

Abject Objects: A Case for Using Humour and Horror in Design

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Abstract

This paper explores the possibility of combining theories from different subject areas into product design as influences not typically seen in the field. The main aim of the research was to discover whether concepts from horror and comedy could be incorporated into a design process to create products that influence user reactions in new ways. While the paper examines one example of incorporating new influences into a design process, it covers key ideas in relation to wider concept exploration and how the ideas presented may work with other disciplinary themes. An exploration of user interactions with products in general was also key in understanding how it could affect the way users viewed and interacted with the final products. The paper proposes these ideas as a way to open new critiques on the design world and the influences used when designing new products. Building on research into horror and humour concepts, the paper explores their integration into a product design process, walking through each stage and drawing from academic perspectives on what makes a product design process successful. The research demonstrates how a design process can be altered by introducing new influences while still meeting guidelines for what good design is. By undertaking the design process and creating a suite of products demonstrating the concepts introduced, the paper determines that products designed with alternative influences can have a space in the design world and can function and interact with users in new ways. The implications of the research open possibilities of successfully using uncommon influences in product design as a way to open new understandings of what good design can be.

Keywords: Product Design; Design Process; Body Horror; Abjection; Humour; Benign Violation Theory.

Abstrak

Makalah ini mengeksplorasi kemungkinan menggabungkan teori dari berbagai bidang subjek ke dalam desain produk sebagai pengaruh yang biasanya tidak terlihat dalam bidang tersebut. Tujuan utama penelitian adalah untuk menemukan apakah konsep dari horor dan komedi dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam proses desain untuk menciptakan produk yang memengaruhi reaksi pengguna dengan cara baru. Meskipun makalah ini meneliti satu contoh penggabungan pengaruh baru ke dalam proses desain, makalah ini mencakup ide-ide kunci dalam kaitannya dengan eksplorasi konsep yang lebih luas dan bagaimana ide yang disajikan dapat bekerja dengan tema disiplin lain. Eksplorasi interaksi pengguna dengan produk secara umum juga menjadi kunci dalam memahami bagaimana hal itu dapat memengaruhi cara pengguna melihat dan berinteraksi dengan produk akhir. Makalah ini mengusulkan ide-ide tersebut sebagai cara untuk membuka kritik baru tentang dunia desain dan pengaruh yang digunakan saat merancang produk baru. Berdasarkan penelitian tentang konsep horor dan humor, makalah ini mengeksplorasi integrasinya ke dalam proses desain produk, menelusuri setiap tahap dan mengacu pada perspektif akademis tentang apa yang membuat proses desain produk berhasil. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana proses desain dapat diubah dengan memperkenalkan pengaruh baru sambil tetap memenuhi pedoman tentang apa itu desain yang baik. Dengan melakukan proses desain dan menciptakan serangkaian produk yang mendemonstrasikan konsep yang diperkenalkan, makalah ini menetapkan bahwa produk yang dirancang dengan pengaruh alternatif dapat memiliki tempat di dunia desain dan dapat berfungsi serta berinteraksi dengan pengguna dengan cara baru. Implikasi penelitian membuka kemungkinan untuk berhasil menggunakan pengaruh yang tidak biasa dalam desain produk sebagai cara untuk membuka pemahaman baru tentang apa yang dapat menjadi desain yang baik.

Kata Kunci: Desain Produk; Proses Desain; Horor Tubuh; Abjeksi; Humor; Teori Benign Violation.



1. Introduction

This paper will propose the layout of a new product design process that includes concepts and themes from non-product-design subject areas. The question this research seeks to answer is whether a case can be made for using horror and humour concepts, within a design process to create more visually and emotionally interesting product designs. The intention of this project is to explore how design could incorporate other subject areas and where this could push design in the future. The concepts selected for this research are Benign Violation theory (Warren & McGraw, 2015) and abjection (Kristeva, 1982). These theories draw from comedy and horror respectively and are mostly seen in the film or media industry. These concepts were selected due to the opposition in emotional responses between laughter and fear. Part of the theory of this research is how the influences chosen, create specific reactions from users. Understanding user responses to products is key in creating good designs (Brown, 2009). By introducing concepts with opposite emotional influences, it creates tension in the feelings users have when using the products. While this is an interesting theory in itself, and how the emotional tension could affect the usage of the product, these will not be explored in this research. The main section of this research is the proposal of a new design process and an exploration of working through each stage of the process, explaining the key steps and adding revisions to the process. In order to test these theories, this paper also includes practical work using the new process then discussing and analysing its success in relation to the research. The aim of this was to understand how the process might work in reality as opposed to conceptually. The academic standing of this experimental process is rooted in design theory, while also allowing the bending of traditional design 'rules'. This particular design process embraces the idea of using non-traditional thinking and 'out of the box' techniques. Using the process as a guideline to create new and interesting designs that lie outside of what might be seen as 'traditional' design. Key academics that this research draws from are Kristeva, Müller-Roterberg, and Warren and McGraw. These voices will build the framework of the research that the design process will be based on.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Contexts

