MOVING STORIES

Eva Brandt, Maria Hellström, Anna Brag & Isa Hardemo
Space and Virtuality Studio
Interactive Institute
Beijerskajen 8
SE-205 06 Malmö, Sweden
+46 40 665 7117
[eva.brandt, maria.hellstrom, anna.brag, isa hardemo]@interactiveinstitute.se

ABSTRACT

Today, designing for home environments call for new design approaches, which are able to more fully embrace the complexity of modern living. The preliminary methodological 'thesis' of Moving Stories is that the interrogation of spaces of experience and reflection, of *lifeworlds*, require design approaches and forms of representations that are likewise experiential and reflective. In the *Moving Stories* project ethnographically inspired methods were mixed with artistic ways of working, as an alternative way of organizing and representing the design process. The result includes a *video-installation* and a series of *booklets* with stories based upon material gathered from five households in the process of moving from one home to another. The participating researchers represented the three different professional fields of engineering, art and interaction design reflecting different perspectives on both methods and goals. The informants were at various stages in life, and the moves made them reflect upon different aspects of both time and space. Finally, the combinatory *installation* as a form of representation, is in this case not an attempt to make art, but an answer to the interdisciplinary field as well as to the manifold time-space of relocating — on the one hand an intermediary recess between the past and the future, on the other a space in formal transition.

Keywords

Design approaches, home environments, life world experiential space, intermediary space, ethnography, art and action research, installation as combinatory display.

THE HOME AS LIFEWORLD

Designing for home environments still seems to be a process defined from the point of view of technology, either in terms of rationalization or in terms of surveillance — a process often driven forward without the considering of the

home as such.

Many IT designers experience this as a lack of methodologies for how to inquire into the role of information technology in home environments. Most often they are trained to design for work settings where the dominating approach can be characterized as 'finding and fixing problems', a system oriented approach aiming at predictability and efficiency.

We started of with a vague idea of the home as a deviation from what could be called rational space, as a *different* kind of space calling for a *different* approach. More than a functional space it should be treated as a personal space, defined from an individual and phenomenological point of view — a *lifeworld* rather than a *system.* Consequently, instead of defining problems we wanted to focus on specificities, on details, on the personal and perhaps even irrational, on the complex accumulation of experiences in and around the spaces we call home.

ART AND ACTION RESEARCH

The goal of our research therefore, is twofold. On the one hand we aim at developing methods of research better suited for the inquiry into spaces of experience and everyday life. This includes the appropriating of the forms of representing these experiential spaces in the design process, focusing on intermediary rather than demonstrative qualities. On the other hand there is a secondary goal of developing design visions for such a space as the home, visions with the capacity of broadening and augmenting different aspects of dwelling rather than the narrowing down of life to the level of problem solving and control.

