

EP

VOL.2



DESIGN
FICTION

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SternbergPress*

PAOLA
ANTONELLI
UMBERTO
ECO
VILÉM
FLUSSER
WILL
HOLDER
LUCAS
MAASSEN
PHILIPPE
MOREL
BRUCE ETC.
STERLING



Umberto Eco (1932–2016) was a semiotician and novelist. **Alex Coles** is a critic, editor, and Professor of Transdisciplinary Studies at the School of Art, Design and Architecture at University of Huddersfield.

Lucas Maassen is a Dutch designer. **Huib Haye van der Werf** is Head of Artistic Programme at Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht. **Paola Antonelli** is Senior Curator in the Department of Architecture & Design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Will Holder is a typographer exploring the transformative processes at play in the act of publishing.

Anthony Dunne and **Fiona Raby** established their design studio in 1994. **Rick Poyner** is a writer and curator specializing in photography, design, and visual culture.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty is Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies and of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University.

Bruce Sterling is an American science-fiction author. **Verina Gfader** is a Research Fellow at the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield.

7–16 Here I Am – Not a Fiction

Umberto Eco and Alex Coles discuss the multiple points of contact between fiction and theory in Eco's writings.

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Will Holder presents the latest installment of his ongoing, contemporary rewriting of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890).

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Carrie Lambert-Beatty examines the political potential of fiction in recent interventionist art practice.

87–98 Most Design Fiction Will Of Course Be Pretty Bad

Bruce Sterling is interviewed by Verina Gfader on his coining of the term "design fiction."

The Atlas Group (1989–2004) was a project undertaken by the artist Walid Raad to research and document the recent history of Lebanon, with particular emphasis on the wars of 1975 to 1990.

Hiroko Shiratori is a Tokyo-based designer specializing in furniture, product, space, and installation design. **Sophie Krier** is a designer and researcher.

Vilém Flusser (1920–1991) was a Czech-born philosopher, writer, and journalist. **James Dyer** is a researcher at the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield.

Philippe Morel is an architect and theorist. He cofounded EZCT Architecture & Design Research in 2000. **Benjamin Reynolds** and **Valle Medina** are cofounders of PAL/AC/E.

Experimental Jetset is an independent graphic design studio based in Amsterdam.

99–112 The Loudest Muttering Is Over

Images and citations from the archive of The Atlas Group (1989–2004) are juxtaposed to underline the multiple roles that fiction plays within the project.

113–128 Fiction as Function: Unusual Objects from Japan

The narrative-based designs of Hiroko Shiratori's ongoing project "Unusual Objects from Japan, 1868–1945" provide a point of departure for an exchange between the designer and Sophie Krier.

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Walid Raad / The Atlas Group, *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair: Engines*, 2000–3. One from one hundred pigmented ink-jet prints. (c) Walid Raad. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

17 / Raad, in "The Atlas Group," 122.

We are not saying that the assembling of facts, data, information about the experiences, situations, objects of "The Lebanese Civil War" is not essential. But we are saying that a history of "The Lebanese Civil War" cannot be reduced to the totality of these self-evident facts.¹⁷

FICTION AS FUNCTION: UNUSUAL OBJECTS FROM JAPAN JAPAN JAPAN

HIROKO SHIRATORI & SOPHIE KRIER

Hiroko Shiratori interviewed
by Sophie Krier

Rule 1

It has to be "could have happened" = each historic background should be true with an additional end made up by myself.

Sophie Krier: Let's take the five fictitious rules you set for "Unusual Objects from Japan, 1868–1945" as a starting point for our discussion. The rules are quite factual, in that they allow you to create parallel histories, reflecting on Japanese history and contemporary life and design in a more general sense. Even though "Unusual Objects" is a work you developed after graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2006, it remains potent. Could you elaborate on the function fiction has in design for you?

Hiroko Shiratori: For me, design needs to have some kind of function – a physical relationship or a kind of interaction. But for this project I was looking at the possibility of the design function to be "speaking to your brain and heart." That's where I thought fiction could have functionality within the world of design.

