

DESIGNING FOR ATMOSPHERIC EXPERIENCES – TAKING AN ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH TO INTERACTION DESIGN

2014
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This dissertation addresses the topic of how to design for atmospheres in the overlap between interaction design and architecture. The research follows an industrial Ph.D. program in collaboration with the Alexandra Institute Ltd. and the Aarhus School of Architecture. The dissertation is based on experimental design work and comprises six peer-reviewed publications, which are framed by a general overview that puts the arguments in the papers into perspective. Furthermore, generative approaches to the topic of the dissertation are presented in the form of an analytical model and a design tool, ATEX cards, to facilitate designers in the process of making.

The starting point for the research is the conviction that too much technology is designed with a narrow focus on the digital device. Certainly, trajectories towards more spatial and embodied qualities of technology are finding footholds in interaction design, but still, we designers neglect how people's interactions with, experiences with, and interpretations of the device are also colored by the timbre of the situation. To acknowledge this, a new vocabulary is needed. To establish this, I position the research at the intersection of furniture design, interaction design, and atmosphere research and illustrate how these domains are vehicles for new knowledge on atmospheric experiences in two ways: first, by relating to the overarching theoretical aspects, and second, by pointing towards concrete design tools for reflection and action.

The first part of the contribution addresses the theoretical grounds for atmospheres in interaction design. The concept of the *middle ground experience* is introduced as an overarching perspective denoting the

unarticulated perceptible design space between our cognitive foreground and peripheral background awareness. This establishes the foundation for introducing atmosphere in interaction design based on phenomenological and pragmatic thinking. The concept of the *atmospheric experience* is positioned in the field of experience design to emphasize how the contextual space is inhabited by affective and social qualities which exist on conscious and non-conscious levels. Finally, I discuss how the atmospheric perspective differs from related research, notably the ambient and affective discourses in interaction design.

The second and larger part of the contribution relates to the research approach: researching through design practice. The research is founded on a range of design experiments, and I highlight the experimental design processes of two interactive furniture prototypes, Kidkit and coMotion, and how they elicit design sensitivities within the topic of investigation. Furthermore, the experiments illustrate the broadness of designing for atmospheric experiences on an expansive continuum of methodological and theoretical strands. Within the overarching perspective of the atmospheric experience, the experimental design work thus points towards new dimensions of analysis of atmospheric experiences, whereas a concluding analytical model and design tool, ATEX cards, embody how to design for atmospheric experiences in the field of interaction design, thus enabling designers to make more deliberate choices for interactive environments and products.

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