DIRT
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“Designers who allow space for the wayward, the imperfect and, sometimes, the just plain “wrong” set in motion a process and create the conditions for the viewer to have truly unexpected encounters with design that are one of its keenest pleasures and a large part of its point.” (Poynor, 2008)
Dirt was introduced to me. I had seen it before, but I saw character, quirks and charm but never interpreted it as dirt.

The initial introduction was made at Konstfack through the design ‘mixer board’ as part of the formgiving course.

The mixer board was a toolbox approach to design, it suggested different categories as a base to help analyse or develop a design. More obvious categories included in the toolbox were colour, texture, semiotics etc. but the inclusion of the word dirt alongside these more tangible or more discussed elements intrigued me.

It was suggested that dirt was a way of falling away from perfection and through introducing or allowing dirt you could avoid the sterile and lifeless. A ephemeral and intangible entity, dirt is, by its nature, an elusive creature.

This intangibility encouraged me to draw a clearer definition for myself of what dirt meant. If dirt was not limited to patina and grime how could it be understood in terms of design. This is the essence of my thesis.

When looking back at my work to attempt to define dirt, the course of the investigation has been unsure, fragmented and inconclusive. Despite this it has not been a failure. The thought processes, discussions and reflections on my understandings surrounding design have been extremely productive in recognising weaknesses and inconsistences I had previously held as a designer. The thesis has become as much about understanding my own process and restrictions as it has about dirt.

This is not a manifesto for dirt. It is an investigation and one that has created doubts, reactions and a few realisations for myself. It is both a personal and deeply subjective piece of work that I hope and believe has value beyond my own reflections.

As with all journeys there is a starting off point and because of this I have retained the original title although, through my investigations and probes, it covers more thoughts on the design process, decoration and authenticity than I originally imagined.

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Hagi Ware Tea Bowl - an example of the Japanese aesthetic Wabi Sabi.
DIRECTION
This is an area I have set aside to add the doubts and questions I was asking myself as I went through the project. It will guide you through the problems and changes in direction I experienced as my thesis developed.
The word dirt has many negative connotations but many choose to have dirt in their lives. In fact dirt and imperfections have a value to many of us.

In these few examples the addition of dirt is welcomed and its value to us almost unquestioned. Dirt adding life and character to the everyday. ‘Vintage’ furniture has for many a greater character than the brand new. The faded leather or rich patina of aged wood are imperfections that can be overlooked or celebrated.

Even the word ‘vintage’ provides a positive outlook compared to ‘old furniture that maybe a little past its best’. Two ways of reading the same situation? Here dirt is viewed as the symptom of time, but not all dirt is related to such a history.

DENIM
Faded and broken in denim holds a strong fascination for many. Debate rages amongst denim enthusiasts if it is ‘cheating’ to buy pre-worn to get the look instantly. Raw denim takes years to fade, the process of disintegration and accumulation of character is all part of the appeal of jeans. Denim is loved for its ability to age and improve with imperfection. Nudie Jeans recommends wearers not to wash the denim for the first 6 months and welcome photo submissions from owners pictures showing their worn and unwashed denim. People actively celebrating the imperfections that have arisen.

HIPSTAMATIC
The hipstamatic iphone app adds a touch of dirt or irregularity into each picture as soon as it is taken. The iphones camera is capable of taking high quality pictures yet many people are choosing to enjoy the dirt instead. It adds character to the photo, gives a life to the picture, it makes it more unique. Dirt is not only an effect of time or decay, imperfection does not have to occur over time for it to be valued nor does it have to be actual dirt.

WABI SABI
A Japanese aesthetic, one of beauty that is “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.” (Wiki) where the imperfection and flaws, cracks and production techniques are seen as a beautiful addition. Not only does the effect of the tea changes the glazes appearance over time, the bottoms of the tea bowls are deliberately chipped.

These examples provide a different view on ‘perfection’, one that is valued by many. But is this dirt of value to design? Can I understand dirt as a concept or rationale, and to use this to add value to the work I produce?
BACKGROUND
Before beginning my design education I had an academic background in social anthropology. The more I have worked with design the more valuable I see my previous education.
When beginning to define what dirt in design could be my initial starting point was Purity and Danger by Mary Douglas. It was a text that I had read during my previous studies in anthropology and seemed an appropriate place to begin establishing a definition of what dirt is.

“Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter...” (Douglas, 1976, p.35)

The text covers many different cultures, with Douglas observing and discussing the cultural construction of taboos and their subjectivity. It was this subjectivity that led her to define dirt as ‘matter out of place’. As an example, having hair on you head is considered good but hair on the floor is bad, the object (hair) has not changed, it is only the context where we find or define a different meaning to it. There is no dirt only matter in the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ context.

If dirt can only be defined by context, both actual and socially constructed, then before I establish a more concrete framework for dirt I must understand what is the context/system that relates to the object or in a broader sense design.

**NORMS**

As Douglas points out, the way we read dirt is based on the context and our individual understanding of what fits. While this is subjective, there is a hegemonic state that defines or control the norms and this can be seen as defining the context that is used or understood to evaluate what is and what is not within these expectations.

It is only positioning against or between established norms that enables dirt to be constructed. If there is no expectations based on the context then there is no reference to establish dirt.

There are of course multiple contexts. I will look to highlight this by structuring the contexts that concerns dirt into three categories: Design, Object and Environment.

**DESIGN**

What is "Design"? While not the focus of my thesis I needed to portray what constitutes design in the eyes of the audience. "Design" is still represented by a less is more, form follows function and the machine aesthetic. Modernism is still the design hegemony.

"For even after the disbanding of the Bauhaus, the disintegration of the International Style, the exhausting of post modernism, we're all still chasing the perfect." (Ilyin, 2006, p.16)

The discourse surrounding design outside of design schools and studios is almost entirely constructed through modernism. While this is not a complete picture of design, it is the norm and as such this defines expectation and sets a context that is broadly understood both inside and outside of the industry.

"Although some modernist precepts are outdated, and although formal purism is no longer indispensable, modernist ideas continue to provide an important guideline to contemporary designers.” (Schouwenberg, 2003, p.51)

The machine aesthetic and its purism has maintained its position at the front of the design queue and the perfect surfaces and hard lines that accompany this have come to represent the norms of ‘Design’.
OBJECT
A context is also constructed within the object. There are set expectations of what, for example, a camera looks like, what materials it is made from, what the proportions are, of what should be. These archetypes provide once again a very broad but essential context for an object.

The archetypes and personal experiences of the user is wrapped up and used by the audience to deliver an expectation. Every object or category of products will have their own unique set of expectations and norms.

Karin Ehrnbergers design and gender study highlighted the expected norms and with it the gender divide between kitchen appliances and power tools. By mixing the expected visual norms it demonstrated the gender issues present in design.

ENVIRONMENT
The context for the object itself adds another layer of expectations or a comparison that, while usually outside the control of the designer and outside of the object, it still provides a comparative layer.

The environment that the object is observed in is a frame of reference to the observer that affects the reading of the object. This environment context is included as when looking from the audiences perspective has a strong bearing on the reading of a product.

Camouflage on the street and in the woods. A similar object but very different interpretations are drawn purely through the context of the object. The gun may also affect your interpretation.
By taking Douglas’s definition and looking very broadly at the contexts that are the most relevant in constructing a reading of an object I tried to establish a framework in which dirt operates. However I could not provide any further definition beyond that of Douglas.

It did provide a starting point. The subjectivity was inherent to dirt and accepting this meant I had to shift my focus. Looking towards examples I felt fitted into the dirt category I decided to amplify the subjectivity and focus on a more personal reflection with the hope that it would deliver an output to continue the work.
DIRT DESIGN LANGUAGE

1. Exaggerated production visible.
Uneven surface decoration.

2. Lines added to encourage
material oxidisation.
Juxtaposition.

3. Uneven and organic markings.
Juxtaposition.

4. Exaggerated production visible.
Uneven form.

5. Exaggerated proportion.
Unbalanced.

6. Unfinished edges.
Uneven finish to surface.
Asymmetry.

7. Exaggerated proportion.
Uneven form.
Screws visible.
Material choice.

8. Borrowed imperfection.
Juxtaposition.
CATEGORISING DIRT

In the examples shown there are some similarities and categories that could be defined but looking at the variety of interpretations alongside the object specificity of the dirt it appears to hold little value for helping the design process. Much of the implementation of dirt in these examples is still based on intuition of the designer and the demarcation is very prescriptive.