SK: Does that mean fiction expands the space that you can work in as a designer?

HS: Yes. These fictions are giving me space to explore thinking within a formal kind of historical presentation. The statement or message I can release from these "Unusual Objects" only implies a similarity in fact.

SK: The handless barber ...

HS: There are so many small truths that don't really belong to each other but that I made into a story. In this case there was the fact that people went to military service and sometimes returned not in the best shape. Then comes my part where

I think, okay, this guy basically lost two arms, let's see if he can still do his job with his feet. This particular story was a crazy one, because the Japanese believe that feet are dirty so it's really rude to put your feet near customers. And maybe because it was so impossible for a Japanese person, this made it eventually believable ...

SK: But the metalworking industry really did shift from swords to scissors in this period of Japanese history, right?

HS: Yes. Sword-smiths turned to scissor making around when the Meiji era began, in 1868. People started to wear Western-style dresses, and together with these dresses, the scissors for cloth cutting were introduced in Japan. So they were combining the new technique of scissor making and an old technique used in sword making.

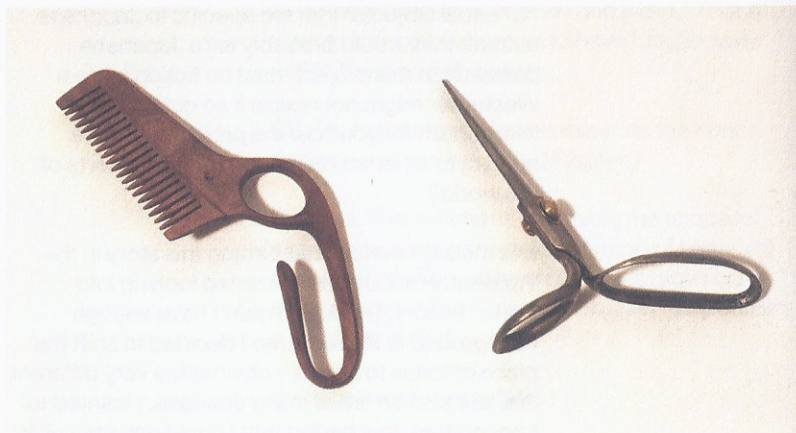
SK: There are cues embedded in this and other "Unusual Objects" that are specific to Japanese culture; they would probably tell a Japanese person that this project must be fiction while a Westerner might not realize it so quickly. Was it important for you how the project would be subject to different readings in different parts of the world?

HS: Initially I considered setting this story in the Victorian era. But when I started looking into British history, I realized I didn't have enough background in that area, so I decided to shift the place of focus to Japan – obviously a very different era, but also an era of many changes. I wanted to concentrate on a period that I could naturally pick up because it is my heritage.



Hiroko Shiratori, illustration for *Handless Barber's Tools*, 2007. Illustration by Sawako Tanizawa.

Hiroko Shiratori, *Handless Barber's Tools*, 2007. Photo by Yu Fujiwara.



Rule 2

Fictitious additions should be humane, humble, and humorous.

SK: How did you put the second rule into practice?

HS: In order to give the fictitious aspect of the work an amusement function the design needed to be bittersweet. It had to imply the reality of a human being trying to survive in a humorous way. While humble meant that the story needed to be for everyone, humane means it should not be too cruel. History has aspects of cruelty but my project needed to have dignity: to be human. That was also my dignity as a creator of these stories.

SK: The notion of dignity is interesting in relation to design. Obviously a lot of the history of mankind is banal or ugly. The question is how to address that fact. It's true that you bring dignity back. If we look again at the handless barber, for example, you introduce the idea that it is the community making those tools for this armless man. The bodily handicap seemed to intrigue you. How does it return in your current position as an external creative consultant for Aesop, a cosmetic company?