As this research will be a primarily design-based project, Design thinking will form the basis of the ideas presented. Design thinking describes the process of a designer's mindset when working on a project and how that mindset may differ from other disciplines (Cross, 2011). This thinking mostly involves solution focussed thinking, reframing problems and visual communication of ideas (Cross, 2011). Design thinking often follows a pattern through the process beginning with understanding the problem and conducting user research, before moving towards idea development and prototyping (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). Using this process and engaging in critical thinking through every stage should lead to a successful design project. Therefore, the proposed process will incorporate these ideas in order for it to be successful in a design space and as a design process. There are many different academic opinions on what is considered good design so this essay will focus on two key stand points. The first is the 'less is more' group, as coined by Van Der Rohe. These designers believe that more minimalistic designs are better and that design should be simple, functional and nothing else. One key voice in this group is Dieter Rams (Lovell, 2011), Rams laid out 10 rules for what he considered to be good design. The over arching themes of these rules were simplicity and functionality, these principles are often still referenced within academic discussions of design (Prochner, 2025). The second group are the 'user focussed' designers. These people argue that design should focus on user *needs*, wants, feedback and emotional responses (Brown, 2009). Krippendorff (2006) suggests that the most successful designs create positive emotional responses from users and the narrative of the interaction forms through meaning and not entirely function. This essay aligns best with the ideas of the 'user focussed' designers as it explores how users interact with products and how these interaction points shape the design of the product. The essay also explores user's emotional responses to design and how these responses can be influenced by the design to create a specific reaction.

"Design is not necessarily about the product [...] it is about the experience." (Heathcote, 2016)

This quote sums up the direction of this design process as it plays into the ideas of creating specific user experiences by incorporating concepts intended to cause fear and humour reactions. The user interaction,

understanding and experience of the products will be the most important part of this design project and will determine its success (Krippendorff, 2006). This project will also challenge user expectations of what design is and what it should look like. By situating this research in a design world, it has the potential to be successful in its innovation and disruption of consumer understandings while opening the possibility of a new market (Christensen, 1997). Before undertaking the design process, a basic understanding of the concepts presented in the research is needed¹. Some explanations of the ideas are included throughout the process which adds context to the proposal and the example. The two subject areas that will be explored in the process are horror and humour. Specific concepts and theories from each of these were selected after deeper previous research into a wider range of concepts. The theories that were selected were body horror, abjection and Benign Violation theory.

2.2 Abjection and Body Horror

Firstly, abjection in this context relates to body horror, in that it is a key point in designing horror that includes bodily imagery (Shildrick, 2002). Kristeva (1982) describes abjection as that which disrupts both physical and emotional boundaries, these limits define our humanity and how we perceive our bodies. When these boundaries are blurred or distorted, it provokes discomfort, this can be expressed through negative physical or emotional reactions. This provocation will be key in the designing of products and what effect they might have on users. In horror media, this concept is key in the design of monsters. As Shildrick (2002) states, monsters occupy a liminal space, existing outside of the limits and boundaries that we associate with humanity, which makes them a direct embodiment of the abject. Theories of abjection extend beyond the design of the monsters to the audience's experience of horror. As Manente (2023) argues, horror films often use liminality to unsettle viewers. This liminality will also play a role in this proposal as it will be encapsulated by the banality of the objects chosen, juxtaposed by the horror visuals. Beyond film, artists also engage with abjection by manipulating boundaries. This proposal will include the pushing of boundaries between life and death, organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate in order to evoke unease or discomfort and fear in users. Two artworks that have inspired the body horror imagery used in the proposal are shown in Figures 1 and 2, these use the idea of using the human head and blurring the boundaries of life, the organic and the inanimate.



Figure 1. "Self - 1991" (Marc Quinn, 1991-2011)



Figure 2. "Untitled 3 (Rabbit Holes)" (David Altmejd, 2013)

2.3 Benign Violation Theory

The other key theory used in this proposal is Benign Violation theory. As coined by Warren and McGraw, Benign Violation theory is the understanding that something that would usually be considered a violation, can be humorous if the situation it occurs in is considered to be benign.

