Storyforming

Experiments in creating discursive engagements between people, things, and environments

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Abstract

This thesis introduces and critically reflects on a design programme, Storyforming, that explores ways to design objects and places to enrich daily life narratives. Using an experimental design approach, the goal is to exemplify and explore this idea with discursive artefacts that, through their physical and temporal form, act as catalysts in the construction of meaningful experiences.

In the current sustainability discourse, behavioural change has been pointed out as a key factor in achieving a sustainable society. Historically, design has been very effective in increasing production and consumption behaviours by creating new types of needs and, in a way, manufacturing desire (Forty, 1986). Drawing on this, the overarching aim of this thesis is the investigation of the ways design, through a suggested programme, can afford alternative types of meaningful experiences in contrast to the prevailing consumer culture.

The empirical work reported in the thesis stems from several research projects looking into the matter of energy use in relation to design. In addition, two of the projects have been carried out in the author’s own design practice. Some concepts are explored more in-depth—involving events such as field studies, situated interviews, workshops, prototype building, design interventions in the form of domestication probes, and contextual studies ranging from a few weeks up to a year—while other concepts exist only as sketches or photo montages. The diversity of these concepts, the design experiments, helps span a design space becoming a new provisional design programme. The idea for this programme has evolved from observations and reflections made throughout the experiments presented in the thesis.

The general results are the suggested approach of Storyforming, which focuses on the design of artefacts supporting daily narratives that can be used to create engagement, meaning, and alternative values applicable to the discourse of sustainable behaviour.

Specific contributions are the selection of design experiments. In the thesis, the experiments have first been examined from the perspective of stories and forming as a basis for the new programme formulation. Through this articulation of the programme, the experiments are revisited through three leitmotifs, part of the provisional programme focusing on different properties related to the aspect of forming. From the perspective of the user, these themes—seeing and accessing designs, exploring and expressing complexity, and sharing experiences and negotiating use—are finally elaborated on in relation to other theoretical concepts as well as their implications for future research.

Keywords: Interaction design, sustainable design, research through design, critical design