HS: Yes, it's funny that someone who wants to express beauty in the most unbeautiful way is hired by a cosmetic company. I look at the body as something eternal, as a continuous line between past and present. My interest in the body was actually accepted at Aesop; after seeing my handless hairdresser the company insisted on getting me aboard. They asked me to translate their cosmetic message in a more accurate manner. Currently, it's the orchestration aspect of the five rules developed for "Unusual Objects" that I'm still dealing with. It's my dream to make a

technically bigger book, and a fake museum someday, so I can put more objects in it, and make it more believable.

SK: There's a difference in the reception of your design of the "Unusual Objects" compared to your work for Aesop, I imagine.

HS: Yes, it didn't matter to me whether the audience understood my "Unusual Objects" as real or fictitious. My intention was to create fictitious objects and fictitious stories, which were believable enough, but at the same time crazy enough for people to take them as fiction. Right now in Paris, Aesop has an annual campaign based on the Futurism movement – and that came out of my brain.

Rule 3

It has to be believable fictions = to draw people into the story. A full and right presentation is needed.

SK: Can you say something about how you applied the third design principle to the Chindon objects, musical instruments of street musicians in the Meiji era?

HS: First, materiality was important. Even though I'm based in the UK, I wanted to get timber that could be traced back to the Japan of the Meiji era. The same goes for cloth: I was buying cloths from Japan, via eBay. I made them into strips and dyed them in the traditional way.

SK: You reproduced the production techniques of the time?

HS: To make it more real, yes. The cotton was for the musical instruments. Secondly, I've actually aged all of my objects. I had big pots all over my

roof terrace and I was burying one instrument after the other, and watering them. Sometimes I used a specific brush, or I rubbed the object with animal fat and heated it, and I hammered each new object to make it look worn. For the presentation, I fabricated an old cabinet – making it look like it came from an old museum. Often old-fashioned museums have writings on small pieces of paper with information about where an object was found, etc., installed in them. I introduced the stories in the same way. I made a book as a summary or catalogue. In it, every object is introduced as if it were part of a cultural history of the objects. I don't reveal that the story is fake until the very last page.

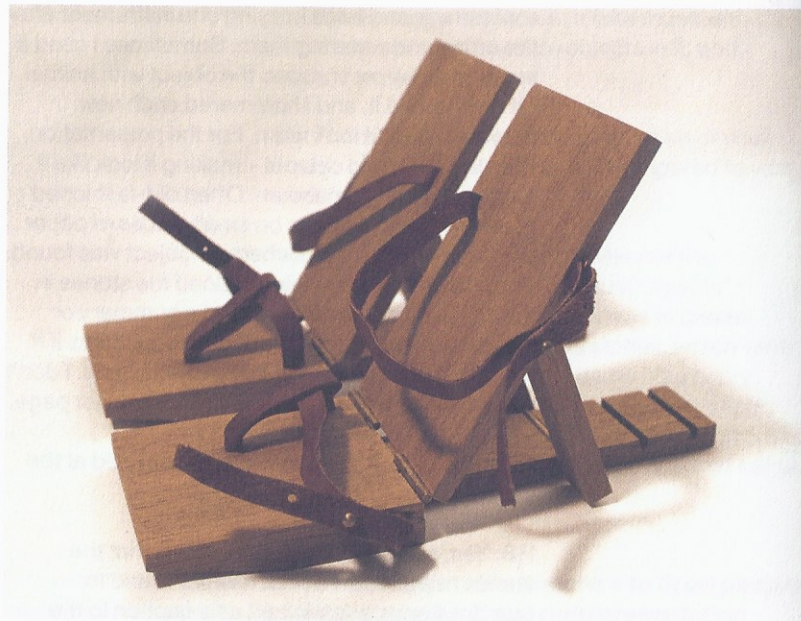
SK: So the reality of the project is only told at the very end?

HS: Yes, so people can initially think that the stories happened. I asked a writer friend to compose an academic text as a caption to the objects, rather than using a storytelling style. I wanted the objects to be read like a discovery of facts.

SK: How did you find out about all the details behind the artifacts you chose?

HS: Mostly through books and illustrated magazines. I knew I was interested in parallel histories, and the sort of developments that happen when external influences changed habits in Japan in the Meiji era. Now we can see parallel things happening with Eastern culture going to the West, making unique hybrid objects and interpretations. That's the aspect that I was mostly looking at.