"the theory proposes that humor occurs when (1) a circumstance is appraised as a violation, (2) the circumstance is appraised as benign, and (3) both appraisals occur simultaneously" (McGraw & Warren, 2015a, pp.75)

This concept functions in comedy films, where acts of violation against people or their bodies are perceived as harmless and humorous because of the fact that the violation is on screen and staged for the film, this way the audience is aware that what they see is not real and so find the humour more apparent than any harm. This is how Benign Violation theory can be applied to horror and introduce elements of comedy. Since viewers recognise that any injuries, deaths, or other on-screen violations are not real, these moments can be interpreted as more benign, which can evoke laughter from the audience. Hye-Knudsen (2018) argues that "psychological distancing" can be achieved through cinematic techniques, mostly physically distancing the character from the screen. By creating greater physical distance from the narrative, it can soften any violations and have a stronger comedic feeling. This theory will be implemented in the process by designing products that are, by nature, benign. The objects selected must be something we already have an emotional distance from. This means that the violations will be less unsettling because of the distance that we already have with the items. While these theories are opposed in the reactions that they may incur from audiences, there is a crossover which prompted the selection of these concepts. This crossover comes from the 'violation' part of Benign Violation theory. As suggested in the name and in more detail above, this theory, while rooted in humour, is open to visual imagery related to horror. This means that though the emotional implications are opposed, the visual imagery can work well and lean into one another. This will make for products that have a clearer design language but still have the full emotional and physical impacts related to each theory.

3. Methodology

3.1 Proposing a New Design Process

The following chapter will lay out the proposed design process as well as walk through each step with an explanation of how I undertook my own version of this project in order to test the theory of the proposed process. This chapter is intended to be read as an instructional booklet walking through the details of each step of the design process and working alongside each step is an anecdotal example of my own work, finishing with an analysis of the three products I designed and made as part of the process.

3.2 Step 1: Understand the Problem

A design process starts with identifying the problem area; What is the issue that needs solving? Who does the issue effect? Has the issue been solved before? In this stage, clarification on the information needed and the gaps in knowledge about users is necessary to know the direction of the research (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). In order to answer these questions, in depth research needs to take place, this research should cover every step involved in the problem to understand the root cause. Wider research to gain an understanding of the current market is also important in finding a gap that your solution can fill (Ambrose & Harris 2009). However, this proposal suggests that this research must also cover whether the problem is benign and how it may fit into mundane situations. Before undertaking this particular design process, designers should pose the question: Can the issue be solved with a universal design process or, could it be solved with a more interesting design process? Finally, target market and user research is key in understanding what consumers need from the solution and to ensure that it fits any criteria the users may have (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). This process suggests that the user research should cover horror and basic human fears as these will carry more weight in the design process than the needs or other wants of the users. The synthesis of this research will determine the solution's effect on the users by defining meaningful, ground-level insights (Luchs, Swan & Griffin, 2015) (Crothers, 2019). To test this design process, I decided to create a series of household objects owing to the fact that these would encapsulate the idea of banality and the mundane. I followed the initial questions laid out in the design process and began by understanding the problem (in this case the need for household items). What is the issue that needs solving? There is a lack of household items designed with aesthetics other than purely functional or ergonomic. Who does the issue effect? Possible markets for this would be people that want more interesting everyday items that fit with their personal style or interests. Has the issue been solved before? Yes,

some novelty products have been made but these are mostly gimmicks and are often juvenile, see Figure 3 for an example of horror inspired products available on Amazon.



Figure 3. Products available on Amazon.com

The next step was understanding the gaps in my knowledge in order to align my research, I needed to understand more about how the themes of horror and banality could work within this example and which concepts I would use to make the most successful items. The other area that needed research was the users and target market, I needed to fully understand what themes and imagery would be the most effective for users in order to gain the reactions that I wanted. This research included mostly horror concepts as this would be the most important thing in evoking visceral reactions. Some of the horror concepts that I researched into were the ideas of the abject and the boundary between animate and inanimate. By using this research, I was able to move onto the next step in the design process.

3.3 Step 2: Define the Brief

Once the research has been carried out it is important to define a brief for the project. Synthesising key aspects of the research will serve as a checklist of properties and functions that the solution will need to include as well as defining the core opportunity for the design. (Luchs, Swan & Griffin, 2015). The brief will also help define what the output of the project might be and how it might be achieved. Defining the criteria that the product must meet will give direction to the project and ensure that the most important aspects of the design are prioritised (Jones & Askland, 2012). In this process the most important aspects of the brief will be to use key insights from the user research along with concepts taken from research into Benign Violation theory and body horror. In order to design a more effective brief, frame and reframe the research questions to view the project from different perspectives (Cross, 2011). For this process, incorporating benign violations into the designing process will offer a new lens on the problem. This brief will serve as a way to evaluate and assess the project as it develops, creating criteria that each design must meet to be considered successful (Jones & Askland, 2012).

