

<https://doi.org/10.7577/formakademisk.4409>

Hazal Gümüş Çiftçi

Lecturer (PhD)

College of Arts and Sciences

The Ohio State University, USA

gumusciftci.1@osu.edu

Seçil Uğur Yavuz

Research Fellow (PhD)

Faculty of Design and Art

Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy

secil.uguryavuz@unibz.it

Video Article

ÇEYİZLAB: Crafting a Speculative Manifesto

ABSTRACT

Çeyizlab is a research project tackling with çeyiz (trousseau)- a traditional gift-giving to the bride in Turkey. Due to the societal changes, çeyiz is under a transformation. By looking at the past and speculating about the future of çeyiz, our research question emerged: Can we envision scenarios that would turn the existing transformation of this tradition into preferable futures? We answered this question by conducting online focusgroups, auto-ethnography sessions and expert interviews. Based on our analysis, the idea of a Manifesto has emerged. This manifesto was embroidered on a fabric reflecting the stories, memories and desires of the women with whom we interviewed. To spread out the message of the manifesto, we decided to make a short film that gives rise to discussions around the issues entangled within çeyiz.

Keywords:

Textile craft, manifesto, speculative design, tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Çeyizlab is a design research project tackling çeyiz (trousseau) which is a traditional ritual of gift-giving to the bride in Turkey. It traditionally includes hand-crafted textiles resulting in an accumulation of artifacts co-created mostly by women to support the bride in her new life after getting married. Çeyiz circulates mainly from women in the family to a younger one, not only as a gift but also as a heritage of the family. Appadurai (1986) emphasizes the circulation of commodities in our lives, therefore defines the commodities as persons who have social lives.

Different from commodities, gifts “embed the flow of things in the flow of social relations” (Appadurai, 1986, p. 11). Kopytoff (1986) mentions that objects have biographies, when they move from one hand to another, they embed a set of life stories. As çeyiz plays an important role in many women's lives, it stores many stories of women, becomes a mirror of their role and place in society, and a plethora of other issues. Due to the societal, economic, and technological changes, çeyiz is also undergoing a

transformation that can be noticeable in the last years in Turkey. This transformation is a result of unsustainable consumption patterns, the changing role of women in society, and globalization.

By looking at the past and the present, then speculating about the future of çeyiz, our research question emerged: Can we create new scenarios through which the already existing transformation of çeyiz turns into opportunities for fostering our bonds, rejuvenating the lost values, and above all changing our perception from consumption to “taking care”? Can we carry çeyiz forward by not neglecting that there is an undeniable change, but through “changing the change” (Cipolla & Peruccio, 2008)? To answer these questions, we have carried out online field research which has become a ground to make our speculative design process flourish. In this paper, we address the research findings and our first design outcomes, a speculative manifesto, and a short film in which the manifesto becomes the narrator triggering critical questions related to çeyiz tradition.

METHODOLOGY

Speculation enables designers to develop and envision “alternative products, systems, and worlds” (Mitrovic, 2015) and “to critique current practice” (Auger, 2013) while inviting the public to debate. We, as two design researchers, have started exploring our research question by analyzing the actual state of çeyiz with a critical perspective. Based on the findings of our anticipatory ethnographic study (Lindley & Sharma, 2014), we speculated about future possibilities of what çeyiz would transform into. Due to the COVID-19 lock-down, we carried out our field research by using online research tools and platforms.

We conducted online focus groups with various age groups of women (25-60 years old) from Turkey living in metropolitan areas, auto-ethnography sessions, and expert interviews. During the focus groups, the participants were asked to bring the items that they liked the most and the least from their çeyiz, to give the interviews a tangible dimension. These items were used as “boundary objects” (Star & Griesemer, 1989) to trigger discussions and reflections. The items included in most of the çeyiz chests were carpets, prayer rugs, lace doilies, patik (short knitted socks), decorative towel edges, headscarves with crocheted edgings, along with various kitchen utensils.

Some items were connected to a memory or a family member such as a scarf knitted collectively by three generations of women or a tablecloth that had a lace piece crafted by the mother of the participant. On the contrary, there were merely functional or even decorative items that did not have a particular value or connection to the family or a beloved person. These items were varying from electronic goods to decorative covers for housewares, such as covers for TV, coffee tables, or even blanket-like knee warmers, etc. By interviewing different age groups, we found out that the stories embedded in these items changed over time, whereas some issues remained the same. For instance, a participant in the elder focus group thought her çeyiz was only her books representing her freedom and wisdom.

Besides, the younger generation seems to think their digital creations will be their children’s çeyiz and some of them even believe that çeyiz will not exist as a physical thing, but turn into financial support. Even though our research targeted modernized, school-educated, urban living women; the meaning of çeyiz and the societal burden it bears did not change. While gathering and coding all kinds of information from these sessions, we did thematic analysis first on a word processor and later clustered the topics in an affinity diagram by utilizing an online interactive board in collaborative sessions (carried out within the two researchers). Based on this clustering, we have identified various themes and connected them to define the main problems and opportunities. These themes were meaning-making (memories, stories, people), function-making (needs and necessities), tangible (decoration, hand-made, economic value), and intangible (emotions, endeavors, responsibilities) values embedded in çeyiz.