SK: Could you give an example of the unique hybrid objects these cultural shifts result in?

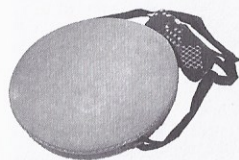


Hiroko Shiratori,
*High-Heel Practicing
Device*, 2006. Photo
by Yu Fujiwara.

Hiroko Shiratori,
illustration for *High-
Heel Practicing Device*,
2006. Illustration by
Sawako Tanizawa.



HS: I tend to collect basic accessible things that are kind of weird. One of them is a chopstick – nowadays Westerners use them much better, but twenty years ago people still struggled to use them. I found chopsticks with really strange shapes, with springs, or made into a U-shape, like tweezers, or complicated or gimmicky chopsticks, where one side is a chopstick and the other a fork or knife.



Hiroko Shiratori,
Knee drum, *One-Man
Chindon*, 2007. Photo
by Yu Fujiwara.

Opposite:

Hiroko Shiratori,
illustration for *One-Man
Chindon*, 2007. Illustration
by Sawako Tanizawa.

Rule 4

The object didn't and doesn't exist = potentially has space today if developed differently. This is my responsibility as the designer.

SK: How do you design something that doesn't exist?

HS: While I couldn't make something that existed in today's world, my objects still needed to be contemporary in some way. I thought I could make an implement that doesn't exist in the current world but that still addressed some kind of need.

SK: How did you decide on how the poster for Sugoroku, the traditional Japanese board game, should look?

HS: This one was definitely meant to look like old drawings. A characteristic of Japanese drawings is how they struggle to accurately render a three-dimensional world. So for composing the *Tokosugoroku* poster I asked a friend to do the illustrations. Despite his desire to make a beautiful drawing, I had to pull him back to make sure it looked like something just not quite right so it would look more real.





Hiroko Shiratori.
Tokosugoroku, 2007. In
collaboration with Hiroshi
Kariya and Fumie Kamijo.

SK: Just not quite right so it looks more real – that’s a nice principle. How did you produce the poster?

HS: It’s a bit smaller than A1. I had it printed in the UK, so it’s a proper three-color print. The ink is not old ink, but I made it look worn and suntanned. The print is often folded eight or sixteen times, so making fold marks was part of the work.

Rule 5

We could find a similar situation and need today somewhere in the world.

SK: How did the fifth rule help you to shape and stage the Chindon objects?

HS: I really like old films. I was reading a book on cinema history, and found out that Japan had these guys called Benshi. They were doing the voice-over for silent films, and so they lost their job with the introduction of sound in film. That was the reason why Benshi people became theater comedians or street musicians called Chindon. Most Chindon musicians played different musical instruments.

One of the reasons I wanted the actor who performed a reenactment of Benshi musicians for the “Unusual Objects” project to play on his own was because of an image I found online of a Western photo from the early twentieth century. The guy appeared like he had one limb missing or something; he was a one-man band of old times, with a harmonica around his neck. It was a beautiful picture.

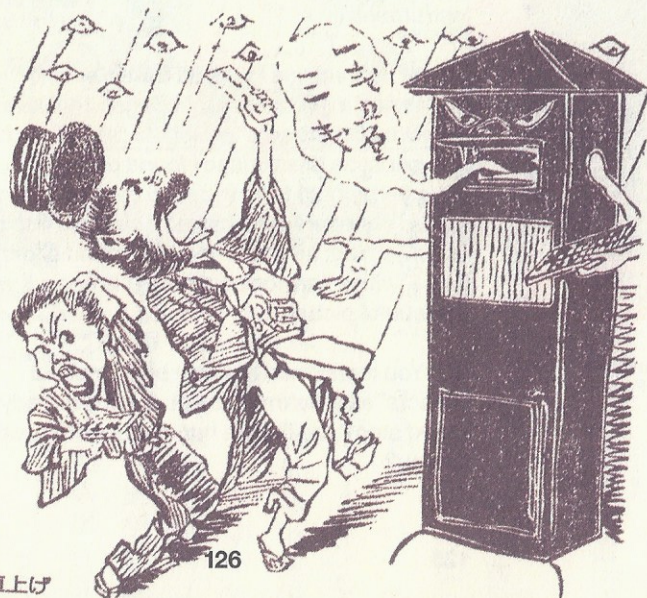
SK: You mentioned that you see “Unusual Objects” as a lifetime project. Do you already have a next step? Are there a hundred stories waiting for you?



