

SYNAESTHES: SPECULATIVE PROTOTYPE

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ABSTRACT

Synaesthesia is the physical outcome of a design through research project, which by speculating and imagining extreme future scenarios explores the area of archiving and accessing past experiences. In its form it is a fully functional prototype, and stands as proof of concept.

KEYWORDS

demo installation, design through research, design fiction, interaction design, senses, synaesthesia, memory, reminiscence, experience

INTRODUCTION

The interactive prototype was developed as the result of a series of design experiments that range widely from qualitative research based on material experiments, taste and smell sample tests, experiments inspired by reminiscence therapy, pastiche scenarios to digital sound design and frequency studies, among others.

The starting point of the design research was established as a speculative and extreme future scenario, in which each single individual has the same memory chip implanted, so that individual past experiences are no more accessible. Meanings and values are designed and controlled by an unknown higher power, and the individual has no affect on and decision regarding his stored memories.

The design research project aims to answer the following question: What if our memories are controlled, and homogenized on an individual basis.

The outcome aims to answer this question via a speculative design sketch building around the use of senses, which closely investigates synaesthesia as an important element of the design experiments.

It also considers the users in the extreme future scenario, and explores alternative ways of discovering, archiving and accessing memories, so that these are not to be decoded by the controlling power, but only the individual himself.

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

The user meets a relatively simple installation setup consisting of a tangible user interface, a set of speakers or headphones, and a computer. The latter displays an application created in the programming software Max MSP specifically for the interactive prototype.



Figure 1: Total view of prototype

The interface guides the user through 9 steps, each dedicated to a short action. To sum up the steps the user is asked to walk through a recipe for making scented fresh dough:

- 1) choosing and mixing the flavours
- 2) indicating the amount of drops of each chosen flavour (a maximum of 3 drops of each essence is allowed by the system); momentary switches are installed for this reason
- 3) indicating when the essence is done; a momentary switch of a different colour is installed for this reason
- 4) mixing the ingredients for the dough,
- 5) by emptying 3 different fillings into a mixing bowl
- 6) using a mixing spoon to blend the ingredients
- 7) working this sticky dough into a firm one
- 8) use a cookie cutter to shape a key out of the dough, and finally
- 9) place the key-shaped dough into place (indicated by an engraved key shape on the wooden interface, implementing a switch button), which will activate, play and save a soundscape file being formed from the individual essence mix

Now the user is able to find the saved sound file on the computer desktop, and use his USB to take it with him. Each file is archived with an individual numeric code, existing of the current date and time and the actual drop mix.

These steps are illustrated in the explanatory video [1].

In the speculative future design context some of the above described steps are corresponding to some extended functions.

When asking for an essence mix, the user is actually asked for mixing his 'special atmosphere', and has to pick 0-3 drops of the moods 'warmth', 'depth', 'focus' and 'fresh'. These are in reality referring to aroma flavours of mint, vanilla, coffee and citrus. Moreover the dough-made key functions as an accessing key in itself – as it hardens within a short amount of time, the user is capable of taking it with him, and collect a series of these individual keys. Not only the individually mixed scent is able to evoke memories (past experiences), but it leaves the design space to open for implementation of a home device capable of decoding the essence mixes in forms of the corresponding soundscapes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The design research project was developed during the course 'Future Spaces' at the Kolding Design School during Fall 2013. The author would like thank the two instructors, Eva Knutz and Thomas Markussen, for their passionate and visionary teaching and their guidance.

REFERENCING

[1] Link to documentation video:
<https://vimeo.com/storiesonwhite/synaesthes>