. After colonial times, the Dutch left Asia, but this object still kept its strange name.

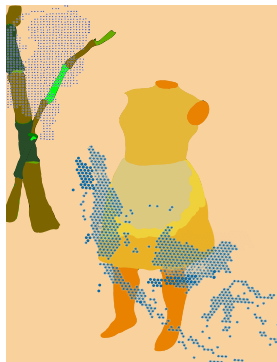


When I researched this unknown object further, it was like opening a sealed letter. I realised how one object can contain many narratives and cultural connotations.

### Female representation

This object is called a ‘Dutch wife,’ but this does not mean a wife from the Netherlands. It concerns particular people. These women were the Indonesian wives of Dutch men in the colonial period. The object’s name and function have a meaning that tells us about the colonial period in Indonesia and women’s role at that time.

With this object, Indonesian women during the colonial period became Dutch wives. We can also look at how we use the term ‘Dutch wife.’ If one person hugs this object, it looks like two people. The Dutch wife lies down with



Drawing, Interpretation of Dutch wife

you and sleeps beside you, and you can hug and hold her under your legs, like the Indonesian women at that time, who were passive and easily taken by the Dutch. They became widows after the traders left. The object represents the colonial power and suppression of women and women’s bodies. It was named jokily, **but reflects the time, ideology and cultural context.**

### Colony

Netherlands colonised Indonesia from 1820–1950. The Dutch wife was a kind of slave in the colonial period. The famous Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer wrote about the Dutch wife in the book *Footsteps* (*Jejak Langkah*). The story describes the fight by one man and his underground group against colonial power and exploitation. It is the third book in a celebrated quartet of novels that has been banned in Indonesia since 1981. In this book, the author describes the Dutch wife as a colonial reminder in Indonesia:

“The bolster (Dutch wife) that you often find in bed



Dutch East Indies: 19th Century



Dutch East Indies: 19th Century



Dutch East India Company logo On the street in Hoorn logo VOC



will never be found anywhere else. My mother told me the history of the object. During Dutch colonization, the English laughed at their habit. When the Dutch came, they had Indonesian women in Hindia ('Hindia' is what they called the Indonesian Dutch colony). That was why the Dutch wife was created. You will never find the term 'Dutch wife' in the old Javanese literature, nor in the Malayan literature, because it was purely derived from Dutch colonization in Indonesia. Lieutenant General Raffles from England was the first person to use the term 'Dutch wife' (the enemy of the Dutch during that period; Indonesia was colonized for a short time by the English until the Dutch took Indonesia from them)" Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Footsteps*

### **The Dutch wife was invented by the Dutch**

The bolster pillow can be traced back to Mesopotamia and is found extensively throughout ancient Egyptian history, when the head was believed to be

the most sacred part of the body. The bolster pillow has even been found in ancient Egyptian tombs. Bolsters were also used for comfort in the Far East. They were originally known as the Dutch wife, which is made from bamboo. The Indonesian people say that the Dutch wife was invented by Dutch people who had bolsters in Indonesia in colonial times. They made the shape of a bolster, but used a different material, bamboo, and a different technique (weaving) in their new context (Indonesia). They were inspired by Korea and Japan and made a new invention to keep them cool in Indonesia.

### **The matter of material**

The main functionality of the Dutch wife is to ventilate the body in warm climates. Contrary to its name, the object's function relates to the climate of Indonesia. It is used in certain tropical climates. Split by the equator, Indonesia has an almost entirely tropical climate. The material from which an object is made is very important because the raw material indicates where it was

