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December 6th 2019

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CART 360: Tangible Media & Computing

<u>Critical Reflection #1</u>

This reading is an essay by Katja Budinger and Frank Heidmann called "Our Symbiotic Life". To summarize, the topic revolves around the relationship between humans, nature and technology, imagining 4 different worlds and their unique lifestyle, using design fiction in order to gain insight on the situations. In fact, through low-fidelity prototyping, the authors re-imagine scenes of future life, specifically evaluating the correlation between climate impact and life. They claim that their designs will help us approach the complexity of climate change and include the human factor to this problem in order to understand it more, with the recent denial of this issue by many different influential leaders. The different designs imagined are called "Harmony", "Invasion", "On Demand" and "Bottle Garden".

The first design called "Harmony" is a self-driving landscape (to summarize quickly), that harvests energy through the plant's biological components, as well as the sun and wind. Different types of vehicles are adapted for different speeds and can even harvest fruits and vegetables. I personally find this idea very visually pleasing, but I doubt the practicality of this. Aesthetically, the moving plants would surely help urban landscapes get a more natural feel, a nice change of colour from the greyscale buildings everywhere in the city. However, one detail that I find that should be mentioned is the quantity of cars already circulating in the city. In fact, traffic is getting worse every year, and in America, 87.9% of people have their own car, which makes millions of people driving to work, school, grocery stores and back every day. To me, it seems like adding more moving vehicles would worsen the problem, but visually, I think it could really brighten people's moods.

The second design, called "Invasion", is about the use of drones and robots in order to help with pollination and overall health in agricultural fields and nature landscapes, mimicking insects and protecting against others. What I like about this idea is the use of technology to actually help nature against "plagues", instead of just using a merge of technology and nature to help us as humans before the plants, like the self-driving plants, which I find to be more for our enjoyment than saving the environment. These drones directly help the health of nature. However, one issue I see with this concept is from an ethical point of view, questioning if we should be allowed to manipulate the environment like this, and try to control what happens too much.

The third concept, "On Demand", is a customizable gene modifier for plants, to create personalized objects such as flower crowns, which are especially popular, yet according to the authors, are treated as lifeless objects. With our consumerist society, we always want more and a lot

of people love to showcase aesthetics on social media, and these gene modifiers will allow consumers to be creative through nature. Once again, this scenario raises the ethical question for me, if commercializing the environment in such manner is a good idea: to me, although this concept is cool visually, the authors claim it will give a more lively aspect to our perception of nature, but I find that it does the opposite, as they turn it into a materialized good in order to gain popularity and status on social media through the modifying gene creativity. They do mention though that it could be used to create textiles and fabric, but focus more on the consumerist society and create a good that people will want to get for themselves and show off. Social media is already a space criticized for being "fake" and pushing an agenda of needing to look perfect: for instance, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook stories are meant to be short videos of spontaneous moments of your that after 24 hours, disappear, yet to record and post them, you must consciously take your phone out while thinking "this will be great to show other people", taking yourself out of the moment and the spontaneity of it becomes fake. Manufacturing nature and modifying what is already beautiful on its own seems like an extra way of being fake.

The fourth design is called "Bottle Garden". It is a source to generate energy, based on an algae that when stressed, uses electricity in order to defend itself. You could charge your device with this electricity, and actually create a relationship with the life source, helping each other survive in a way. I find that this could be a great way to generate reusable energy, and both "participants" need to work together in order to thrive. I think they are very visually pleasing, and are a unique source of energy, but just like they mention in the text, the output is very low, so it would need a lot of time in order to charge up a device. This could then be useful as a backup system, yet with the amount of attention and care that has to be given, I doubt of its efficiency, as it seems time-consuming for the amount you actually get back. However, I think the close relationship between the consumer and the plant would be very good: having plants around people supposedly helps with concentration, memory, as well as happiness. They help you be more optimistic and even relieve stress, create an environment of comfort and security.

Overall, I think these 4 concepts are mostly great ideas, as integrating nature in a more ubiquitous manner is good for our own morale, and the health of our planet. I think it was missing a bit of information, such as empirical data and statistics, and at some of the concepts were explained very unclear, and I had trouble knowing their intention, such as the "Invasion" concept. However, I found it to be an interesting read, and I appreciate how the 4 ideas were completely different from each other, and offered solutions to different problems. I think my favourite would be the "Bottle Garden".

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