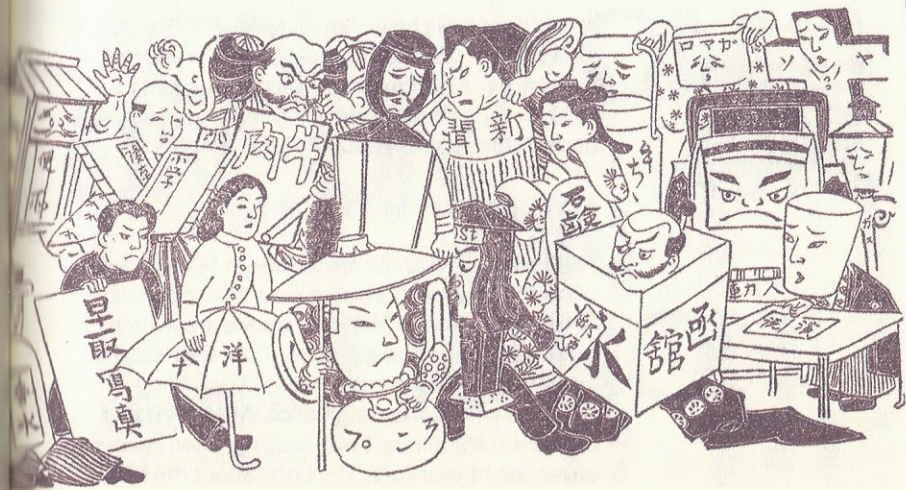
“W.C. Williams: One
Man Band.” Postcard,
ca. 1914.

図2 「手紙の急進」

「手紙の急進」というタイトルが、郵便制度の社会への浸透を物語っている。この絵が描かれたのは郵便制度が始まって12年ほど経たない時代。この短期間で、郵便は近代社会が動くための血液のような存在となった。（『団団珍聞』明治16年5月14日号）



郵便料の値上げ



開化見立十八番面附

「早取写真」「洋傘」「石岐」等々、文明開化によって普及した事物が描かれているが、中央の「郵便」はその中心役。（『団団珍聞』明治18年7月11日号）

Pages 126–127:

Koichi Yumoto, *Fūshi manga de Nihon kindaishi ga wakaru hon* [Discover modern Japanese history from political cartoons] (Tokyo: Soshi-sha, 2011).

HS: It's not that I have stories ready to physically realize, it's more finding the stories. To research the history side requires a continuous effort to read more. I remember as a kid reading Manga-style history books about the Meiji era ...

SK: Manga-style history books?

HS: Loads of histories are written in Manga style in Japan, whether it's about a particular period or happening. Manga history books are written like a story, but drawn instead. They are based on information that the authors could get, filling in the gaps with some imagination. Manga history books are something I was reading when I was six, seven, eight years old. The book about the Meiji era I am reading right now has cartoons that were published in newspapers or weekly magazines. These are cynical cartoons, illustrations drawn to tell of political changes, suggestive and quite strange. The history of Manga started with these cartoons. With the "Unusual Objects" project I'm going back to these roots – trying to grasp the information and the mood of a specific era. I am working with pictures, interpretation, and imagination, rather than trying to read from facts and explicit text.

SK: What drives you to continue this research?

HS: I think there are two things that surround us – our bodies and habits. They dictate which things need to be developed.

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ON
FICTION

VILÉM
FLUSSER

INTRO-
DUCTION
BY JAMES
DYER