LIVING

WITHOUT

SANCTUARY
Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Design

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Abstract

Through their close interconnection with technology, humans and their needs within society are rapidly changing. Technology slowly but firmly introduces us to new ways of living. This process happens so smoothly, that we don’t really get a chance to choose or refuse this new way of life. One of these socially influential technologies is photography. Apart from its relevance as an art practice, its general role has shifted from a memory-creating tool to an even more documentative one. The camera can be considered a prosthesis which enables our eyes to see more, and differently. It expands our visual abilities as well as influencing our memory. At the same time though, it might disable us when it comes to experiencing a moment authentically. How much do we gain and how much do we lose when introducing photography into a moment?

The camera as a prosthesis has already grown to be a crucial organ for human beings, but it remains a technical extension for our bodies. Could evolution respond to this new need of ours by genetically and organically adapting our bodies in some way?

By making use of speculative design methods, this project explores the possibility of a future society in which evolution has equipped us with an organic documentative organ as a response to our current needs, based on our relationship with photography. Comparable to lungs that provide us with oxygen, the new organ’s purpose would be to create a perfect documentation of one’s life and to communicate it to others. In this possible future society, our bodies would naturally and automatically fulfil the task of constant documentation, which would take away the option of choosing which moments to document and share. In other words, we would be the observing subject and the observed object, anywhere, anytime. What would life be like in a world that is public space, one where there is no sanctuary? How would we interact? What would that mean to concepts like security, memory, empathy? And first and foremost, what does that mean to life as we are living it now? Through imagining a possible future society, this project aims to raise questions about our current use of photography and the surrounding ethics.
1. Introduction

During my studies, I have gradually found out that for me, in order to create meaningful design, it is first and foremost important to have a creative way of looking at the world. I consider this a precondition for detecting subtle issues that I as a designer can then try to work on. Design is for me more and more a social action than anything else. My main source of inspiration is people and their behaviour in and with their environment. Even though my educational background is in commercial graphic design, I have lost interest in the conventional role of a designer who creates desirable goods of consumption or promotes them in sophisticated ways. It seems that there are enough designers who take care of our wants rather than our needs. I see my future role as a designer in designing for our needs rather than our wants by creating precious services and opportunities. In short, to increase the quality of life through designing for all living beings.

This project has its roots in observing my own behaviour and those of others around me. I became really interested in the interaction between humans and technology and how this relationship infiltrates the human culture, values and behaviour.

This project, which I call Living without sanctuary, evolves around the relationship that people have with photography.

2. Theoretical background

In my theoretical paper I explored the social consequences that result from the interaction between humans and photography in the present. I wrote about how inserting photography into a moment might change the moment itself. A very important factor in the paper was also possible explanations for why photography plays such an important role in nowadays’ life.

Satisfaction through consumption
Could it be our drive for consumption that expands into consuming a moment through photography and therefore possessing it? Maybe we don’t only want to live a moment, but rather possess it forever. Especially consuming experiences makes people happy, as theorists have found out. In comparison to materialistic possessions, experiences are intangible and therefore are not so much subject to a rapid adaptation, which leads to a higher level of happiness.¹

Power through prosthesis
Another possible explanation for the photography-obsession could be that through its possible interpretation as a prosthesis, it extends our ability to see. It enables us to frame and freeze time, which extends our power over our environment.

Self-knowledge through visibility

Also, the wish to be distinguished from one's environment can be a reason for photography's importance in society. One of the factors that label an individual as such is what scientists and philosophers call embodiment: “[...], individuals are constituted as such through the recognition of their possession of a unique body.” Through numerous techniques in modern society, such as for example photographic portraiture, this embodiment can be recognised. Visibility and self-knowledge are closely intertwined, meaning that in order to be aware of ourselves, we need some kind of visual assurance. “[...] photography itself not a static apparatus – thus offers one way into an exploration of the historically specific and dynamic relations between seeing and knowing.” Individuals strive to be seen as such through the recognition of the possession of an own individual body.

Recognition through representation

The nature of a photograph is the representation of its referent. As Roland Barthes states “[...] [a photograph] is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope.” He points out that a photograph is always this antiphon of “Look”, “See” or “Here it is.”

Social media has different demands on photography, since its audience is fundamentally different from the traditional viewers whose main interest is what can be seen on a photo. Typical social media users do not only care about what can be seen on a photo though, but also very much how the photo looks. These two factors are determinants for achieving recognition on social media, which is manifested in so called “Likes.”

3. Design work

Having dived a bit into the theory provided me with a certain base for a practical design work. Whereas the theoretical paper discussed the status quo of photography in society, the practical work goes one step further and explores a possible future society that has evolved based on our current use of photography.