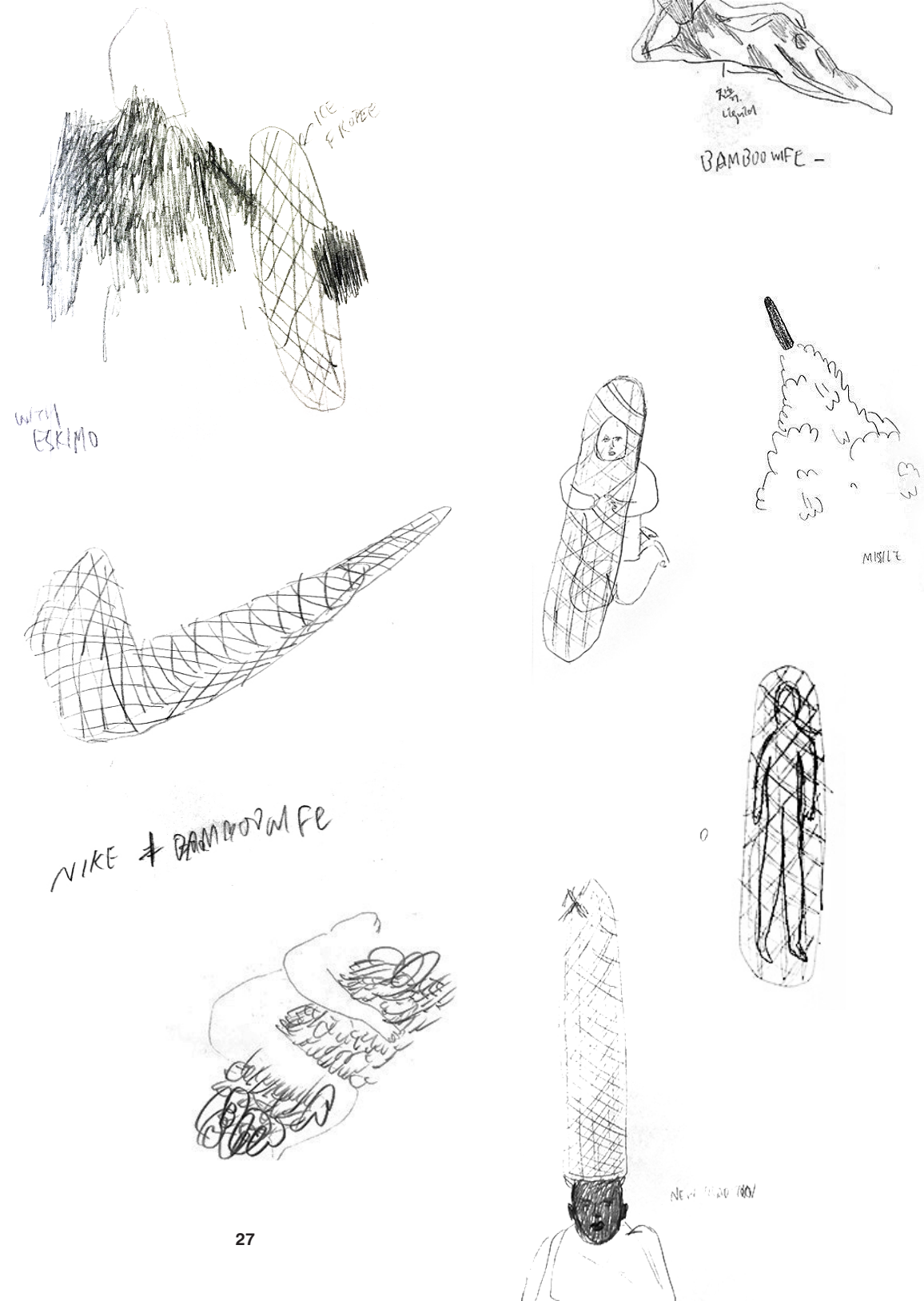


Bolster Pillow

made and helps us understand it. When I discussed this object with my tutor, Koen, he said, 'Maybe the reason that we don't understand the object is because we don't understand bamboo.' Bamboo tells us about an object's geographical context, as it is from Asian countries. Bamboo is a contextualised material and is not produced industrially. It is not an international raw material. Most bamboo is only native to moist, tropical, warm and temperate climates. Bamboo is of notable economic and cultural significance in Southeast and East Asia, as it is used for building materials, a food source and a versatile raw product.