Before beginning to write the brief², I needed to synthesise the key points of the research. This led me to have four distinct points that encapsulated the scope of the research. Firstly, research into 'gross out horror' (Draven 2013 "the gross out") led me to the understanding of the importance of bodily fluids and mutilated body parts when designing body horror. Furthermore, the other horror concept I found integral to the research was the idea of the 'abject' (Kristeva, 1982). This is the idea of the in-between or liminality. It encapsulates the idea of crossing boundaries within the body to blur the lines of organic or inorganic, animate or inanimate. Next, the key point of Benign Violation Theory (Warren & McGraw, 2015) is that there must be a balance

between horror (a violation) and humour (the banality of the situation). If this balance is not correct the items will either be too horrific or too benign to be considered funny. Finally, the part that ties this process together is the design thinking associated with UX design. The key concept here is the importance of recognising how people interact with products. By gaining an insight into this, the designs will be more successful as functional products while also having more impact on the user as a horror object. An artwork that demonstrates the understanding of how we interact with products and how this might be manipulated with abjection to evoke reactions is *Breakfast*, 2014 by Ronit Baranga, shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. "Breakfast" (Ronit Baranga, 2014)

3.4 Step 3: Initial Ideation

The initial ideation process begins by using the research and the brief to create solution focused ideas to start the designing process (Cross, 2011). Common methods include mind mapping, user journeys and decision matrices (Crothers, 2019). This design process suggests that each idea must include horror concepts from the research stage. This process should also involve using concepts from the research into Benign Violation theory in order to combine the horror and humour lenses. Including visceral body horror imagery is a key step in the initial ideation process, an exploration of different areas from the user research into fears and emotional responses to different types of fear will allow for a wider range of reactions. Using visual representations of ideas is key in this stage to fully understand what the designs may look like as well as helping to develop and explore new ideas (Cross, 2011). Furthermore, designing from a solution focused angle will enable the project to meet the basic criteria of the brief while exploring and experimenting with different imagery to create multiple ideas and possible solutions (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). The initial ideation process that I undertook for this project started with identifying household items and understanding how we interact with them. I also gathered lots of inspiration images and reference photos to help me ensure the designs looked how I intended. After this, I began ideating around these products, their functions and the way we interact with them. The most successful of these initial ideas were the designs where I incorporated imagery that reflected how we might interact with the items and where they might come into contact with us. I used mostly sketching for this stage but for some of the simpler designs I created low fidelity models to get an idea about how these objects might look in the real world. See Figure 5.



Figure 5. Ear wax and human hair earphones, Taylor (2025)

3.5 Step 4: Develop Prototypes

Making prototypes of initial design ideas is a good way to get a feel for how the product will work and look in real life. This will provide an understanding of what might need to change for each design and also offer insights into what others might think of the designs (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). Different qualities of models can also be important for speed and editing purposes. This should begin with low fidelity or proof of concept models to gain quick understandings of the product in relation to the real world and how users may interact with it. This can help to evolve and develop ideas (Ambrose & Harris 2009) as well as highlight what might be wrong with them and make changes to the designs (Luchs, Swan & Griffin, 2015). Then moving onto higher fidelity or facsimile models towards the end of the development stage to more clearly visualise what the final outcome may look like. In this stage of the process, it is important to have reference imagery of body horror and other grotesque depictions that will influence and inform the designs and the models. Using a range of methods to make models can also be beneficial in order to determine the best or most effective manufacturing techniques as well as discovering what materials will give the desired colours and finishes to the final products. Developing the models early on in this project was the most time-consuming part. This was because of the importance of realism. With the low fidelity models, it was much harder to gain beneficial feedback or to test the designs against the brief. By creating higher fidelity and more realistic models, see Figure 6, I was able to gain insights into my designs through user testing. The process of making the models was also an area that I experimented with manufacturing techniques, different materials and scale. By trialling a range of each of these I was able to practice different techniques and work out which would work the best and give me the most successful outcome.