Concept

Photography has generally reached a high importance in every-day-life. The camera has be-
come an extension of our bodies that enables us to document what we are doing. While doing this, it might interfere with our experience of the actual moment itself though. Also, like Roland Barthes stated in his book *Camera Lucida* we experience a certain change of hierarchy as soon as a camera is inserted into a moment. There is the photographer, who is the observing subject in this situation and then there is the observed object, the motif that the photographer uses as his or her object of art.  

Nevertheless, documenting our lives through images and showing them to many others seems to be more important to people than it has ever been before. Even though we rely so much on our cameras, they are still just a technical extension for our bodies. Evolution is making it possible for our minds, but also for our bodies to adapt to new needs in life. Adaptability is a precondition for survival. This is the starting point of my project. It is based upon imagining a future in which our bodies have evolved based on and towards the photographic culture that we live in. I was starting to be very intrigued by speculating about the future of the human species and its social behaviour in relation to photography.

**Speculative Design**

In this project, I make use of speculative design methods in order to draw attention to our current use of photography. As the pioneers of Speculative Design, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, state in their book *Speculative Everything*: “What we are interested in […] is the idea of possible futures and using them as tools to better understand the present and to discuss the kind of future people want, and, of course, ones people do not want.” These futures are mostly expressed through scenarios that start with a “What-if” question. By asking „What-if“ they open up spaces of debate and discussion. The discussion needs scenarios that “[…] are by necessity provocative, intentionally simplified, and fictional.”

In my case for this project the what-if question is the following: What if evolution would react to our need of documenting by equipping us with an organ that would fulfill the task of documenting our lives? This organ would not be implanted or artificially created, but it would be endogenous. Its purpose would be to document one’s life just like the lungs’ purpose is to provide the body with oxygen. All the documented material would be available for others at any given time through some kind of new sense, that connects humans on another sensual level. We would not be able to decide on the moments that we want to share (like we are now), but documenting each moment would

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be a biological process, like breathing. Since we are also adapting our life to its potential for building one’s self-image, this contemporary need would also be manifested in our future DNA. What if we would be evolving towards a “superconnected me” that develops something like a sixth sense, a third eye to see people, even when they are far apart. The new documentative organ would provide the documentation of everybody’s life. In contrast to transhumanism, all this would happen on a non-technological, but purely organic level base. This is a very important detail that has to be kept in mind when imagining this future society and their dynamics. I suppose that the fact that this organ has not been implanted by an external authority but is biologically and organically grown as a part of one’s body, changes the way people would interpret and therefore live with this situation. In other words, their body is the authority, so they, themselves are the authority. They are not obeying any external source of power, but according to their own biological abilities and restrictions. The significant difference in this future society would be the additional organ and sense that makes us a documented and superconnected human species.

What is most interesting to me, is to imagine the social consequences that arise from this scenario. How would we interact with each other, with things? What would this mean to concepts like privacy, crime, security, memory, empathy? How fast would people and society adapt psychologically and socially to the new situation? Would there even need to be a phase of social and psychological adaptation or would our whole cognitive system adapt to the evolution of a new organ? What it all comes down to is that people would be living a life without sanctuary, without a safe and private space as we currently understand it. I suppose, that for many members of nowadays’ western society, this is a disturbing thought, but of course we cannot know how future societies would be experiencing this way of living.

The philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed a special structure for prison buildings that would allow one single watchman to observe all inmates at once without the inmates being able to tell whether they are being watched or not. This uncertainty of being watched or not led to a change in the inmates’ behaviour, meaning they started controlling their own behaviour constantly. They started behaving like authorities wanted them to without an actual interference by these authorities being necessary. Similar to this phenomenon, the possible future society might be adapting their behaviour to the circumstances. They won’t have any place that would be a sanctuary as we currently understand it. There are things in life though, that we in general only do when being alone or among people we trust. The future

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generation though would need to be comfortable with doing all these things publically. Using the toilet at their homes for example, would be as private or public as peeing or pooping in the streets in front of everyone. Either way, they would be watched.

Execution
A world without sanctuary would also be a world with different values. That would lead to a whole lot of new possibilities for each individual to live their lives. It could be seen as a huge opportunity for people to be closer to each other, to feel connected. Consequently, this could increase the level of empathy and therefore could make a peaceful and content coexistence possible. On the other hand, it could also scare people never to be alone, never to be unseen. This possible anxiety might lead to aggression and conflicts. It is not up to me to draw a picture of a dystopia or a eutopia. But either way, this possible future society would live according to different circumstances than we are living to currently. Everyday-life actions that nowadays in the Western World are generally considered private or even taboo subjects would then turn into actions that are normal and visible to the public.