## Chapter 4.

## Re-evaluation of the Dutch wife



## The Broken Sequence

When European people saw the Dutch wife, they did not know what it was, so it became an unknown object. The Dutch wife is particularly interesting because it has no context in Western society, so it has no meaning. It is an unknown, exotic thing. The idea that objects lose their context is interesting because this happened with a particular thing that I found in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. I know what this unknown object is, so how can I re-evaluate and reinterpret it in a different context?

I want to discuss the layers of meaning of the Dutch wife. It has a deeper background as an object that people do not know about.

My research and evaluation demonstrate how one unknown object has many layers and can be re-evaluated in different contexts. If its meaning is reinterpreted, the object becomes something different. This shows that the object has many narratives.

Many designers review, research and discover or re-evaluate particular materials' or objects' meanings in contemporary times. Research into objects and historical investigations can explicate the value of such meaning.

When I researched this object's narrative, I found many different meanings for people in the Netherlands, Indonesia, England and even Korea, all of which had been mixed and integrated in this one object. The knowledge I discovered has affected my design. Before my research, I did not know that the Dutch wife had a critical connotation. When I learned its story and symbolic meaning in a certain context, its materiality was overwhelmed by its symbolic meaning.

**I believe design has the ability to respect context.** When I re-evaluate an object, my first assumption is that the unknown object came from an unknown people. Design is a medium for investigating the meaning of an object, and it is surprising that this one object has many layers that tell the history of the colonies and women and has different cultural pronunciations. **This is valid in a context of cultural**

isolation and cultural exchange. To understand an object is to understand people. This can evoke a historical relationship by layering the elements of the realities of exotic, unknown objects. Therefore, the Dutch wife could act as a bridge between the unknown and known.

4.2

## Reinterpretation of Two Contexts From Design



Ikea bedroom Advertisement, March 2017, Netherlands



Ikea bedroom Advertisement, March 2017, Indonesia.

To examine the differences between two contexts in design, I searched for examples of a 'bedroom' on the Ikea website to see how the lifestyles of two different contexts also differ. The photos above are advertisements from March 2017 in the Netherlands and Indonesia, respectively. Even though they are filled with products from the same company, the contexts appear to be different. I found the mats on the ground especially interesting. The advertisement for the Netherlands shows a rug that is made from polypropylene to create a warm feeling for in the inhabitant of the bedroom.

In the advertisement for Indonesia, the mat on the ground is made from jute. Jute functions include UV protection, heat insulation and low thermal conduction. Additionally, the chair and lamp have woven patterns. These patterns are more familiar to Indonesian people. The contextualisation of objects is deeply related to visibility, tactility, scent, climate, etc., but contextualisation is mostly related to our perception, experiential knowledge and history.



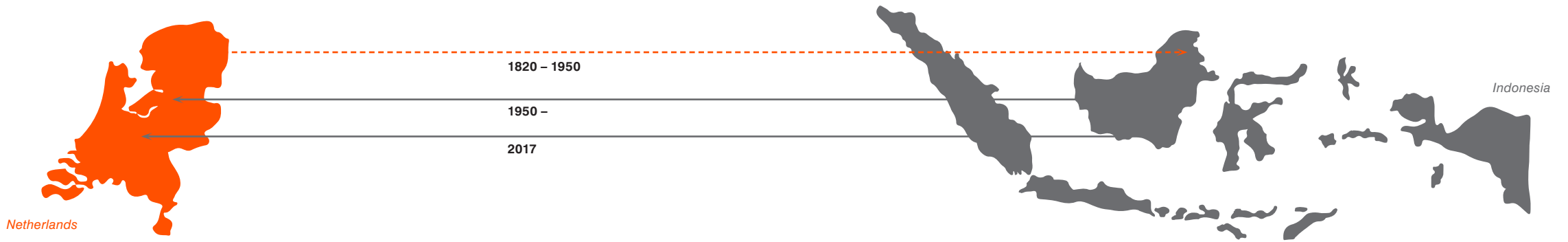
## Bringing Back the Narrative to the Unknown Object

“Objects do not have a single past but an unbroken sequence of past times, leading backward from the present moment to the future.”

