Wanting and allowing embodiment relationships between oneself and an object

WHY VISUAL AESTHETICS MATTER

Soundit is a postphenomenological tool: It guides its user to think in a certain way. The user designer becomes embodied with Soundit and learns to listen as a consequence of that embodiment relationship.

But an important question to ask that may be overlooked is why a student/user would allow themselves to become embodied with an object in the first place. I in my opinion, to embody or become embodied is an intimate act. I say this because embodiment changes what you are. You are no longer (you), you accept to become the assembly (you+tool). This means that you don't only change your own perspective or view on the world around you, you are also viewed differently by your environment.

Take the following examples: From the moment (person) picks up a camera, (person) becomes (person+camera). This means that compared to (person), (person+camera) assumably has a more visual focus on the world. (person+camera) will see things (person) would have missed because of (person+camera)'s visual focus. But at the same time, the humans in the direct environment of (person+camera) will feel watched, because they will get the feeling they are in the presence of a person that is watching them.

Another example would be a person carrying a wrench. The wrench enables (person+wrench) to twist bolts that a (person) cannot. (person+wrench) will see bolts as twistable, (person) will see bolts as an obstacle that cannot be overcome. At the same time, if (person+wrench) would be at a bicycle shop, people walking in with their broken bicycle would probably approach the (person+wrench) for their repair questions.

The objects that people are carrying or using and their (perceived) relationship with those objects, changes how others see these people. Then, others see people no longer as (person), but as (person+object). For that reason embodiment is intimate: it changes what we are and how others see us.

Location

There is another piece of this puzzle that I have not yet mentioned. The meaning of (person+wrench) in the face of others is partly based on where this (person+wrench) is. At a bicycle repair shop (person+wrench) is seen as a talking point or authority, but in a forest people may wonder what (person+wrench) is doing there. But from the perspective of (person+wrench), being in a forest may not matter from a functional perspective: (person+wrench) will still see bolts as twistable even though there are no bolts around.

But, the mismatch between (person+wrench) and their location may cause (person+wrench) to get negative attention from others, causing (person+wrench) to leave their wrench at home. (person+wrench) may feel embarrassed because of this mismatch, or (person+wrench) may feel they are making others uncomfortable.

The way others perceive (person+object) depends in no small part on the context. For that reason I will embed that in the naming convention I will use from now on, namely (person+object) @ location.

The way others perceive (person+object) @ location may influence whether (person) leaves (object) at home or not.

Why does this matter for Soundit

The idea behind Soundit is deeply postphenomenological. Yes, at face value it is a tool to record sounds and use those sounds in an exercise. But Soundit and the exercise are not *about* the exercise, they're about listening. The aims of both the exercise and Soundit are to learn designers to listen to their surroundings, and to listen for recognising design potential for sound.

This makes Soundit a tool of the postphenomenological type: Soundit aims to enable listening through its functionality: Because Soundit records sound, users will focus on the sound around them. Users form the assembly (person+Soundit) and through this assembly, people will become more focussed on sound than when they were only (person).

My personal message to the users of Soundit is not only to learn to listen, but to be receptive to sound at all times. I want to embed this message into Soundit by making Soundit a tool for 'all times' as well. A big part of this is getting Soundit to be accepted at all times, or as many times as possible.

This touches on the issue that has just been established: perception of (person+object) influences whether people feel comfortable being in this assembly. This does not matter if (person+object) is alone, but ideally, Soundit gains a place in peoples everyday lives: Because listening is something that, in my view, deserves a place in the entirety of peoples lives. This means also in busy environments, at school, at home, at work, etcetera.

The way others perceive (designer+Soundit) @ school, (designer+Soundit) @ work, or (designer+Soundit) @ busy environment may influence whether (designer) leaves (Soundit) at home or not. For that reason it will be taken into consideration in the design of Soundit.

Of course this is something that will vary from person to person: Some people will feel uncomfortable at times where others simply don't care about what others think. Yet I still want to take this into account in the design of Soundit, because I believe it is my responsibility as the designer of Soundit to make sure people feel comfortable using it.

Others accepting (designer+Soundit) @ everyday life

I will start off with an example of two cameras that I own.

Ricoh GRiii (source)   Nikon Z6 (source)

The Ricoh GRiii and the Nikon Z6 are very different cameras. The GRiii is small, light, fragile, has a fixed lens. The Z6 is bulky, heavy, tough and lenses can be swapped. But both are cameras and both take beautiful photos.

