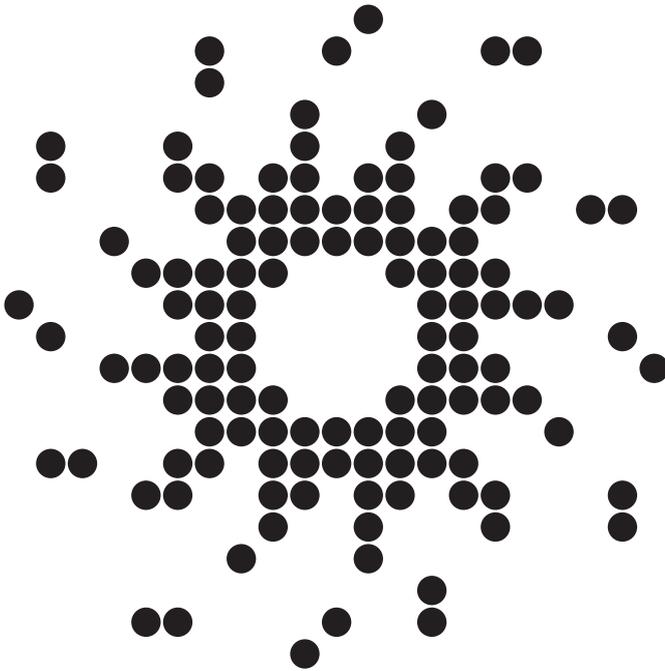


John Maeda, "Emotion"
from his book *The Laws of Simplicity*, 2006.
p. 62-71



Law 7

EMOTION

More emotions are better than less.

Simplicity can be considered ugly. Take my mother who absolutely despises anything of neutral color or minimalist form. She wants neon flowers, bejeweled frogs, and other decorative essentials. When it comes to aesthetics, she's all about the "bling."

From a rational perspective, simplicity makes good economic sense. Simple objects are easier and less expensive to produce, and those savings can be translated directly to the consumer with desirable low prices. As evidenced by the extremely affordable line of simple products from furniture retailer Ikea, simplicity benefits the frugal shopper. However, there are some people, like my mother, who would say that simplicity is not only cheap, but would add that it *looks* cheap as well. A strong sense of self expression belies all of us humans, and many such decisions we make are not driven by logic alone.

The seventh Law is not for everyone—there will always be the die-hard Modernists who refuse any object that is not white or black, or else with clear or mirrored surfaces. My mother finds the iPod entirely unattractive. And while the older gener-

ation isn't Apple's targeted market (for the moment, at least), I am still the dutiful son I was raised to be, and so I find the seventh Law a necessary component in the simplicity toolbox. *More emotions are better than less.* When emotions are considered above everything else, don't be afraid to add more ornament or layers of meaning.

I realize this seems to contradict the first Law of REDUCE. But I use a specific principle to determine just the right kind of more: "feel, and feel for." Everything starts from being sensitive to your own feelings. Do you know how you feel? Right now? By connecting with the emotional intelligence inside yourself, the next step is to empathize with the environment that surrounds you. "Form follows function" gives way to the more emotion-led approach to design: "Feeling follows form." In this section we talk about emotion and the move towards complexity (and away from simplicity) that it sometimes requires.

FEEL, AND FEEL FOR: E-TIQUETTE

I've been emailing since 1984 when I arrived at MIT as a freshman. Although some fellow classmates had experience using Compuserve, the predecessor to online service companies like AOL, the concept of the network seemed quite foreign to me. I soon realized that everyone that mattered then had this odd device called a "modem" to connect to the computer network. So I got one and quickly became enslaved. I would check my email not just as a habit, but in lieu of breathing—my unhealthy fixation still haunts me. Which reminds me ... *There.* That one deep breath I just took will take care of the rest of the day ;-).

The smiley at the end of the paragraph causes the familiar tilt of the head to the left, and reveals a light touch of visual emotion. The Internet tells me that the smiley may have been invented in 1982 by a Mr. Scott Fahlman, currently at Carnegie Mellon University. I find it odd that in the long history of type-set text going back to Gutenberg that this invention had not happened sooner. The act of writing by hand doesn't lend itself to the use of smileys, however in the age of the typewritten letter, one would have expected to stumble upon the funny combination of characters that can make a wide variety of silly faces like :-) 8^) ;-o =) |-D and so forth.