I was looking to reach a broad understanding of dirt to enable its use, but this prescriptive categorisation does not provide a creative addition to the discourse.

With this in mind I felt it useful to identify three broader categories to aid discourse and provide a framework for further work; Material Dirt, Visual Dirt and Symbiotic Dirt.

MATERIAL DIRT
This category concerns the material and surface treatment. It includes patina, decay, scratches, visible production artefacts and finish.

VISUAL DIRT
This is related to the form features that deviate from the expected narrative. It includes Asymmetry, Juxtaposition, Proportion, Incongruous elements.

SYMBIOTIC DIRT
This is related to borrowed dirt. This is a small section but merits inclusion. It relies on outside elements to add dirt to itself. Includes parasitic objects, supporting structures, receptacles and interaction.

These three categories reflect different manifestations of dirt.
This subjectivity began to shape the direction of my thesis into a more personal reflection on my understandings of dirt, design and my own design process and decision making. While I appreciated that this approach was a necessary action, I wanted to reflect on the value of dirt outside of the design process.

Using these three broad categories to look at understanding the value in dirt for design to hopefully provide another view that would be useful to consider during the design process.
In the last 10 years “emotional design” has gained a larger and larger place in the discourse of design. Form and function, the traditional tenants of design, have been reevaluated to incorporate the user’s emotional relationship with products. Looking at the user in terms of their emotional subject-object relationship is as important as more qualitative user research.

Emotional design provides a way of establishing a value for the more intangible qualities of an object. By focusing on the human and their emotional response to objects, looking at the research conducted some insight into the varying role that dirt can be used would be found. While this may not define dirt with anymore clarity it would provide a role and rationale for selection.

By using some relevant cornerstones that Chapman discusses in ‘Emotionally Durable Design’, I have positioned the three categories of dirt, highlighting what can be gained by each as a potential tool in or output of the design process.

CO-PRODUCER
Chapman recommends allowing the user to be perceived “as a co-producer of the narrative, rather than just a passive observer: This way the narrative experience that does eventually unfold will be a unique experiences since it has - to some degree - been shaped and produced by each unique and individual user.” (Chapman, 2005, p.136)

Both material and symbiotic dirt enable the co-producer.

EMPATHY AND ATTACHMENT
“We interpret everything we experience, much of it in human terms.” (Norman, 2004, p.136)

To err is human. Dirt can be seen as a deliberate error. While dirt can sometimes be unintentional, the act of leaving the unintentional is itself a deliberate act. The inclusion of dirt adds a level of humanity to an object. Dirt can be utilised to enable an empathetic response to an object by defining an inherent ‘weakness’ in the design.

“Personal experiences and emotional meaning complete the image of the object whose appearance and functions are but initial cues to their broader meaning. The more an individual consciously or unconsciously relates to the sensory/aesthetic, cognitive/behavioural and personal/symbolic qualities of an object the more profound will be the attachment.” (Cupchik, 2001, p.79)

It appears that all three elements can be used to encourage empathy and attachment.

NARRATIVE
A component of emotional design is the construction of a narrative. I would like to suggest that dirt provides a break from the expected narrative. This break in the expected pattern is both disturbing and intriguing. It is here where I would suggest the balance of dirt to expectation is governed by target group and instinct of the designer. How much dirt allows for a break in the narrative whilst still providing or satisfying enough of the subjects expectations for the subject to move forward and accept the dirt as part of the whole instead of an unwanted distraction?

“...products possessing overly programmed semantics - or perfect products - are particularly vulnerable to de-fictioning. This is because they are too black and white, too easy to map and pigeonhole; in so doing, they leave little or no room for that crucial whiff of ambiguity that so often sustains the dialogue between subject and object.” (Chapman, 2005, p.145)

If dirt is to maintain the fiction then the volume of dirt is an essential consideration. Can it be too dirty? will this fail to maintain an ambiguity? It is allowing for the ambiguity or the balance of the expectation that enables dirt to be a sustainable narrative. It is precisely this ambiguity that makes dirt so hard to define.