Within an *action research* format [8] we apply a user-centered design approach engaging in a dialogue with participants/informants throughout the design projects [2, 4]. Crucial to this approach is the openness in the perception of space; the ability to grasp space, not as a fixed set of relations but as a space in transition, spaces as
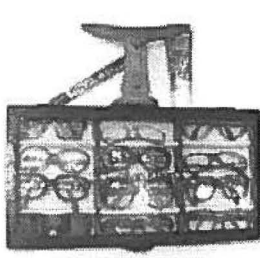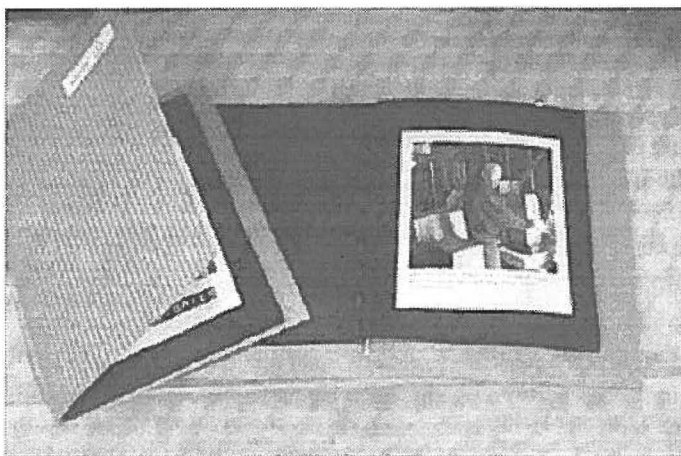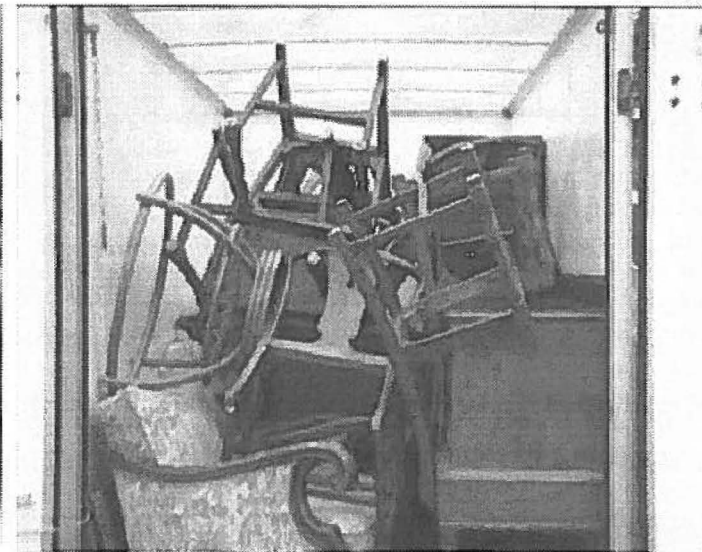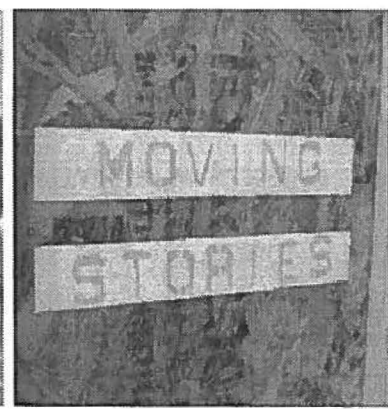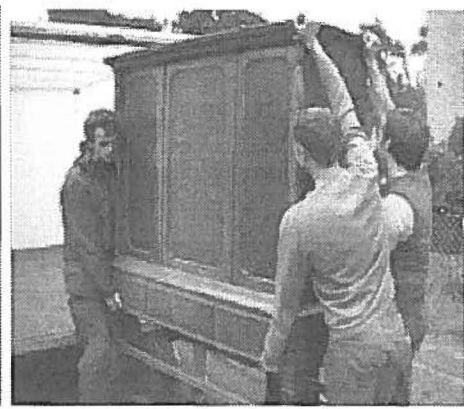
temporary formations, as still undefined or vaguely defined, slight differences and changes, space as bodily experience etc. If the *lifeworld* could be understood as *"the totally of objects that can be known through experience"* [7], the home could be understood as a micro version of such a lifeworld. This phenomenological approach when extended to include also the design process as such, come closer to something that could be called an *artistic* method, due to its focusing on the experiential and individual.

In the case of *Moving Stories* this implied a stressing not only of a reflective and experiential approach to the *object of investigation* but also emphasizing a *self-reflection* in the design process as such [6]. Thus, the success of the action research depends on its ability to handle a situation where total openness is desirable but impossible, and in such a situation art can provide the means for staging a dialogue that contains its own critique.


This is the reason for our emphasizing the setting up of temporary spaces of experience, or *temporary design labs*, where stakeholders — like potential future users/dwellers and R&D representatives from the industry — take part in inquiry and design on a collaborative basis. The aim is that they participate in a series of workshops, and that these are central in the further development of the project [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. We mean that the workshops should be understood as more than an occasion of feedback, but as *intermediary spaces of experience*, each one to be temporary furnished and explored.

THE MOVING STORIES PROJECT

Our interest for the home environment derives both from its format as a conceivable experiential unit, a space with a scale related to the human body, and to the fact that the home is a space that reflects the broader transitions of modern society. This was also the reason why we, in the "Moving Stories" project, chose to follow people moving from one home to another, people in the process of de- and reconstructing their homes, thereby reflecting over the different aspects of dwelling and the different components of a home.

Five different households participated in the project. Their stories were recorded on video from the point of packing, through the actual move, to the unpacking and furnishing of the new home. This documentation gave us an opportunity to learn more about the transformation of intimate space and of space as a situation where the past, the present and the future are brought together.
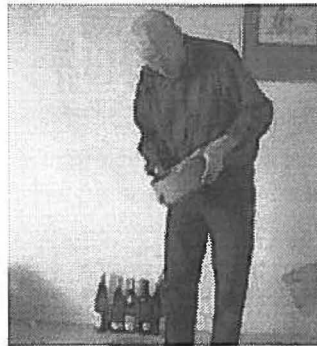
INSTALLATION AS COMBINATORY DISPLAY

The project was based on ethnographically inspired methods, which here signifies the collection of personal stories, where self-reflection and space construction are brought together in a video recording. We elaborated artistic ways of editing and representing, such as collages and combinatory displays (installations), where the artistic also could be regarded as an *intuitive* component. In a research situation *intuition* should be understood as a way of merging *our own experiences* of dwelling and relocating with the survey material. We mean that this is inevitable in all forms of re-presentation, but that it becomes more crucial in processes dealing with this kind of qualitative interpretation and evaluation of experiences. Thus, the final video installation, presented in the form of a moving container or packing box, was also an attempt to grasp certain *unarticulated* aspects of a home, through a combination of film clips, where the viewer meets people in the middle of their moving processes, combined with a presentation of items that had been left behind by the people moving.