Besides these themes, a map was created visualizing the actors who are involved in the preparation of çeyiz (Fig. 1). As seen in the figure, while the çeyiz receiver is in the center, there are a variety of actors - who are mostly women- giving a shape to the homes and lives of the newlyweds. Although these people engaged with the preparation are mostly from the inner social circle of the bride, from time to time it involves people who earn their living by crafting from home, small businesses, and

big-scale textile companies. This is also a reflection of a change in society that sees craft as a time-consuming activity. These themes and the actor-map became the ground for our speculations. As speculative design benefits from “imagination” to develop new ways for solving the “wicked problems” (Dunne & Raby, 2013), we used *what-if* questions as a gateway to the imagination for an alternative future that çeyiz could be situated: What if çeyiz is affirmative? What if çeyiz is an object with personal memories? What if çeyiz is not only matrilinear? What if çeyiz is digital and/or intangible? What if çeyiz is a museum? What if çeyiz disappears? (Fig. 2) These questions helped us to further ideate a tangible design proposal - a provocative artifact that reveals the outcome of our research.

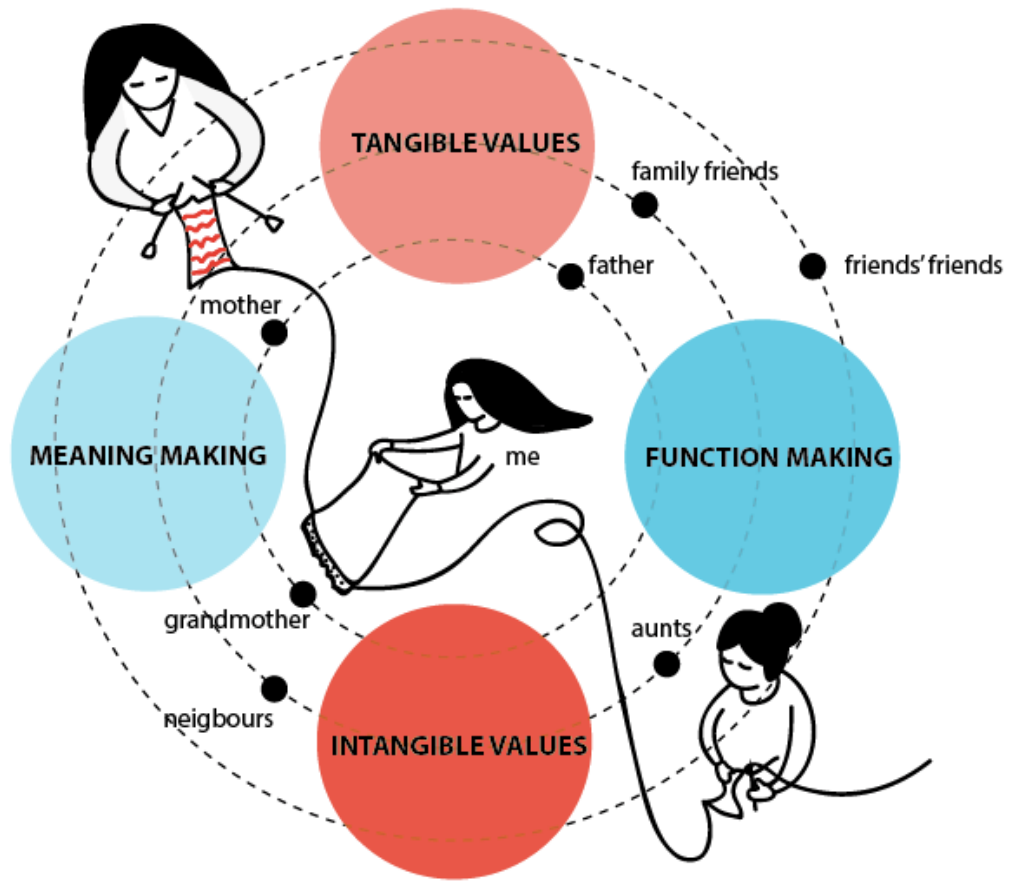


FIGURE 1. Four main themes emerged in the analysis and the actors who are involved in the preparation of çeyiz.