When someone hires me as a photographer I show up as (Geert+Nikon Z6). From my own perspective I do this because the Z6 provides me with a viewfinder and I can change the lenses on the Z6 allowing me to use a lens better tailored to the job I am doing.

When I take photo's of my everyday life I do that almost exclusively as (Geert+Ricoh GRiii). The GRiii is light which makes it easier for me to throw it in my backpack. I could also throw my Z6 in there, but the small footprint of the GRiii makes it more attractive to me.

But here's the catch: These are not the main reasons I use the GRiii privately and the Z6 professionally. The reason I make those choices is because *how other people perceive me*. When I show up to an event with only a GRiii, my clients don't take me seriously. The Z6 is a big, professional-looking camera that screams "I AM A PHOTOGRAPHER" and is universally recognised as such. Clients want 'the real deal' and not some hobbyist wielding a mini-camera; that's not what they paid for.

On the other hand, when I go out with friends, I don't bring my Z6. The Z6 screams "I AM HERE WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF TAKING PHOTOS" and it makes people more uncomfortable. The GRiii looks harmless compared to the intimidating Z6. When I go out my aim is to have fun, which is what I want express to my friends. When I carry my Z6 it seems my only aim is to observe and capture people visually.

Out of the two, the GRiii is the camera that I want to embody and that allows me to be creative. Not because it gets out of my way and is experientially **transparent to me** (the Z6 get's out of the way and is transparent too), it is because the GRiii is **transparent to others**.

That transparency from the perspective of others comes not from the fact that it is hidden, but it comes from the fact that it is not intimidating and socially accepted.

Designers accepting (designer+Soundit) @ everyday life

The final piece of the puzzle of acceptance is designers feeling comfortable in the assembly (designer+Soundit). The part of how others perceive the designer is a part of acceptance and feeling comfortable, but the designer being comfortable by themselves plays a big part as well: The fact that the message of the assembly person is in is socially accepted, doesn't mean it's a message person comfortable with.

For (designer) to accept being in the assembly (designer+Soundit) @ everyday life, the message this assembly communicates must be a match for the goals and ideas of the designer in question. What are those goals and ideas?

In other words, being in an assembly that others can perceive, is making a statement, whether (person+object) @ location wants it or not. It's a statement stating messages like "I am taking photo's", or "I like to take photo's", or "I am a technical person", or "I am working".

I believe this is unavoidable: people will have ideas or even prejudices about an assembly once they perceive other people walking around with objects or using them. Whether it's a painters brush, a camera, a wrench, a hammer, an audio recording, a pan, a glass of

beer, a pen, a pair of glasses, type of clothing, type of smartphone, a lego set, a pregnancy test, a condom, a crucifix, a pack of apple juice, a sponge, a pair of security goggles… I can go on and on. Seeing a person with each of these objects on their person will give people ideas about others' goals or ideas.

There is a big difference between Soundit and the aforementioned objects: People recognise everyday objects but people wont recognise Soundit. So people will judge Soundit based on what it looks like and how it is used. This is why visual aesthetics and interaction style matter in the context of Soundit and the acceptance of novel technology in general:

SUMMARY: (person+object) @ location

Example: assembly (designer+Soundit) @ supermarket

Statement: "I am actively listening to my surroundings", "I am interested in listening", "Even though I am at a supermarket, everyday listening is still a priority for me."

Ideas: "I believe everyday listening is important", "I believe active listening is something that could be done anywhere".

Goals: "To capture interesting sounds in my environment", "To gain a deeper understanding of sound".

The main puzzle pieces/ requirements for accepting embodiment:

- **Person** is comfortable with the statement of assembly (p+o) @ l

  - The **statement** matches person's **goals** and **ideas**

  - Person feels comfortable with **others being able to see** (p+o) @ l 's goals, ideas and statement.

  - Person **feels free to express** statement, goals and ideas in the space they are in towards the people that may be watching or paying attention.

  - The person and the object have a **strong embodiment relationship** with each other: person **understands** object, **knows how to use** object and person is **able to express** themselves through the object: transparency from the perspective of the person.

- **Surroundings** are comfortable with the statement, goals and ideas of assembly (p+o) @ l

  - The statement and goal of the assembly are a match for the location.

  - The goals, ideas and statement of the assembly are socially accepted.

  - The assembly does not intimidate the surroundings.