Consequently, the *unarticulated* emerged in form of a gap between the actual stories told and the collection of left-overs presented. Furthermore, to reinforce the actual stories embedded in the film clips, we also produced a

series of small booklets with pictures and quotations from the video material. With this material as a starting point we arranged two collaborative design workshops focusing one the gathering of additional experiences and reflections of the process of moving.

Throughout the collection of *Moving Stories* our preliminary ideas were strengthened as well as problematized. We found that the home environment represents aspects of both memory and visions, that it can be understood as conserving or stabilizing as well as a space for experiment and change. It represents an intersection between the need for privacy and identity formation on the one hand, and the need for an individualized yet highly communicative — and mobile — stage setting. Throughout a collaborative process that consisted in filming, collecting items and stories, editing, representing, re-representing and installing, we managed to condensate a number of rubrics out of the material, to be utilized as trajectories in a further design process.

SUMMARY

When opening up the task of designing to be more collaborative, embracing also the stage of concept or vision formation, it is necessary to find ways of collaborating across various competencies, interests and experiences. We do this by providing *intermediary spaces* to be furnished, using artistic techniques, and creating props for collaborative inquiry and design [2, 4, 6]. These approaches have earlier been successfully used in projects developing products for various work contexts [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

Building upon these experiences we have tried to adapt our ways of working to fit into the designing for home environments. Within the over-arching research theme of *Future Living* we have earlier been struggling trying to abandon the diagnostic and problem-solving approach of industrial design. The home, more than perhaps any other kind of space, is a space that can vary but never be *wrong*; a *potential* space rather than a problematic one. We have found that paying more attention to the ethnographically inspired gathering of experiences is a fruitful way of avoiding the narrowing down of a strictly functional approach. However this might appear to slow down the design process in terms of tangible results, our

research has shown that home environments — as *lifeworlds* — cannot be described in terms of needs and functions only, and thus *do not present any obvious design tasks* to be carried through. The design tasks emerge in a dialogue with the environment. Consequently, the home as an open space of bodily experience and self-reflection calls for intermediary objects of augmented meaning rather than functional objects of appropriate utility. With these experiences in mind we have found it necessary to put an even stronger focus on developing new and interrogative ways of working within the *Future Living* research theme. An outcome of the project was the heightened awareness of the central importance of an interdisciplinary approach in the development of quality-oriented strategies in user-centered design. The project was based upon the collaboration between engineers, artists and an interaction designer; intertwining ethnographic and artistic methods in order to give priority to semantic rather than rational notions of private space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

1. Binder, Thomas, Brandt, Eva, Horgen, Turid, Zack, Gregory. Staging Events of Collaborative Design and Learning. In *Proceedings of the Concurrent Engineering conference, Tokyo, 1998.*

2. Brandt, Eva and Binder, Thomas. Customer/user Workshops in Product Development – Creating Fora for Collaboration between Competencies. In *Proceedings for the International Conference on Engineering Design*, Tampera, Finland, 1997.

3. Brandt, Eva and Grunnet, Camilla. Evoking the Future: Drama and Props in User Centered Design. In *Proceedings of the Participatory Design Conference. New York, 2000.*

4. Brandt, Eva. *Event Driven Product Development: Collaboration and Learning.* Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Technology and Social Sciences, Technical University of Denmark. 2001.

5. Buur, Jacob, Binder, Thomas, and Brandt, Eva. Taking Video beyond 'Hard Data' in User Centered Design. In *Proceedings of the Participatory Design Conference. New York 2000.*

6. Hellström, Maria, and Brandt, Eva, *Oro i designlabbet* (Anxiety in the design lab), to appear in På väg mot det oväntade#1 - Friktion (On the way to the unexpected - frisction), Anders Emilson (ed), Forthcoming, Raster Forlag, 2002.

7. Husserl, Edmund, *Ideas; general introduction to pure phenomenology*, Library of Philophy. London, Allen & Unwin; New York, 1969 (1913).

8. Whyte, William Foote (ed), *Participatory Action Research.* Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991.