

Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

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IS CHANGE AS GOOD AS A HOLIDAY? - USING METAPHYSICAL BONDS TO DESIGN ENDURING CHANGE

Two new design research methods are presented that will assist designers trying to understand how to generate lasting commitment to change in sustainable products, services and behaviours.

Abstract

They say that a change is as good as a holiday. Who 'they' are has been lost in time so we cannot question why they thought this might be so. But if change is to be considered a good thing (like a holiday) then what is it about a holiday that is good and by association makes change a good thing? A holiday takes us away from the ordinary and everyday. It is the degree of difference (change) between our everyday experiences and those experienced on the holiday that make the change so recognisable and usually, pleasurable.

Two things are necessary to recognise in this condition of change. The first is to become aware of what it is about our everydayness that by contrast allows us to recognise the change. The second is the ability to determine what it is about the holiday experience (aka. change) that brings about such a positive reaction to the perceived differential to the everyday.

The holiday is made more memorable by making sure it is different to the everyday. This paper will firstly present new methods for structuring and bringing to consciousness those aspects of the everyday which are easily and commonly overlooked. This is to establish a clear understanding of the basis from which any change might be developed.

Having established this basis and having developed a deep familiarity with the complexity of the everyday, we can then begin to explore the metaphysical aspects of a 'changed everyday' and so begin to understand the aspects of the change which create such positive and lasting relationships to it. This is the basis for the second set of design research methods (tools) presented in this paper.

...and this can be useful to sustainability how?

It is largely our bond with the metaphysical that underwrites our attachment to things, events and even to change. It is the nature of this bond that will help determine the direction and strength of our commitment to any changes proposed. If design is to provide the seeds for sustainable change in terms of new products, services, service systems or lifestyle changes then it must understand the metaphysical bonding agents that people will respond to and also the new bonds these new socio-technical systems are likely create within their recipients. Designers need to design experiences (incorporating the everyday and the metaphysical) which consumers want to own and value. This

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requires a deeper level of understanding of the conditions underpinning the change being induced and whether they are likely to create an effective and lasting bond with its recipients.

The design community has long been aware that greater acceptance and commitment to sustainable products, patterns of behaviour and modes of thinking are needed to achieve the level and direction of change required for a sustainable future. By understanding the complexity of our everyday experiences and the metaphysical bonds that create the strongest attachments to them, designers and decision makers will be able to more successfully achieve the dual goals of satisfying customer needs in a more sustainable manner. It appears that we know what we have to do. We know we have to do it now. We are just not sure of how to go about it. The tools presented in this paper can help in real and tangible ways to achieve these goals.

Recent university trials in Australia and Germany provided interesting and encouraging results using this type of development of everyday and metaphysical meaning. The research explored phenomenological and hermeneutical methodologies to gather material and probe deeper layers of experiential data from diverse sources. This paper presents the methods so developed, the experience of students using these experimental methods, the outcomes they achieved and the usefulness they foreshadow for sustainable design. They are immediately useful in sustainable design activities such as design for longevity, design for social equity and universal design however, the understanding generated in designers using these methods is also useful in design decisions affecting all stages of the product/service lifecycle.