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Both visual and symbiotic dirt can add value to the narrative through ambiguity. Material dirt is expected to occur and does not offer the same ambiguity that the others do.

PACE AND TIME
The speed of consumption is a large factor in emotional design. Not only in terms of lifecycle of a product but the way the product evolves over time for the user. A large wow factor quickly loses its value over a very short time period. The concept that a product can adapt, reveal or enable a reevaluation of its appearance or personality is cited as a strong factor in creating durable and engaging design.

Dirt can extend this period through enabling a greater degree of cognitive reasoning on behalf of the subject to negotiate and reconcile the dirt element within the object.

“The trick is to make objects that degrade gracefully, growing older with their owners in a personal and pleasurable manner.” (Norman, 2004, p.221)

Material surfaces that degrade or shift with usage, for example a chopping board, adds a personal story, one of use that adds to the memory or emotional associations to the object. These marks reflect the history of the subject-object relation.

While material dirt is the most obvious fit, all three categories can be considered depending on the intention of the dirt, i.e. adding a wow.
It is unlikely that there is a precise conclusive statement to be drawn surrounding dirt. It is hard to define and hard to quantify the outcome. It appears that there is a value in terms of emotional design particularly but again this is hard to measure. To move forward if we can accept that there is a value in dirt, then how can this be achieved or understood as part of the design process?

With this in mind I felt it was of more value to focus on looking at dirt through short observations and probes.

This was the start of my design process but not the end of my research. How to continue to develop dirt in design when it is a concept defined by its subjectivity?
I looked for ‘imperfect’ finishes, surfaces, artefacts. I collected them.

I played with plastic and removing the moulded smooth surfaces. I rolled and twisted sheet materials looking for structures. I looked at creating the finish the removing it.

It was enjoyable but never productive. I was missing what I set out to achieve. My thesis was not about material exploration. I was jumping ahead to try and kick start a direction but I was looking for an understanding rather than just the production of dirt.

This was a step to understanding this.
Forcing dirt feels uncomfortable to me. Trying to make things wrong or off is not easy as a starting point.

It feels false and contrived and ultimately I want the dirt to add charm not the opposite.

Material experiments, breaking and forcing aren’t giving me a positive feeling.

Is dirt ‘just’ decoration?
“The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects” (Loos, 1997, p.30)

The intellectualised rationale that ornament was primitive and inefficient. Ornament had no place in the modern evolution of objects, to be modern is to be without ornament.

One of the most prevailing tenants of design has been the absence of decoration. The International Style, Bauhaus and minimalism have shunned and rejected decoration in their rationales and aesthetics. Against this backdrop, decoration exhibits many qualities that appear similar to dirt. It is itself matter out of place.

This leads to the question what separates decoration and dirt? Does it need to be separated for me to accept it as part of my design process? What is decoration and what is dirt? Is this decoration or a celebration of the imperfect and could be seen as dirt? Is there a real difference?

If dirt is an extra it does not have to be there, so is it really just decoration? It is a conscious decision to add or leave. Does dirt feel more authentic to me than decoration which is why I am happier to consider it?

While thinking about the difference between decoration and dirt I saw an interesting piece in ‘I Miss My Pencil’ a design exploration by Martin Bone and Kara Johnson. They decorated a skateboard using traditional Chinese lacquer. Apply some use and the result is pictured.

Looking at this presented me with the idea of conflict with the decoration. I felt that this actually helped separate dirt from, or as a contained category within, decoration.

It is decorative. But not all decoration is dirt. It again depends on context and I would suggest the presence of conflict separates dirt from decoration. Conflict based on juxtaposition, context, expectancies and, in the case of the lacquer skateboard, through use.

The conflict of what could have been and what is provides the defining factor for dirt vs decoration.
By recognising dirt as an element to decoration was both an insight and a dilemma. Decoration had previously been avoided.

