Smart Cities, Design Fiction

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Origins

- PhD research about future orientation in R&D
- 2009 journal article on ‘vision’ videos
- Recent research & consultancy (EU Capital of Culture 2012)

http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=a42371
this talk

- Understanding the ‘smart city’ as a discursive regime
- Exploring ‘design fiction’ as a means of laying claim to ‘smart city’ futures
‘Smart Cities’

**Discursive regime**

Freights a number of interconnected discourses that justify and perpetuate understandings of ‘smart-ness’ in an urban environment. Including:

- Commercial agenda to sell intelligent infrastructures
- Future oriented R&D agenda for ubiquitous computing
- Emerging systems of technocratic governance
‘Smart’ capabilities

Hinge on sensors, processors & storage/analysis capacities developed in a range of tech. arenas.

Also developed in parallel & in relation to development of imaginative geographies of automation in both work and leisure.
'Design Fiction' describes ways of using storytelling techniques, especially in the form of video, to make speculative design ideas feel ‘real’
Microsoft ‘future visions’

Please see the Microsoft ‘Future vision of productivity’ video, available on YouTube:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6cNdhOKwi0

See also Microsoft’s ‘Office Labs’, who created the video:
“cinematic depictions of future technologies are what I term diegetic prototypes that demonstrate to large public audiences a technology’s need, benevolence and viability”

“Diegetic prototypes have a major rhetorical advantage even over true prototypes: in the fictional world – what film scholars refer to as the diegesis – these technologies exist as ‘real’ objects that function properly and which people actually use”

David Kirby, Manchester University
A “paratext” is “[m]ore than a boundary, or a sealed border, [it] is, rather, a threshold” that “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction”

Gérard Genette (1997)
THINKING THROUGH product invention new grammar ‘reality effect’ TALKING ABOUT

DESIGN (GOOD) DESIGN FICTION

COMMUNICATION

Adapted from: http://www.flickr.com/photos/bergstudio/5431153476/
THINKING
THROUGH
product
concept

FEELING
affective
response

new
grammar

‘reality
effect’

COMMUNICATION

TALKING
ABOUT

DESIGN
Affective response

- following Deleuze – affect is simultaneously a physical phenomenon & an ‘impersonal force’ ~ ‘substrate of feeling’ (Connolly 2002)
- prospective experience - emerges from within sets of relations to disclose the creation of potentiality
- ‘trans-personal’ attunement to potential technologies ‘as if’ they already exist

For more, please see: “Representing ‘things to come’”

http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=a42371
Bodies
  Touch

Gesture

Affective response
Anticipatory practices

- anticipatory practices ‘do more than gather the knowledge necessary to know futures’
- anticipatory practices establish the presence of what has not happened and may never happen - an ‘indeterminate potentiality’ (Massumi)
Catalysts for anticipation

- using the future as a tool – idea of the future becomes a thing to be manipulated

- performative anticipation – the representation of the future, seen as an artefact, shapes the present in which it performs
Politics of anticipation

- “Politics is the art of [conditioning] the possible”
  – Otto von Bismarck (adapted)
- marking & coding of futurity in practice
- communities of practices ‘institute’ meaning
- apparently ‘immaterial’ discourse of anticipation
given materiality by practices
- futurity is situated in the living present

For more please see: ‘Practising tomorrows?’, PhD thesis
Alternative anticipation

Please see the ‘Open City’ website for the European Capital of Culture Guimarães 2012 programme to view the alternative ‘smart city’ video:

http://watershed.co.uk/opencity/commissions/commission-3/
Questions

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