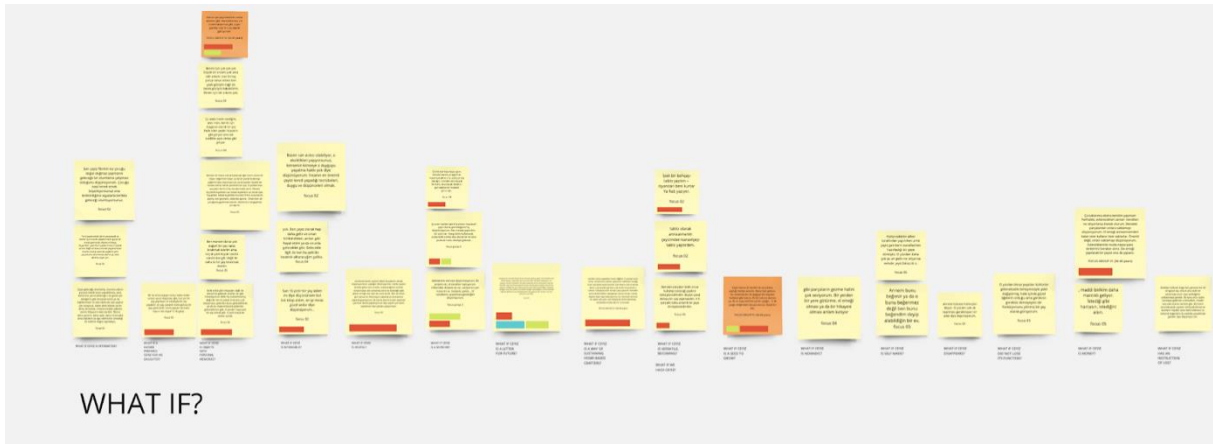


FIGURE 2. An image from the interactive board for ideas & what-if questions which gave rise to the manifesto.

RESULTS – TEXTILE MANIFESTO & SHORT FILM

After the in-depth analysis of our research, the idea of creating a manifesto has emerged. Our findings indicated that the change that *çeyiz* is facing is also a change in the society itself. Women are more in the workforce now and they have neither the patience nor the time to fashion their *çeyiz*. Another finding was about the loss of the meaning of *çeyiz* while the utilitarian characteristic stays the same. These findings formed our what-if questions that gave life to a feminist manifesto. The manifesto was crafted by the stories, memories, wishes, and desires of the women with whom we interviewed. This provocative artifact aims at opening a debate about the transformation of a common good intertwined with societal issues. As *çeyiz* is generally related to crafted textiles, we used textile as a material to host the manifesto. To emphasize the postmodern approach to *çeyiz*, we worked with a digital embroidery machine to craft the 130cm long textile.

To disseminate and spread out the message of the manifesto, we decided to make a short film (Fig. 3). In this film, *çeyiz* becomes the narrator which reveals its manifesto to a young woman who is taking it out from a closed box. The box was used as a metaphor for traditional *çeyiz* chests that are wooden containers of the crafted artifacts in the houses of Turkish women. Taking it out of the box was also a symbolic act of opening up a critical conversation about the ritual of *çeyiz* that is interconnected to many issues of being a woman in Turkey. We shared the short film in a social media account and in a digital exhibition where a public debate took place. The feedback from the audience showed us that the manifesto has changed their perception and made them question their internalized habits related to *çeyiz*.



FIGURE 3. An image from the short film of the Çeyiz manifesto. **To watch the video, click the picture**

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The issues laying behind çeyiz preparation, exchange, and the use are not only linked to the items being utilitarian or not, but it reveals many issues around women. Our observations indicated that these issues were parallel to unsustainable consumption patterns, the role of women in society, and globalization. This journey to our roots together with other participants is still going on. We have listened to many stories that wanted to be heard, many of them kept secret for the last thirty to forty years. The women that we interviewed were modern, educated, and strong individuals; but still, they encountered social and familial pressure about marriage in their early 20s. With this manifesto -which is also translated into Turkish- we aim to reach out to non-profits, organizations, and companies that value women’s work and create real social impact with our speculative design proposals. The manifesto works as a discussion starter around the issues entangled within çeyiz tradition and leads us to envision scenarios that would turn the already existing transformation into “possible, preferable, probable futures” (Hancock et al, 1994) in speculative co-design workshops.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1986). Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (pp. 3-63). Cambridge University Press.
doi:10.1017/CBO9780511819582.003
- Auger, J. (2013). Speculative design: crafting the speculation, *Digital Creativity*, 24(1), 11-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2013.767276>
- Cipolla, C. & Peruccio, P. P. (2008). *Changing the Change Design, Visions, Proposals and Tools Proceedings*. Allemandi Conference Press.
- Dunne, A. & Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. The MIT Press.
- Hancock, T. & Bezold, C. (1994). Possible Futures, Preferable Futures. *Healthcare Forum Journal*, (March/April), 23-29.
- Kopytoff, I. (1986). The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (pp. 64-92). Cambridge University Press.
doi:10.1017/CBO9780511819582.004
- Lindley, J., Sharma, D. & Potts, R. (2014). Anticipatory Ethnography: Design Fiction as an Input to Design Ethnography. *Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Proceedings, 2014*(1), 237-253.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1559-8918.01030>
- Mitrovic, I. (2015, May 10). *Introduction to Speculative Design Practice – Eutopia, a Case Study*.
<http://interakcije.net/en/2015/05/10/introduction-to-speculative-design-practice-eutopia-a-case-study-2/>
- Star, S. L. & Griesemer, J. (1989). Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. *Social Studies of Science*. 19(3), 387-420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030631289019003001>