

Designing for a Relationship other than Use

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Creating a design typically involves the creation of some kind of functionality, a use, the motivation for bringing the object into being. However in the creation of functionality other potential practices and other relations than just that of use are also brought into being. The artefact will interact with, influence and be influenced by the contextual conditions in which it is embedded in ways that extend far beyond its functional purpose. In this dissertation I describe how the concept of 'pre-use' has been used as a way of exploring another kind of relation that can exist between people and designed objects, a more indirect one than use, and show how this has provided opportunities for design.

The central contribution of this dissertation is the conceptualisation exploration, investigation, and critical assessment of 'pre-use', as a design domain. 'Pre-use' and 'pre-users' are compared to the role of the concepts of 'use' and 'users' in design. Then through the example of a constructive design research project run in collaboration with two companies who manufacture medical devices, the deployment of these concepts as tools for design are described and unique characteristics of working with them are outlined.

Two indirect strategies of design enquiry, exploring controversy through abstraction and combining controversy with recognisability, are introduced as a means to address the sensitivity needed for working with pre-users, in order not to confront them with aspects of the project objective that may compromise their sense of identity. The characteristics of the design space that is created when exploring pre-use are also described, including a strategy of crafting solvable problems as a means of working with the initial openness of the design space. Additionally the notion of 'design complements' is introduced as a way to describe the specific kinds of design outcomes that have been produced from this process, and the presentation of these design outcomes as part of an exhibition which was intended to inspire and provoke the companies is described.

The final contribution of this dissertation is to broaden the notion of exploring relationships other than use beyond pre-use. Two approaches are suggested for navigating design spaces defined by relationships other than use. These involve conceptualising the networks of practices in which use is embedded and considering designed objects as multiple. It is argued that by deliberately removing the user as a central focus of the design process and instead focusing on other kinds of relationships to designed objects, opportunities that might otherwise have remained invisible come into view.

Overall this work introduces an approach for designing for relationships other than use that can be used as a supplement to existing user centred and participatory design approaches. This approach can be used as a way to add new perspectives to design processes which put people in the centre.