Why have smileys evolved? Why does the textual medium need such baroque flourishes? Because of the human need to better express emotion—to capture the nuances of communication that we take for granted in speech. Interfacing through text, speaking to other disembodied voices, it is easy to stray from normal social mores. Smileys evolved as a way to temper and soften textual conversations without the facial cues speakers use to signify when they are “just kidding.” And although sending photos is now possible, text continues to dominate.

My daughters send me email with text of all sizes, all colors, and sometimes in ALL CAPS! Not only does this seem to make their job of typing of email unnecessarily complex, it hurts my eyes! However I wholeheartedly accept their high-fidelity messages as I know their youthful exuberance cannot be contained by simple text messages alone. Does not the phrase “I love you!” have so much more meaning when typed, “I LOVE YOU!”? Think of it typed at 36 points in pink and bright yellow and it really can go over the top.

Much is said about the development from child to adult as a gradual process of neutering emotional output. Having the privilege of fostering minds and developing young careers on a daily basis, I can see evidence of people pressing the mute button on emotion every day. I once asked one of my students at MIT why she never smiled when communicating with others. She said, “Because I don’t want to look unprofessional.”

This event caused me to reflect on my own attempts to project professionalism as a professor, which caused a natural lean towards the stereotypical stern and authoritative. As an artist, I found the results of my self-analysis offensive. Thus, today I try to reply back to my daughters in all-caps and colorful letters when nobody’s looking, “I LOVE YOU TOO!!!”

FEEL, AND FEEL FOR: NUDE ELECTRONICS

When I first started a blog at MIT, I discovered that the most frequently accessed entry was the one entitled “nude electronics.” I could imagine the disappointment that a thrill-seeking geek might have had with my fully dressed prose.

By “nude electronics” I refer to the trend of making hand-held consumer electronic objects smooth, seamless, and small to satisfy the market’s demand for simplicity. Using methods such as SHE, designers can simplify an object to its core and spare mysteriousness. But like a sheep that has been fleeced, you can’t help wonder if SHE is responsible for making the skinny little objects feel a tad bit cold.

The booming market for protective and decorative iPod accessories solves this problem—but it also raises a peculiar

question. Why, after people are drawn to the simplicity of a device, do they rush to accessorize it? Why, as I browse the airport gadget store while waiting for a flight, do I see so many businessmen perusing Treo cases made of metal, plastic, leather, and cloth with the intensity of my younger daughters' choosing outfits for their Barbies?

Carrying cases for the simplicity object achieve two important goals. First of all, while SHE can make an object smaller, thereby alleviating the natural fear associated with larger and more complex machines, the successful application of SHE can instill a different kind of fear: concern for the object's survival. For instance, a student of mine is afraid to carry around his ultra-slim iPod Nano for fear of snapping it in half by accident. An iPod case provides needed protection for the pitifully undernourished and gaunt device.

The second reason is rooted in self-expression and in the need to balance the subzero coolness of the ideal consumer electronics gadget with a sense of human warmth. While the core object retains its pure, simple, and cool nakedness; its clothing can keep it warm, vivacious, and simply outrageous if so intended. The combination of a simple object together with a host of optional accessories gives consumers the benefit of expressing their feelings and feelings for their objects.

FEEL, AND FEEL FOR: AICHAKU

Growing up, my siblings and I were taught that everything in our environment, including inanimate objects, had a living spirit that deserved respect. "Even a cup?" we asked. "Even a desk?"

“Even a chewing gum wrapper?” “Even the house we live in?” The answer was always, “Yes.”

Under this strict code of life, my taking a clean sheet of paper, crumpling it up, and throwing it away was grounds for punishment. I would be denying the paper’s existence to perform a useful task, and divine retribution would result from the disrespect I had shown the paper. My family’s belief system was based upon an extreme form of Shintoism, which is the ancient Japanese tradition of animism.