Figure 6. Severed finger toothbrush, Taylor (2025)

3.6 Step 5: Testing

The testing stage of the design process involves using prototypes and models of the design ideas to evaluate whether they meet the criteria set out during the briefing stage. This step is vital in developing and improving design ideas in order to create the best outcome. Evaluating designs and prototypes in this way helps to inform the development and future iterations of the design (Luchs, Swan & Griffin, 2015). With this process one key test that *needs* to take place is user testing. In order to determine whether the products are successful or not they need to be exposed to potential users and their feedback taken on board. (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). The nature of this proposed process requires the products to evoke visceral emotions and fears from the audience and gaining feedback on the models will determine whether the designs are successful in this or whether they might need redesigning or developing in order to create a more visceral response. Testing in this stage will also involve physical testing to see if the design functions in the other ways it will need to, the products must still be functional, and feasible for this process to be successful (Ambrose & Harris 2009). This stage leads into the loop of the design process; after testing and evaluating it is important to loop back through the ideation and prototyping stages in order to improve upon the designs. (Ambrose & Harris 2009). The testing part of this process enabled me to see how successful the models had been and where they could use developing. The main feedback I received from users was that the designs I had made, while disgusting, did not have the desired 'body horror' effect. Another feature in these models that I received negative feedback on was the scale. For the designs that had scaled imagery the reactions were not as strong as the ones that were a more realistic size, Figure 7 shows one idea that wasn't successful due to its scale.



Figure 7. Tongue chair, Taylor (2025)

From the feedback I looped back to the ideation stage of the process and used the new information to design a new set of products. This time using the brief as well as what I had learned from the first round of designing and making. This loop allowed me to have designs that aligned more with my brief and with my intention for them.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Final Products

As a final output of testing the design process, the three products I produced embodied the concepts that were laid out in the research as well as hitting the necessary points to be considered functional designed products. To gain an understanding of how these products relate to the concepts found in the design process, each piece has been analysed in terms of function, horror, humour and user interaction.

1) Product No.1: Face Mask

Product no.1, shown in Figures 8 and 9, is a decorative face mask covering. Intended to be used over a regular or disposable face mask, it allows the wearer to express more individuality in their attire in situations where face masks are mandatory, it also allows the wearer an extra layer of protection. Inspiration for this mask came from research conducted into designing monsters. The horror concepts used in this design include abjection, mutilation, viscera, and the uncanny valley.



Figure 8. Face mask, Taylor (2025)



Figure 9. Face mask, Taylor (2025)

As both Kristeva (1982) and Shildrik (2002) discuss, abjection in relation to the defiance of boundaries within the body is a key concept in the designing of monsters. In this design, abjection was created in the imagery of the viscera and organic nature of the torn flesh. This is the 'object' because it defies the ignorance of the external body by showing that the body has openings and is not impenetrable (Stallybrass & White, 1986; Fraser & Greco, 2005). To design within the proposed process, the user interaction with the product informed the design. The key interaction point with a face mask is the face, more specifically, the mouth and nose area. This interaction inspired the ripped face design of the mask. Users also interact with face masks by touching them to put them on and off, by including texture in the design, the interaction of touching the mask is also altered by the design process. The humour in this design comes from the idea of wearing this mask as part of daily life. Scary masks like this are often associated with Halloween or other such 'dress up' spaces. By bringing something scary or horrifying like this mask into the benign normality of everyday life, the context shifts and the mask becomes humorous (Warren & McGraw, 2015).

2) Product No.2: Back Scratcher

Product no.2, shown in Figures 10 and 11, is a realistic human arm backscratcher with nails to get a better scratch. This product functions as an extension of the user's arm much like standard backscratchers. This design, however, depicts a real human-sized arm severed just below the elbow. The inspiration for this design came from the interaction users have with backscratchers and the feeling they recreate. Research showed that most current market backscratchers are shaped like hands and arms so this design language paired with the proposed design process changed the perception of the product and introduced horror and humour.



Figure 10. Back scratcher, Taylor (2025)



Figure 11. Back scratcher, Taylor (2025)

The horror concepts used in this design were mutilation and 'animate/inanimate'. By creating an inanimate object that looks realistic and would be used in a way that reflects how arms are typically used, *i.e.* to scratch your back, this design blurs the boundaries of animate and inanimate thus creating abjection (Creed, 1993). The mutilation depicted at the severed base of the arm draws from the idea of using bodily fluids and protruding bones to give the design a more visceral and grotesque body horror feel (Draven, 2013; Bakhtin, 1984) in Fraser & Greco (*eds*) (2005). The humour in this design comes from the warping of the products that users already know. By taking a normal backscratcher and changing the realism, this design becomes humorous because the imagery is unexpected and out of place. (Warren & McGraw, 2015).