As a designer, I understand a particular material, what it means and how it relates to its context. There are different forms and different ways of understanding an object. **I think that objects cannot be disassociated from who made them or how they were made.** An object can only exist through perception. An ethnographical object represents a certain truth about where it came from, but what if a cultural object starts to speculate, predict or anticipate what is to come? What if it starts to see continuations in the narratives constructed? What if it becomes a mediator between two different contexts?

The principle idea of the transformation of this object is to investigate the possibility of developing objects from the Dutch wife. To communicate their

# The History Line of the Dutch wife



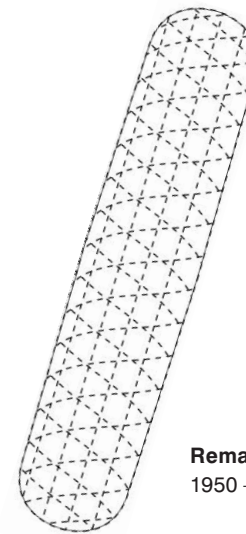
The Journey of Dutch wife started from the colonial period from Netherlands to Indonesia. Dutch wife was invented by Dutch people and later adopted to Indonesia's climate and reborn with a different context. Later the shape was spread to East Asian countries without its original context, and it was recalled back to Netherlands for this project.



**Colonial Period**  
1820 - 1950



**After Colonial**  
1950 -



**Remained object**  
1950 -



**Recalled to Netherlands**  
2017

socially engaged visions, they draw on a range of materials and methods. Through the journey, I, as a designer, devote myself to giving a voice to an object to tell a story; a sequence of transformations occurs in the object during the journey.

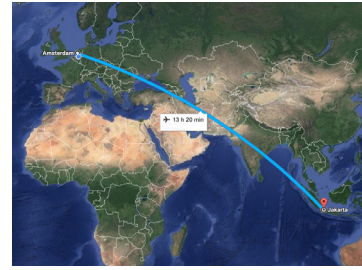
I followed the steps of the unknown object (the Dutch wife) and brought it from its origin to here, which is connected to the object's identity. The transformation connects one context to another and the past to modern times. **It is about how we contextualise the object by building it in a sequence of two different contexts and how the materials and techniques are deeply related to identity in its original context.**

## 5.2

## Tracing the Object's Narrative

## 5.2.1

Indonesia. Netherlands.



Route to Indonesia

**Then, the tracking started 7,046 miles away.** I called my Indonesian friend, Anggi. I asked, 'Where can I see bamboo?' Anggi said, 'It is everywhere, even in my backyard.' I asked her where local people make things with bamboo. She said there are too many places to name because bamboo is everywhere and it is free to use. Additionally, weaving is a very simple activity, so people farm in the daytime, and at night-time, they make bamboo crafts, such as rice baskets, gourds, and kitchen products. Women mostly do this to make money from free, natural resources. Little villages near cities make such crafts. The villages sell the bamboo commodities to markets in the cities. Anggi knew some craftsman in a village, so I decided to go there. Along the way, I went to the bathrooms in restaurants, and there

was always a manual above the toilet. It informed users of how to use it because the typical toilet in Indonesia is a squat toilet (also called an Indian or Turkish toilet). Typical modern toilets come from the West, and some people do not know how to use them or adopt the same position that they use with squat toilets. People still have to learn how to adapt to having these new types of toilet in their culture.