I needed to get a firmer grip on dirt as a rationale not the aesthetic. I decided to look at the design process as a core rather than the boundaries of aesthetics and decoration.
From the short experiments with form and material I refocused on what it was I was trying to achieve in this thesis. The experiments lack of impact on my thoughts had reminded me that I wanted to find a rationale or reasoning that would help me understand the use of dirt within the design process.

Looking at dirt as decoration also provided myself with a focus. By beginning to reason what made dirt dirt and not decoration it became more obvious to me that I had to narrow my parameters to deliver any further insights. In fact, the more I looked at this topic it became less about defining dirt but integrating the research on dirt as part of my own design process.

Turning to the inclusion of dirt in the design process I had thought of three different methodologies that I could use: Addition, Subtraction and Uncontrolled.

ADDITION start from clean and add dirt.

SUBTRACTION starting with dirt and refining.

UNCONTROLLED would allow for chance in creating dirt.

The three different approaches are ones I feel would have their own unique sets of problems and tipping points contained within the design process.

I limited myself to explore one. Addition: to start from clean and move out to dirt.

I felt this would result in the most insight for myself although I had doubts about achieving a result that would be satisfying. I think my choice was also a reflection on the uncertainty and subjectivity that I had uncovered during my research phase as starting with a 'typical' design provided some groundwork to build from.

Focusing on the centre of dirt would result in a quieter more nuanced expression of dirt but would allow me to focus on the core understandings behind my decisions and reasoning rather than material experiments.

As realised early in the discussion, context is central to dirt and to deliver a series of experiments or probes on this subject I would need to create a clean zero point to build from, to set the framework for the audience as much as myself. I have taken holotype as a term to define this object. It is a word used in biology to refer to the original physical example that all others of the same species can be compared to.

I would also look at introducing VISUAL, MATERIAL and SYMBIOTIC dirt to the design process to see if this encouraged of hindered the addition of dirt. What would be the pitfalls and traps of considering dirt? What is authentic? What was too much or too little? What were the tipping points?

From this I established a more specific brief to work from.

Exploring dirt as a metaphor in design. What can the production of 'matter out of place' within a field associated with control and perfection add to design? How can 'dirt' be introduced in the design process?

Falling away from perfection as a goal, embracing flaws, encouraging error or pushing away from a considered form. Adding 'dirt' to humanise and character and to engage in a negotiation between the object and the audience to present intrigue rather than an expected result.

Beginning by attempting to define 'dirt' as an additive to design, the nature of the subject shifted to an acceptance of the lack of definition. This resulted in an investigation of elements defined by my own subjectivity, context and use within my own design process.

What?
To produce a design a common, low function object and use dirt as a tool to influence the process.

Why?
I see that dirt has a value to my design process and the audience and I would like to attempt to understand a way to incorporate this within my own process.

How?
By creating a series of explorations based on my research by adding dirt to an archetypal design reflecting my understandings of dirt as a concept.
After outlining my plan to illustrate dirt, I was still unsure if there was something missing from my understanding.

Dirt still felt very contrived from my perspective as a designer and focusing on dirt was hard to rationalise in my design process.

Typically, my process was very controlled. This was also the reason why dirt appealed to me in the first place.

Doing it wrong was not an inspiration. There was something else.
I revisited some of the examples of dirt that I had originally looked at. Deconstructing the dirt by removing it and looking again at the objects was an exercise that provided me with the distance to reflect on what dirt was on each object. In trying to reverse the process and add dirt to an already existing industrial design product it became clear what was missing.

In thinking about craft and the imperfections associated with its production I was struck by the strength of the narrative that is underpinning the work. It is not the imperfection but the narrative surrounding the production and heritage that is so strong. A craftsman looks to perfection but is accepting of the faults of the material or the hand, it is not the imperfections themselves but the narrative that encourages the acceptance and value. It adds an extra narrative layer to the object.

Compare this to industrial production where the machine is central to the narrative. The expectancy of the production is within tolerances. Its is set to reproduce, to remove imperfections. The secondary layer of narrative is absent or it is concerned with the machine.

This was the a natural place for dirt, to provide the additional narrative. It perhaps provides the main or only narrative depending on the volume of dirt. This had been missing from the thought processes. Without a narrative I was extremely uncomfortable adding dirt.

