

**experiency**

Vision Media & Design Academy

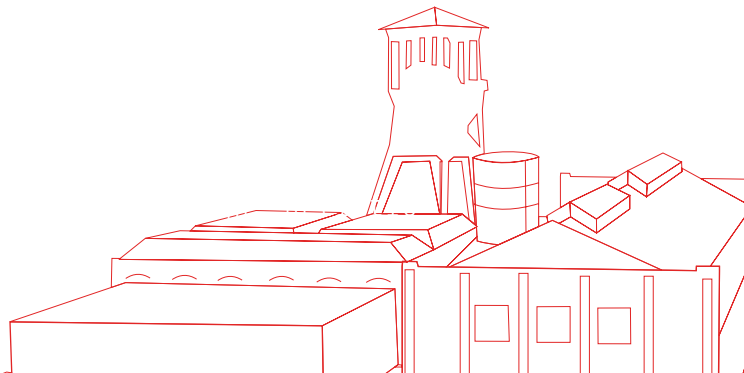
Design Research

Experiency

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Within the Media & Design Academy (MDA, KHLim) in Genk research is seen as part of innovative design. Design research creates knowledge and therefore it is more than a mere evaluation of already existing ideas [LAUREL, 2001]. The research center *Mediawatch* within MDA has been looking for creative design solutions with an imaginative character for several years now, hereby taking into account the company's goals and the user's needs. The renewed research laboratory has denominated what has always been a leitmotif throughout the research in MDA, namely "Experiency". Until now, this approach was known mainly in a commercial environment where "experiences" were seen as "points of contact" between people and brands. The last couple of years several ideas about experience design in non-commercial and educative environments have been pouring in. The Media & Design Academy is a synonym for multidisciplinary and human-centred design education and research. Here the "experience design" approach fits extremely well since its aim is to create experiences for people in each medium [SHEDROFF, 2006]. It is interesting that within this framework people are more than just "users" [BOLTER & GRONALA, 2003]. Don Norman even argues that designers who consider people to be consumers or users would be incapable of "good" design. We all are designers, he says [NORMAN, 2003]. A good design should invite people to participate, act and react. Information in other words needs to be an experience [BOLTER, 2003]. In this text we would like to go more deeply into a number of essential points and dimensions of the experience design research.

A new type of cell is ready to be injected in the living tissue of the Media & Design Academy, a cell which shares many characteristics with the ones already present and yet is different. In careful ways it has been designed to perform a manifold of functions, each and every single one of them aimed at strengthening and enhancing the existing organism, the Media & Design Academy, within its ever evolving context. As such, the Experiency Cell will form a joint, a nexus of interaction between educational staff and students to work together across and beyond disciplinary boundaries on design related research projects with 'experience' at its core. Simultaneously, the Experiency Cell will be a muscle to help shape change through design in the many societal contexts within which projects will be set. Last but not least, the cell will be skin as it will be a touching point between academy, business and society, working together to design solutions for today's and tomorrow's needs and challenges. As such the Experiency Cell has been conceived as a unique point of reference in Flanders and beyond regarding the field of experience design, a meeting space within the Media & Design Academy and the wider national and international context in which the school, its people and its ideas operate [TASSINARI, 2006].



## research and research on design

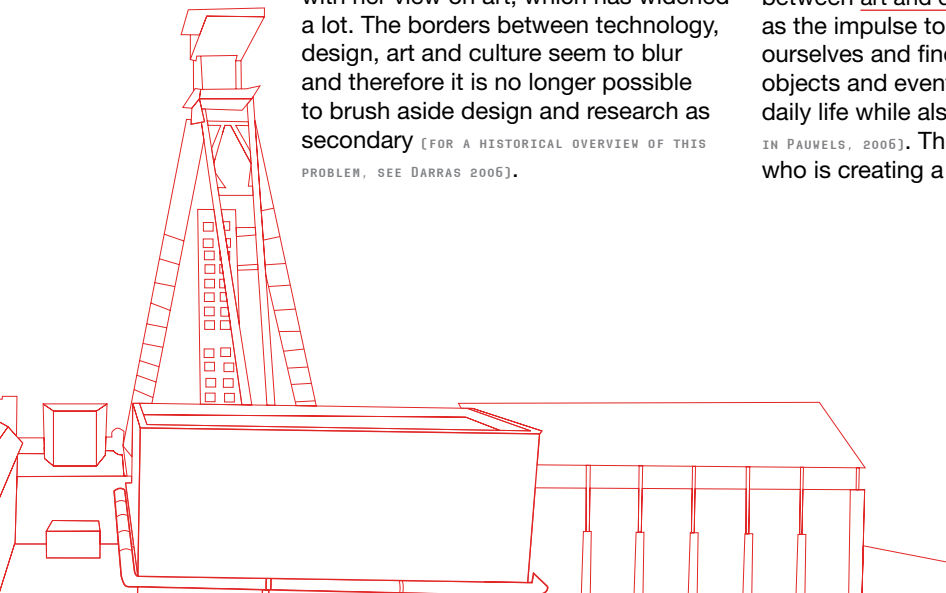
Both art and technology are established by man in a specific and constantly moving cultural context. It is impossible to separate art, culture and technology from each other (GERE, 2006) and design is one of the aspects of human action where this interaction has taken a prominent position. Designers developed the characteristics of technology to facilitate its use and to make it more pleasant, among other things. However, they obviously can't force the users to slavishly make use of it. The shaped image does not simply stand between a human being and the object that needs to be known, but also structures the studied field (PAUWELS, 2006).