Toilet Sign

When I arrived at the Jakarta Airport and headed toward Sumedang, during the drive, I saw a train in the mountains. I asked the driver why it was in such a high place. The driver explained that the railway was made by the Dutch in colonial times so that the travellers could see the wonderful scenery. Some cities were also established by the Dutch for their travels, such as Bandung and Bali. I headed to Sumedang, which is a little village where all the residents make crafts. It was supposed to be 3 hours from Jakarta (according to Google), but Indonesia has horrible traffic, so it took 9 hours.

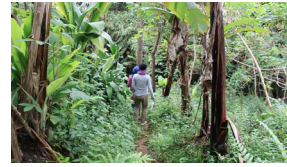
We arrived in the late afternoon ('we' being Anggi, whom I had dragged

along to help, Anggi's mother, her mother's friends and I). The walk through the mine was a fairly surreal experience because the village has a completely different timeline hidden within four mountains of bamboo.

When we walked to the village, we started to talk about bamboo. Anggi's mother said she thinks bamboo is very boring because it is everywhere. She thinks plastic is much more attractive than bamboo. She said only travellers like bamboo. For her, it is not exotic, so it is not interesting at all. Naturally, all the houses in the village were made from bamboo. The walls, structures, and even the fences were made from bamboo. I asked Anggi why they were not made from wood. She said it is because bamboo is the most available material in Indonesia and is free; also, bamboo is flexible, cooling, easy to grow, and very light (because it is hollow). On the way to meet the craftsman, we saw many women and families weaving bamboo. Weaving is the main technique for making a Dutch



Walk to village



Bamboo Forest Cutting Scene



Making of Dutch wife



wife. Traditional weaving still exists as a contemporary skill in Indonesia because Indonesia is still a young country.

I eventually met the craftsman, Mr Anang Suryana. He is a farmer, but at night, he makes bamboo crafts. I said to him, 'I want to make a Dutch wife,' and he recognised it as a bolster. In Indonesia, sleeping is not complicated. A bed linen set typically consists of pillow cases, bed sheets, and a bolster cover. This is a common and essential bed accessory for Indonesians. Due to the tropical weather, blankets are not necessary. He said the bolster culture comes from the Dutch colony. It did not exist before colonial times. The Dutch wife remains in use as a bolster in Indonesia. It is part of the cultural heritage from colonial times in Indonesia.

The Dutch East India Company was huge, and many brave traders came to Indonesia in the 16th century. During their voyages, they left many unique, multinational things between the East and West. The flow worked both ways, but there was a power imbalance due to colonial power.

Indonesian cultural influence in the Netherlands consisted of food, salt, pepper, coffee, silk and cotton, but I could see the Dutch effect on architecture on a larger scale, or a more intimate level in the people's lives in Indonesia, such as the fact that the Dutch wife is still used in Indonesian culture as a bolster. It also conveys the existence of unequal states between Indonesia even now.



Discuss with craftsman



Bolster culture in Indonesia, 2017









The arrival of the Dutch wife in the Netherlands



The arrival of the Dutch wife in the Netherlands

My thesis started with questioning how objects are deeply related to their context and the people around them, which I explored by researching the historical and cultural context of an unknown object.

Through research, I confronted many symbolic meanings of the object, such as colonial power, women's representation, and cultural values. I found that this unknown object has many connotations.

I confirmed that to understand objects is to understand their surroundings and people. I found much value in regard to not only the 'Dutch wife', but also the qualities of a designer. I think that if designers did not care about understanding objects, it would be very difficult for us to understand each other in our world.

As I am a designer, I will attempt to continue the broken sequence of the Dutch wife by designing the rest of the story and shaping the identity of the object based on an understanding of a particular context.

The identity of the Dutch wife is formed in between two contexts: the Netherlands

and Indonesia. There is no particular context for this object, but it has a deep history and connotations, which is why I took a Dutch wife from Indonesia to the Netherlands. By following the sequence of the object, when the Dutch wife arrived with me in the Netherlands, the object started to transform in its different context.