3) Product No.3: Body Scrubber

Product no.3, shown in Figures 12 and 13, is a heart shaped body scrubber or sponge made for use in the shower. The functionality of this product allows for a good soap lather with built-in exfoliation. These benefits come from the design of the product, the crevices and texture on the surface aid in holding soap suds and removing dead skin. The inspiration for this design came from the idea of showering being a very intimate thing and our hearts are often seen as one of the most intimate and personal body parts. People also feel more vulnerable when in the shower so introducing horror in this space gives it more impact (Shildrick, 2002).

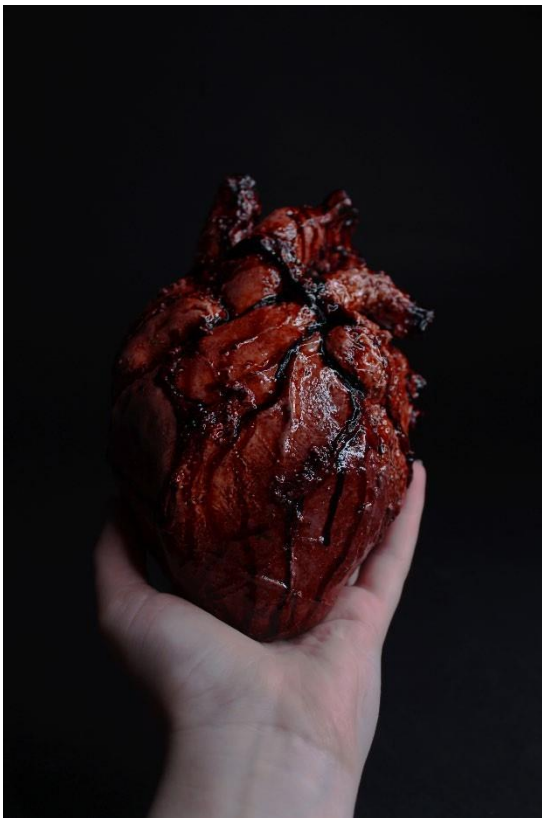


Figure 12. Sponge, Taylor (2025)

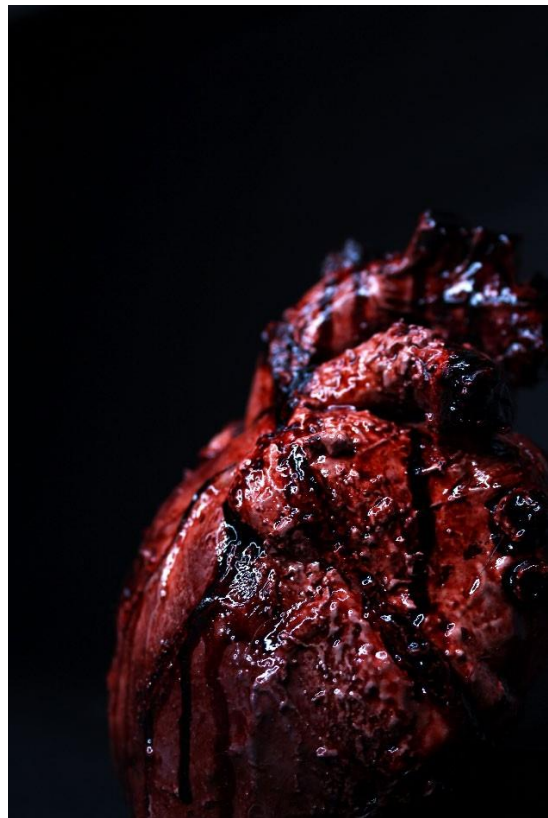


Figure 13. Sponge, Taylor (2025)

This design is very visceral and graphic making it a very overt depiction of horror, and it draws on people's fears of seeing internal body parts outside of the body (Scott & Barbezat, 2019). As the proposed design process suggested, reference imagery was used when making this design as the product needed to look more realistic in order to gain the best finish and reaction. If the heart looked too stylised, then it wouldn't have the same horror effect as a realistic heart because it would be too benign. By having the realism in the design, it gave more balance to the product and created the requirements for benign violation theory (Warren & McGraw, 2015). The balance of humour in this design comes mostly from the function and interaction with the design. Because of the way people would use the product, *i.e.* squeezing it in their hands to create a lather, the imagery of it looking like squishing a human heart in their hand but it being soapy is humorous.