Believing that all things around you—rocks, river, mountain, and clouds—are somehow “alive” was something that I couldn’t grasp as a child. However as an adult, I prefer the world with its mysteries intact and I find myself comfortable with the thought. In many animated works from Japan, like the work of acclaimed animator Hayao Miyazaki, the belief in the spirit living within all objects is, pun intended, alive and well.

Technology has helped to extend the illusion of life in a literal sense with robots that walk, talk, and even dance. Sony’s AIBO robotic dog is constructed of plastic, motors, and a sophisticated computer. It obviously isn’t a living dog, yet some AIBO owners relate to it almost as a real pet—gently stroking and coo-ing to them as if to express love for an animate, but non-living consumer product.

The Tamagocchi craze of the late 1990s also showed that anyone could fall in love with a small electronic keychain unit that yearned for human attention. Our yearning to care for what is purely imaginary extends to Neopets on the Web today where millions of cartoon characters are bred, fed, and loved. Although it contradicts traditional predominant Western reli-

gious beliefs, a kind of digital animism appears to be an acceptable and growing practice among our technologically empowered youths. If one can love an on-screen monster or a digital baby encapsulated in a little electronic box, is it so far a stretch to love and respect a plain piece of paper?

Modernism is the design movement that led to the clean, industrial look of many objects in our environment. It rejected unnecessary ornament in favor of exposing an object's truth through the raw materials of its production. Japan's rich tradition of almost perfectly crafted artifacts of wood and clay seems built on the same design principles as Modernism. However a hidden facet of Japanese design is this animistic theme. The precise lacquered surfaces of a bento box are more than just a fact of fine production; these surfaces—and the bento box that they comprise—are essentially alive. The inanimate box is accorded its own spiritual existence. There can be a natural emotional attachment to the object's life force that is a kind of deep, hidden ornamentation known to only those who feel it.

愛 着

AI (love) CHAKU (fit)

Aichaku (ahy-chaw-koo) is the Japanese term for the sense of attachment one can feel for an artifact. When written by its two kanji characters, you can see that the first character means “love” and the second one means “fit.” “Love-fit” describes a deeper kind of emotional attachment that a person can feel for an object. It is a kind of symbiotic love for an object that deserves affection not for what it does, but for what it *is*. Acknowledging the existence of *aichaku* in our built environ-

ment helps us to aspire to design artifacts that people will feel for, care for, and own for a lifetime.

THE ART OF MORE

In November of 2005 an exhibition of my digital art opened at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. Opening at the same time was a show of work by Australian artist Ron Mueck, a soft-spoken and intense man famous for his large-scale but incredibly life-like sculptures. The individual hairs, the shining eyes, the skin painted with veins—every detail is perfect.

So perfect that, as you approach one of Mueck's pieces, you ask yourself, "Is it real?" As your hand reaches out to confirm the warmth of the human form before you, your mind tells you that the sculpted giant cannot exist.

The best art makes your head spin with questions. Perhaps this is the fundamental distinction between pure art and pure design. While great art makes you wonder, great design makes things clear.

Sometimes, though, clarity alone is not the best design solution. At my opening in Paris, an old friend from Milan told me of a powerful socialite who was diagnosed with cancer. While she was still reeling from the shock of the news, her physician informed her of his ten-minute time limit for appointments. Even in her fragile state, she would have to leave, so that he could deliver similar messages to waiting patients. Here, the extremely efficient design of his communication system lacked any appreciation for the ambiguous dimensions of feelings—the stuff of art.

Afterwards, this brave woman came up with a solution that could bridge the gap between message and emotion. With five months left to live, she started a foundation to create intensely artful, beautifully designed centers near oncology units, where those first facing death can soak their minds and hearts. Art—a reason to live—is tempered with design—the clarity of message.

Achieving clarity isn't difficult. The Italian woman's oncologist had easily mastered it. The true challenge is achieving comfort.

Emotional intelligence is now considered an important facet of leaders today, and the expression of emotion is no longer considered a weakness but a desirable human trait to which everyone can immediately relate. Our society, systems, and artifacts require active engagement in care, attention, and feeling—the business value may not be immediately apparent. But the fulfillment from living a meaningful life is the ROE (Return on Emotion). A certain kind of more is always better than less—more care, more love, and more meaningful actions. I don't think I need to say anything *more* really.