Interview

*Interview Aram about her work graduating Design Academy Master 2017.*  
*Interviewer: Donghwan Kam, Social Design, Design Academy Eindhoven.*

Donghwan: What I find interesting about your work and your ongoing research is the way you use the object itself as a tool to understand meaning. You use the Dutch Wife (D.W.) as a means of interpreting the ideology and history that surrounds it as an inanimate form. I find the way you contextualise the D.W. by putting it in new contexts fascinating.

Aram: It's always interesting to see the hidden levels of reality in an object. To discover another world behind the object or other levels.

DH: The hidden realities of the Object... ? So, that's why your work has its genesis within the context of a museum.

AR: Well, yes. I'm interested in reading about objects. Umm... Well I like to go to ethnographic museums. Every time I go to a museum, I see objects that, at first glance, appear to have been in the same position forever. That's why I

like to work with objects in a museum. I then leave to explore and find the hidden realities and stories buried within those objects. I also find that there's a lack of information displayed about the object in the museum, especially in the museums in Europe that have a lot of loot. Now, they just don't know what to do with the millions of objects that fill their depots and collections. Anyway, finding the stories of objects in European museums is exciting.

DH: I know you've also worked on a project called 'Unknown Objects' from Korea National Museum. This was a project that saw you add a fictional narrative to an object with no academic history. You've applied this way of thinking to your current project by bringing an object from Indonesia and placing it in the country it's named after, even though the Dutch don't really know what it is. Why do you keep challenging the identity of objects within museums?

AR: Well, the shell was a completely unknown object. I found it in the Korean National Museum with the title 'Unknown Object'; archaeologists still don't know what it is. I could define the

shell by making a completely fictional scenario for it, however, as its identity and genealogy are completely empty inside. The D.W. was a different case, however. It is a completely known object to me; however, it is an unknown object in Europe. It's filled with a complex historical identity. I found this interesting because people in the West often view Asian objects as exotic, unknown, or unfamiliar. When I went deep through the D.W., I found Dutch identity and history merged with Indonesian culture as a result of colonialism. Can we then say that this thing is an unknown object, or even exotic, if it's the result of the cultural collision between the two countries?

DH: Tell me a bit more about the D.W.

AR: The D.W. represents the Netherlands' colonial history with Indonesia. It's the physical manifestation of the mixing of cultures, whether wanted or not. It still exists in different forms, however. Its genealogy is not of only one culture and of one nation, but two. It existed during a certain time when two nations mixed in one country. I am interested in how the complex layers of

information can be condensed regarding one object and how the museum as an institution represents the object.

DH: Perhaps you can tell me a bit more about the genealogy in your project.

AR: In my D.W. project, the genealogy aspect was very important, as it led me down the path of investigation. I'm not actually a fan or admirer of this object; I'm more interested in its analysis and what it means.

DH: So, that's why it was important to go to Indonesia?

AR: For me, I went to Indonesia not only to research this object but so I would become part of the object's story and its ultimate storyteller. This action creates a richer investigation.

DH: Action?

AR: Yes, for me this action forces me to truly understand where this object came from and what it means.

DH: What's interesting to me is the way you comment on displays within the



museum; for example, how they only represent a singular narrative.

AR: What I want to achieve is a more 3D view of the object. At the moment, within museums, objects and information feel 2D, flat. Museums treat objects' histories as if time is linear, just a series of consecutive events, but there is so much more to their stories. I believe it is necessary to go deeper into an object's meaning in relation to its place of origin, its story, and the people who relate to it as a socialized cultural object. That's why I research just one object. In the end, what interests me is the question of whether there is a meaning or a narrative found in objects that goes beyond their cultural significance. For example, there are some Asian objects Europeans will never understand, because they can't comprehend them in their cultural context. Like, if someone tries to explain it so they can sell it, people will not really understand what that object means because they never lived in that culture.