Under the influence of the classical Western thought strongly associating art with concepts like unselfishness and asceticism (from the maker and receiver's point of view) and lack of efficiency (from the object's point of view), the whole area of design (and of technology and science in general) is being underrated in comparison with the "pure" arts. This traditional view no longer corresponds with the way a modern, mediatised and technologically highly developed society functions and with her view on art, which has widened a lot. The borders between technology, design, art and culture seem to blur and therefore it is no longer possible to brush aside design and research as secondary (FOR A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THIS PROBLEM, SEE DARRAS 2006).

When trying to apprehend the procedure for design research, the theoretic tripartite structure of "design science" by Simon can be very interesting. He speaks of an "inner environment" or the entity of components out of which the artefact has been built and their mutual relationships, an "outer environment" or the external forces acting on the artefact and the interface between them (SIMON, 1996). Vaishnavi and Kuechler, building on Simon, consider design to be the establishment of that interface. Design is knowledge in the form of methods and techniques to perform the "mapping" of space with, while during the process implementing an artefact that responds to a set of functional demands (VAISHNAVI EN KUECHLER, 2006).

## experience design

Design not only is cognitive or functional, but also carries an aesthetic dimension which, considering this subject, is not to be underestimated. Tufte, one of the best-known contemporary designers emphasizes the aesthetic pleasure in visualising. Analogous to John Dewey in "Art and Experience", he sees the relationship between art and daily life (DEWEY, 1980) as the impulse to start committing ourselves and finding meaning in objects and events that pleasure us in daily life while also constructing it (GRADY IN PAUWELS, 2006). This means the designer who is creating a pleasant experience



for the user, actually cares about the human well-being and the daily living space [DARRAS, 2006]. This corresponds to one of Don Norman's designing principles. Design becomes part of our lives, so he says, as soon as interacting with designing features becomes fun (like some places, people, events and things stirring special emotional feelings) and even helps defining our place within society [NORMAN, 2003]. Tufte also intends to involve other disciplines like performance, plastic arts in the process of development [TUFTE, 1983]. To him, design is a "complete" event that goes further than visualization and even interacts with other systems.

Brenda Laurel in her book "*Computers as Theatre (1991)*" indicated that during the design of computer applications, it should be kept in mind that they will not only be "used", but also "performed" and "experienced" [LAUREL, 1991]. Designing an artefact is the same as shaping an experience, a choreography of the user's experience. Therefore, design should not pretend to be a window [NIELSEN, 1999], but should also be a mirror of the context people live in. If we only choose to look through the interface, we will be unable to appreciate the way in which it manages to shape our experience [BOLTER & GROMALA, 2003, p.8-27]. Involving the experience and the user's body in the designing activity [DELEUZE, 1989], is a leitmotiv in the research of "Experiency". It is situated in an experience design discourse which puts emphasis on experiencing

through several senses, and reacting against merely functionalistic designing approaches. The interface is seen as a shared context of action [LAUREL, 1993, p. 5].

Disciplines like cognitive psychology, ergonomics, graphic and sound design are becoming more and more involved in the designing process. The performative and representational force of arts are able to break down barriers people are often confronted with when making use of an interface. Interfaces offering the possibility of immediate manipulation and direct involvement, intend to overcome those obstacles. The emotional and cognitive processes that are involved, turn the human-computer activity into a "designed experience" where applications and interface come together. The quality is not simply a matter of aesthetics of the design, but of "*representing an action in which people can participate*" [LAUREL, 1993, p. 1].

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