I realised that there would consequently be a need for new kinds of tools. Tools that give people the chance to make the most out of every situation, since privacy as such won’t exist anyways. People might want to use tools that let them efficiently combine their physical and personal needs with everyday-life. Therefore, I designed three future tools as a materialization of people’s different understanding of sanctuary in a possible future society. The tools or artefacts deal with three examples of basic bodily human needs. These needs are often what we consider private, that are not ought to be shared whatsoever. I see a grotesque contradiction in how we as Western citizens are openly willing to document and share emotionally private content whilst we are keeping physically private content rigorously to ourselves. When I think about it rationally, bodily human topics could be handled way less privately, since we can assume that everyone has the same basic bodily needs. Our emotional world though, represents our individual inner life and still the general public is way more open about documenting and sharing the experience of a painful break-up than the morning bowel movement. I decided to play with this grotesque contradiction by talking about our possible future way of dealing with bodily needs, such as body-hygiene, excrement and resting. I chose these three topics because all three of them demand tools that meet certain requirements. The products will materialize my concept of a possible future society and will translate it into tangible objects. Two of the three objects are produced by a 3D-printer and finished and refined by hand. The third object is assembled by metal, fabric and plastic. The artefacts are not meant to turn into effective and working products, but they are a way of materializing the whole concept of the social structure in a possible future.
Portable excrement device

The first artefact covers the topic of excrement. Using the toilet is considered a private act. And even though everybody has to do it, it is still a topic that is generally not to be talked about or performed in public whatsoever. In a world without sanctuary though, it would automatically turn into a public act, and this, no matter where or when one would go to the loo. It would, like everything else become indefinitely visible. Consequently there would be no point in holding back when being around people. I therefore designed a portable excrement device that is in its origin a vacuum-creating container with two tubes, one for urine, one for faeces. The suction cups that are attached to the tubes create a seal between the tubes and the body. By creating a vacuum, the device guarantees a clean and neat excretion without the need for toilet paper. The look of the device is futuristic, sharp and round, made out of plastic in order to represent a cheap everyday-life product out of a possible future.
Finalised artefact
Portable body-hygiene device

The second topic I am exploring in this project is related to body-hygiene. Cleaning oneself implies touching oneself, which is to be done at home or in a safe space. In a possible future without sanctuary as we know it, the whole world would need to become a safe space. Actions like cleaning oneself could then be done wherever. The second artefact I designed is a portable body-hygiene device. It is made in the same way as the portable excrement device, cheaply out of plastic, combined with a layer of rubber on the bottom. The device cleans through sterile powder that enables the user to have a “shower” without water, on the go, at work or while waiting for the bus.
Finalised artefact
Portable resting zone
The third artefact plays with the relationship between people and their need for rest. Resting is closely related to feeling secure, cosy and comfortable. Currently, home as our sanctuary is the place that provides the needed feeling of security in order to be able to let go of stress etc. In a possible future without this kind of sanctuary, we will need to rest and recharge our batteries even without feeling secure and private. Or, we might just feel secure and private wherever. Therefore, I designed a portable resting zone that materializes this extended safe space. The design follows the looks of a snail shell, consisting of a metal skeleton, covered with a lined duvet. The metal skeleton can be assembled easily, so it can be transported and used when-and wherever one feels the need to rest.
Finalised artefact
4. Exhibition

The three artefacts are representing the social structure, values etc. of a possible future society and will therefore be the core of my exhibition at Gerðarsafn Kópavogs. Through the objects, I want to make people question the current use of photography on an everyday-base. The exhibition should not be educative nor didactic, but it should encourage the visitor to speculate about a possible future and therefore be a critical observer and actor in the present. The visual appearance of the artefacts themselves should attract people’s attention and should act as a trigger to make them reflect upon the thought behind. To offer some concrete information about the background, the project will be presented through a short text that will be played constantly as some kind of whisper in the exhibition space. It is supposed to provide background information, but mainly it should be a trigger of thoughts. Additionally, the same short text will be displayed on small cards that people will be able to take with them. These cards can be kept in a wallet or in a pocket and should therefore keep the project alive even after people have left the exhibition.

The text will give a very basic overview of the concept behind the project. Each sentence should make sense to the listener or reader individually:

In a possible future, we could be living without sanctuary. Evolution could adapt our bodies to our use of photography, to our need of documenting life. We could be born with a documentative organ. It would be an organic part of our body. It would create a perfect documentation of everyone’s life. I could see you in the bathroom. You could see me in the shower. We could see each other resting. We would have a new sense for seeing each other’s documented life. We would be a superconnected human species. There would be no sanctuary as we currently understand it. What would that mean socially? What does that mean for current life? Imagine a future society.