DH: What is important now is starting with this trajectory, this meaning,

and the object's existence. Let's imagine the objects are lead soldiers or Buddha statues; there is always a cultural polysemy, a possibility that is offered to you. At any rate, when it comes to objects and their circulation today, this is important. People must understand that in culture, every object imported from one country to another, from one hand to another, from one sector or territory to another, should be considered charged with an entire history.

AR: Yes, living things are inexplicably related to one another these days. Objects are there, I think, simply to help people understand one another better. However, wherever the D.W. comes from in Indonesia, it brings all of Indonesia with it. Even if it is the tiniest of objects, it carries all of this history within it. So, I can hold in my hands all of the possible and imaginable means for getting to know Indonesia and Netherlands beyond.

DH: I think you are focusing more on beyond the object, which is a narrative, and the people surrounding it.

AR: As well as its context and its representation, because the context



and representation recreate and give identity.

DH: What are you considering these days?

AR: Through the project, I was asked two different questions. One is more about 'representation' of object. It is important, because an object has many layers of stories. If we look at the objects in the museum, all of the pedestals have to be neutral, but if you look at the eighteenth century displays, a painting's frame was part of the painting. It was considered part of the theme of the painting. The form and colour or material of a frame had to consider the theme and visuals of the painting. Even the display typography and frame had a particular function for supporting the painting.

DH: Now, I see all the frames are neutral, though.

AR: Yes, What I found interesting during this project was how the matter of 'representation' is the most important aspect in understanding an object and understanding beyond. It is equally

important as an object. I think the objects that do not tell stories in museums, even if they contain a lot of stories, are like shells. The stories are ghosts, especially when it comes from another context. Thus, some medium of representation – such as a frame or pedestal – has some potential and function to tell the narration.

DH: It could also be specialized by who represents it.

AR: Yes. Thinking about representation is closer to what I was questioning in the beginning.

When I was thinking about this colonial object, however, and bringing it here and thinking about its transformation, I had new questions. During my research, I saw a lot of colonial objects from museums. As a designer, I think about what it could be. Like, when I think about the D.W.'s transformation, its re-contextualisation was very important.

Then, I come up with feasible scenarios about colonial objects. What if colonial objects speculate the future of Western society? What if colonial objects are used for Western society climate change? In this dynamic, feasible scenario, it

based on the premise of global warming in Western society. I imagined if we could import the objects from colonial countries which are warm countries. What I found is interesting, and this is relevant because it changes the spectrum. Indonesia has certain kinds of knowledge for living in a warm climate; it is a former colony. This technology can save the world. Now we see the climate changing, and we have to rethink existing models. If we only look at the D.W. for the air conditioning, it could be a good example. In Western society climate change means we have to use products in different ways. Suddenly, where we thought we were isn't true; our knowledge comes from other parts of the world. We have to import the knowledge from warm countries, which were mostly colonial countries, to tackle this question. It is a reverse action to what was outside, where they were waiting for us to tell them what to do. Now they could help us think about our situation.

DH: So, you have two different questions about representation and re-appropriation through this project?

AR: Yes. They are obviously different

questions, but both are relevant for me. I found two different roles in this project as a designer.

One is about representation, how telling a story is also a function of an object, how to form the story to support the object, and how to make the story beyond that object visible. The second question is about re-appropriation and re-contextualisation. I found a new potential to use colonial objects in Western society.

DH: Thank you.



**Appendix**

*The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, Arjun appadurai  
*Culture's Consequences*, Geert Hofstede  
*Mapping Asia*, Project Projects  
*Footsteps*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer  
*A critical Reader*, Fred Wilson  
*Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Ivan Karp  
*Object Atlas Fieldwork in the museum*, Clémentine Deliss

**Articles**

From the Ethics of Acting to the Empire without Signs, Issa Samb

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Ownership  
Misunderstanding  
Impression  
Spectacle  
Ambiguity  
Commodities  
Ghost  
Fantasy  
Rumor  
Myths  
Muse  
Fashion as style  
Taboo  
Hatred