In thinking about narrative it made me reflect on the story of the object. Its construction and dissemination.

Objects are observed, read and used. When thinking of narrative it is often through associations, context and a semiotic/linguistic code that convey this to the audience. Often the story is told through text or pictures rather than alone through the piece. For instance text that accompanies the object either in the media or point of sale has strong presence in the consumption of design.

Barthes, while discussing the photographic image, called this layer the linguistic message. He suggested that it is almost inevitable that an image will be accompanied by text which will guide the reader to a meaning or understanding. In considering narrative with respect to dirt and design does the narrative need to be conveyed entirely in the piece? Is it then too obvious? Ambiguity is discussed as a benefit in terms of emotional design but so is narrative.

These will be decisions to be made and investigated in my explorations.
FRAGMENT 7

I felt there was a direction or more confidence surrounding dirt from understanding the position of the narrative within machine production.

Ironic that the first stage in the plan will be to design a ‘neutral’ stool. A clean narrative, or as clean as I can stand by.
My decision to produce a ‘craft’ object rather than an industrial object was made by the decision to focus on the core. I was hoping this focus would produce a clearer understanding rather than more speculative work. It felt a logical step to walk before I ran.

The subjectivity and context driven nature of dirt defined the initial starting point for the addition of dirt. I needed to create an holotype that I can hold the others up to. By defining a starting position it would provide a restriction to the dirt and allow for some comparison between the explorations.

Originally the intention had been to place a taper on the legs but I decided to reduce the stool to a very basic form to help highlight or bring the attention to the differences rather than the stool itself.

Several prototypes were sketched in CAD and moved to full scale models in the workshop to play with the proportions and angles in real life. It was interesting that the CAD version had too much activity than I had intended. This was reduced in the actual piece. Maybe the CAD and render world has an inherent dirt reduction that I was over compensating for?

The production was carried out by a combination of hand and CNC milling,
FRAGMENT 8
After establishing the holotype to compare all with, I felt it important that they were all still the same stool but slightly different interpretations.

Keeping identical components and only adding narrative through dirt became the challenge.
ILLUSTRATION CONSTRUCTION
While doing the prototypes I was making a lot of tests using different sizes and the process of construction was quite relevant to me at that time. Playing with the structures and joints provided me with a very simple idea to exaggerate the construction by simplifying the finish. The construction stool has a more sketch like quality its form takes on the unfinished feel.

Returning to some visual experiments surrounding order and balance I thought to rake the support at an angle would provide an alternative plane that is not represented elsewhere in the stool. By altering the angle of the support it produced a more exaggerated direction to the round stool. Originally the support was protruding out of the main support but I replaced this with only protruding from the legs. It felt more consistent.

The effect is visual dirt. The expectations are of a finished production and while none of the stool are finished to even a moderate craftsman standard the addition of the visual dirt plays with the expectations of the complete and finished.
ILLUSTRATION GLASS

When looking at decoration and dirt I felt conflict had a role to play in defining the difference between the two. With this in mind I tried to address a narrative of conflict within the stool. How could I interpret this.

I had been working with very simple joints, simplifying them even more for the first exploration of visual dirt, and it was interesting to see the stability added from the compression. I wanted to play with the idea of strength and weakness.

Originally I was looking to exaggerate the need for this support. Using a material that is shaped naturally allows for dirt but the narrative of strength through weakness felt more interesting so I decided to experiment with glass and how that could be used in the stool.

The conflict in the material, shapes and the expectations of the glass in this context.

It is both material and visual dirt and I feel conveys a successful and clear narrative to the observer. It adds a character that while out of place still combines well aesthetically.
ILLUSTRATION METAL
The final direction was to play with symbiotic dirt. A lot of the research made in emotional design field stresses the importance of time and pace. Another simple narrative that allowed me to add dirt. The result is less strong than originally intended. The original narrative has remained that as one material ages the other becomes newer through use, but the expression I intended to use went up in flames.

The original idea was to fuse copper to the legs with heat but the fusion did not occur as I had hoped or provide the strength I had hoped. There was also the fire to deal with, although not unexpected was much fiercer than I had imagined it.