5. Purpose

My project addresses all of us, who are part of the photographic culture, either as active or passive members. It is supposed to show another dimension of our relationship with this technology and its surrounding ethics. The project is
not supposed to be judgemental nor didactic, it should rather draw attention to the power of the lifestyle-device “camera.” It should make it obvious that taking a photo is more than the action of pressing a button, but that it, in a subtle way, influences our culture and our way of living. Through this project, I want to invite people to be future thinkers. In my opinion, new and innovative technology slowly but firmly introduces us to new ways of living. This process happens so smoothly, that we don’t really get a chance to choose or refuse this new way of life. And before you know where you are, you find yourself in a totally different world. I think that the ability of being a better detector of hidden meaning is the only way of how we can be an active society that does not follow who-or-whatever.

6. Other ideas

The purpose of this project is first and foremost to offer another perspective on our relationship with technology, in this case photography. Therefore, I consider it important not be didactic nor educative, but to actually give people the opportunity to establish another point of view, that they might not have seen before. Attracting people’s attention is the first step in this undertaking. Before having decided on designing artefacts out of a possible future world, I was thinking about other translations of the concept. I will describe these other approaches briefly in the following chapters.

Working with miniature models or illustrations

When starting to think about how to materialize my concept, I first came up with showing actual events or situations out of a possible future society. There were two options of portraiture that came to my mind: by creating a miniature world or by illustrating. I was thinking of translating situations that could result from the speculative scenario into tangible objects. The problem that I had with this solution was that by portraying a certain situation, I would have automatically expressed my personal judgement of it. After having realised this, I soon decided to not portray a specific scenario through any kind. The inspiration for this kind of approach came from two main sources. I started to be very much inspired by the work of the Chapman brothers, a British artist duo who are creating horrific miniature worlds in order to draw attention to pressing subjects. Another source of inspiration was the work of Luigi Serafini, an Italian artist, architect, designer and illustrator who created an encyclopedia called *Codex Seraphinianus*. The encyclopedia portrays a different kind of world. He re-invented the current world by changing small details and therefore changing their whole meaning. He even created another kind of writing, so the text that you can find in the encyclopedia is to be interpreted by the reader. His work inspired me to think about using illustrations as a form of expressing the possible future society.
To live and think like pigs – Chapman Brothers
Intimacy – own illustration
Body and mind – own illustration
Watching one another – own illustration
Hiding shame – own illustration
Working with text

The difficulty for me in translating the concept into a tangible piece of speculative design was to find a way of not predetermining the viewer’s opinion. It has been very important to me not to draw a horrible nor magnificent image of our (future) society based on our relationship with photography. Working with text seemed to possibly be a way of showing actual situations without being too judgemental. I came up with the idea of writing down situations within which people would be documented. Reading those sentences should trigger some kind of emotion within the reader. I printed the sentences and made a small booklet as an experiment.

Your body documents the birth of your child.
Your body documents the argument with your partner.
Your body documents your break-up.
Your body documents what you ate yesterday night.
Your body documents your wedding day.
Your body documents you saving your neighbour’s dog.
Your body documents you doing drugs.
Your body documents you picking your nose.
Your body documents you ignoring the old man who fell.
Your body documents you destroying a chair.
Your body documents you talking to your mother.
Your body documents you getting bullied at school.

Your body documents you observing your mother’s child’s birth.
Your body documents you observing your neighbour’s argument with his girlfriend.
Your body documents you observing your ex-boyfriend’s break-up with his new girlfriend.
Your body documents you observing your best friend eating.
Your body documents you observing someone’s wedding day.
Your body documents you observing your neighbour saving your dog.
Your body documents you observing your sister doing drugs.
Your body documents you observing your boss picking her nose.
Your body documents you observing your dad ignoring an old man who fell.
Your body documents you observing your best friend destroying a chair.
Your body documents you observing what your father said to his mother.
Your body documents you observing a kid getting bullied at school.
YOUR BODY DOCUMENTS
YOU
SAVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR’S DOG.

Experiment – working with text

YOUR BODY DOCUMENTS
WHAT YOU ATE
YESTERDAY NIGHT.
Conclusion

After having spent a lot of time and thoughts on reflecting upon ways of how to materialize my concept, I realised that I needed to find a way that would spark people’s interest and at the same time would not force my personal interpretation on them. This meant that translating the concept into some kind of emotional representation through images (2-or-3-dimensional, through illustrations or a miniature world as explained earlier) was no possible option anymore, since these images would have been a product of my personal emotional filter.

The other option of working with text dropped out after a meeting with my mentor Goddur. He advised me not to purely work with text since “it is just boring.” I soon agreed with what he said, especially since I hadn’t been a huge fan of this method either.

I was starting to see my materialization of a possible future society more and more in a specific visual language and therefore kept evolving the idea of creating the three artefacts that can be read about on page 11 to 17, or alternatively seen in Gerðarsafn until May 21st 2017.
Bibliography


Images