4.1.2 Evaluation of the Design Process

Undertaking a project using the proposed design process allowed for analysis and evaluation on which parts were successful. I think the process was mostly successful and I think there is opportunity for this design

theory to expand and explore deeper. I do think some improvements to the process could be made, including incorporating more humour concepts to create a more even balance between horror and humour. I do, however, think that the process succeeded in combining three very different and separate theories into a design process that is able to output products that also combine theories that have not previously been combined. Comparing the objects that I designed for this project against the brief that I set for myself I can assess them as successful. I was able to meet the key points of the brief, including the first criteria - to explore the design of household products incorporating the key themes from body horror, Benign Violation theory and UX design principles. As set out in the brief, the time constraints meant that the designs I made were facsimile models and only partially function to their full ability. These designs also met the last point from my brief; they are successful at evoking humour and fear responses and creating a sense of the abject. I tested this theory by gaining user feedback on the designs to ensure they were received how I intended them to be.

4.2 Discussion

This research was an exploration of how theories and concepts from multiple disciplines could be used to influence product designs. The concepts selected for this were body horror, abjection and Benign Violation theory (Warren & McGraw, 2015). The ideas presented in this proposed design process will not appeal aesthetically to the majority of customers, however, the intention was to develop a process that would design specifically with an intended target market in mind. This target market would include people that may want to have items that match their personal aesthetics rather than the style of design that is widely available. This process is not intended to be universal, nor is it intended for mass production of designs. This is a proposition of a small-scale design project using specific horror and humour concepts. The proposal is also intended partially as an example of where design could go in the future in terms of using other concepts from a wide range of disciplines that could correlate to a different target market or consumer space. Another intention of this proposal was to open the design world to other influences as most current influences in design draw from previous design styles, for example minimalism or minimalist designs often draw from the ideas of Rams as discussed in chapter 1 of this paper (Prochner, 2025). The intention of this proposal was to discover how incorporating other influences in a design process might work and what type of products it might produce. The key findings in relation to this intention are that while the style of these designs may differ from the norm, the functions have remained similar. This was a key issue that developed while in the prototyping stages of the process, it became quickly apparent that the designs needed to be functional in order for the process to be considered successful so development of the functionality of each product was key before continuing.

Another key finding of how the influences shaped the designs was the responses from users. Throughout the process of designing the products, user feedback was taken into account and an analysis of how each design impacted user's emotions was undertaken. One main intention stated in the design process was the importance of user interaction and responses, this process would not have been successful if user opinions were not taken into account. The main reason for this is that good design should be about the experience of using products and the relationship that we as consumers develop with the products around us, Krippendorff (2006), (Heathcote, 2016). The narrative of these designs in terms of how users reacted to and understood them shows an understanding of the overall concepts used as influences. The integration of horror and humour concepts throughout the process meant that at each stage the designs were evoking fear and humour responses from users which allowed the end product to be the most impactful that they could be.

One issue with the designs would be the user interface or the communication of what the products is, how it functions and how to use it. Due to the nature of the horror concepts present in the designs they are less obviously products to use and could be perceived as art pieces. This could be seen in two ways, firstly it could be construed as a negative point, as discussed one of Rams' principles was about interface and simplicity, however, in opposition to this the design could also be dual functional as a product and as more decoration. An example of a designer that uses this idea is Sebastian Errazuriz, see Figure 14, while his designs are mostly decorative, they function fully and have a dual purpose. This is the intention of the designs produced, that they are not exclusively functional and meant to be hidden away after use. These products are intended to be displayed or otherwise shown off as stylistic and personal designed items.



Figure 14. "Chicken Lamp 3" Errazuriz (2004)

As part of the research conducted at the beginning of this project, certain criteria of what makes a design successful were mentioned. Using these criteria to assess the success of the process shows that the key lines of thinking were followed. The main standpoint of the assessment criteria implemented in this process aligns with the 'user focussed' designers mentioned in the first chapter of this essay. They argued that the most successful designs focused on emotional responses to design (Brown, 2009) and that the narrative of the product should form from the interaction of the user (Krippendorff, 2006). Using these criteria, we can assess that this process was successful at producing good designs in line with academic perspectives. This is evidenced in the use of user research and feedback throughout the development of the process and also within the process itself. While not only using users' opinions to develop the designs but also considering secondary research into human nature and how we as people have innate responses to certain stimuli, the research gave the products a more well-rounded user experience rather than only creating the desired responses in certain people.

As a basis for a new subsection of design which includes ideas from other subject areas, this proposal shows success in the process of combining cross-disciplinary concepts within product design. From an academic perspective, the process laid out meets industry standards of what a design process should look like, (Müller-Roterberg, 2019). The steps through the research, writing the brief, initial ideation, developing prototypes and testing, lead through a recognisable design process. Ensuring that the process was in line with industry standards meant that each step in the process could be backed up by academic perspectives and it also gave any outputs standing in any argument on whether the products were 'design' and not just 'art'. This was integral to the success of this proposal as the key question was whether these ideas had a space in the design world, more specifically within functional product design. In terms of the success of integrating the concepts within the design process, there is clear evidence that by incorporating detail about the concepts throughout each stage of the process and not just in the ideation stage, the process became much more about the understanding of the concepts and allowed the products to have deeper effects on users.