Instead of oxidation though heat and fusion with the wood the artificially oxidised copper finishes the legs while allowing for wear back to a more polished feel over time while the wood wears and ages in the opposite direction.

The addition of symbiotic dirt allows for both variation over time and in some respects the idea of co authorship with the audience.

My feelings are that this falls more towards decoration as the conflict nor narrative is as strong despite the literal presence of dirt in the object. While the result is disappointing, it offers an illustration on the importance of both narrative and conflict for dirt.
Constructing four stools using essentially the same building blocks invites comparison. While it will be interesting to see reactions to each, the reason for the comparison was to illustrate how dirt can operate in different ways.

Each has a different outcome but each has an element of dirt. I would like to suggest that this illustrates that dirt is not based on aesthetics but on the rationale of ‘matter out of place’. With this in mind the presence of the holotype provides the framework.
FRAGMENT 9
What had I done with dirt?
Was it useful outside of myself?
Was defining dirt important after all?
My thesis on dirt was an exploration. I attempted to define with more clarity what dirt meant in terms of design. I looked at its value to the audience and reflected on its value to a designer as a tool.

I have not evolved the definition of dirt itself further than ‘matter out of place’ but I have tried to in some way contextualise this through looking at ‘Design’ and through introducing an holotype for creating illustrations of dirt.

The categorisation of dirt into Material, Visual and Symbiotic I hope makes clear that dirt doesn’t have to be dirty. It is not restricted to a surface treatment and has a wider remit than the colloquial understanding of the word. Perhaps it is best thought as a metaphor rather than an aesthetic.

In looking to understand the value I turned to emotional design, and while I feel there are benefits related to dirt surround ambiguity, narrative, co authorship and time, it is more an instinctive understanding of the elements. As highlighted through looking at denim, vintage furniture, wabi sabi and the hipstamatic app, it is clear that there is commercial value at least.

If I can view the project as a search for a greater understanding then I feel it is successful. The path I have taken, while fragmented, is one that I feel led to several insights - not all related to dirt.

From my own perspective it was interesting to gauge my reaction to decoration, the difficulty in trying to make things wrong and the discomfort of the unknown. At some point in the process I really felt that I had opened pandoras box and the more I dug the less was certain.

While this was not unexpected, reaching solid ground was never really realised and this is reflected by the move towards a more subjective approach.

In allowing my own thoughts and opinions to so prominent in the work, the level of questioning also left its mark on my understanding of my design process. To capture a clear position on why I was looking at dirt really became a struggle for authenticity. It seemed to be so important and despite the topic introducing dirt felt at times extremely false and forced. Perhaps because I felt dirt was not an aim in itself. I viewed it as a tool to use when appropriate but I had to use dirt in my work.

Deliberating on decoration was also one of the more interesting areas for me to consider. Decoration has been pushed to one side in my design education and it was interesting how much that has influenced my approach in my previous work and how perhaps how much the influence of the Bauhaus is still contained in modern design education. Maybe we need a rationale for decoration as well?

Dirt has provided an interesting starting point and allowed myself to adopt a critical look at its place in my design process. At times it has not been helpful, a restriction that was unwelcome. Attempting to make dirt a small element to focus its use as a tool on such a simple product with the restrictions I allowed myself to operate with has been hard.

But it is because of these restrictions that made me dig into the process and the rationalisation of dirt and design that has produced the most valuable outcomes. How does dirt relate to the wider field of industrial design? The presence of dirt is more deliberate and I feel requires a stronger narrative to overcome the heritage of production. Perhaps this is why so much of the dirt found in more industrial design is still based on alternative production techniques, retelling a different version of the machine aesthetic.

It is an area for further research and would almost certainly introduce a wider set of issues that have not been uncovered in this preliminary exploration / explanation of dirt.

Dynamic is a useful word to consider. Dirt in design, because of its contextual nature is shifting and will react as norms and expectations change. It is a fluid concept and will be part of design regardless of whether used as a tool or seen as an unwanted consequence of the process.
LITERATURE


WITH THANKS
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In memory of my mother. She would have enjoyed the party.