As this is a proposition of a new style of designing, this research has the potential to integrate into many different disciplines. The intention of the research was to try to understand how multiple disciplines could come together in one design project and to see where this could work in the wider design world. This proposal used theories from film, art and comedy but this was intended only as one experiment or option with the idea that in the future other disciplines could be involved in the same way. The possibility of combining concepts in this way could open the design world to a wider market and draw in new consumers. These ideas could also change customer preconceptions about what design is and who it might be for (Christensen, 1997). Making design more inclusive in this way expands the opportunities for more collaborative design styles or even design companies where multidisciplinary teams could work together to develop new branches of design styles. If these were successful in the same way this this project was there could be a future where a new design

movement forms using cross disciplinary concepts and moving away from the current ideas of what makes good design. While sustainability was not a key focus in this research it is important to note how the future of design is reliant on sustainable practices. This incorporation of ideas from multiple disciplines could open doors for using sustainable practices that are perhaps not seen in current product design projects but may have shown success in other disciplines. By opening the design world to influences from new places, the space for innovation widens massively allowing for the emergence of new practices and understandings of how design can be 'global'.

The methodology used throughout this research was encapsulated in the writing up and carrying out the proposed design process. These were done in tandem with one another ensuring that either one fed into the other. By performing both methodologies at the same time the practice was able to inform the writing. The main benefit of this came from the feedback and understanding of what was working with the designs and what wasn't. At the midpoint of the process, I conducted user testing and evaluation of the designs to see whether they had met the brief that I set at the beginning, from this the realisation of a few changes that needed making became apparent and this allowed me to adjust the process to include these changes. Some of this feedback is detailed in chapter 2³ however the main alterations to the design process were to consider certain concepts earlier on in relation to realism and scale. These insights came directly from the process of undertaking the design project and critically analysing my practice throughout.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to understand how non-product-design based theories and concepts could be included in a design process as stylistic and theoretical influences. The intention was to explore where this could push design in the future and to better understand how the influences chosen, create specific emotional reactions and responses from users. The process undertaken for this research included mostly practical design-based work. However, before the physical practice could begin, research into the different areas that the paper would cover was necessary, to do this the first chapter became more of a literature review to understand the context of where this research would sit. This research then informed the designing and writing up of a proposal for a new design process to find out how the theories played out together. After writing the proposal it was necessary to test the theories by undertaking the design process to determine the success of the proposal and to understand how it worked and what improvements could be made to make it a more viable process for future designing.

Chapter 1 set up the basis for the whole paper by giving key context to the ideas and themes that are used throughout the process. It presented the theories of abjection and Benign Violation theory in a simplified manner in order to develop a contextual understanding for the role the theories would play in the process. Briefly, it describes the abject as that which defies or blurs the boundaries of the body (Kristeva, 1982) and Benign Violation theory as the idea that a violation against a person or their body can be humorous if the situation is equally benign (Warren & McGraw, 2015). Chapter 1 also discusses how these ideas will work together and where we will see them in the process. Suggesting using products that are emotionally distant from users and using imagery of violations to the body.

Chapter 2 introduces the proposal by walking through the steps involved and giving an explanation of my own process of working through it. This chapter explains the five step design process, understand the problem, define the brief, initial ideation, developing prototypes and testing. These steps all include elements of design thinking and user experience design while also proposing the inclusion of the horror and humour concepts. It also explains my own working through the process showing how my practice progressed through each stage and how the process shaped the work that I produced. Finally, it analyses the suite of three objects that I designed and modelled using the process, breaking down the horror and humour concepts used and explaining the design choices made.

Chapter 3 opens the discussions about the research and critiques the work of the proposal and the process. It delves into the successes of the proposal in relation to academic design opinions researched and evidenced at the beginning of chapter 1. It also discusses the reactions from users and how the objects were perceived. The main discussion points however are in relation to the scope of this proposal within relation to other wider disciplines and concepts. As discussed in chapter 3, the future of this proposal could involve using other disciplines as design influences and forming the idea of more 'global' design in terms of the influences and theoretical inspirations used within the design world. This is also where this paper could contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the design world and how it could be more open to new influences. Particularly, as the proposal suggests, using theories of abjection

and Benign Violation theory as successful imagery in the design of household objects.

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