Back to the future (basics)

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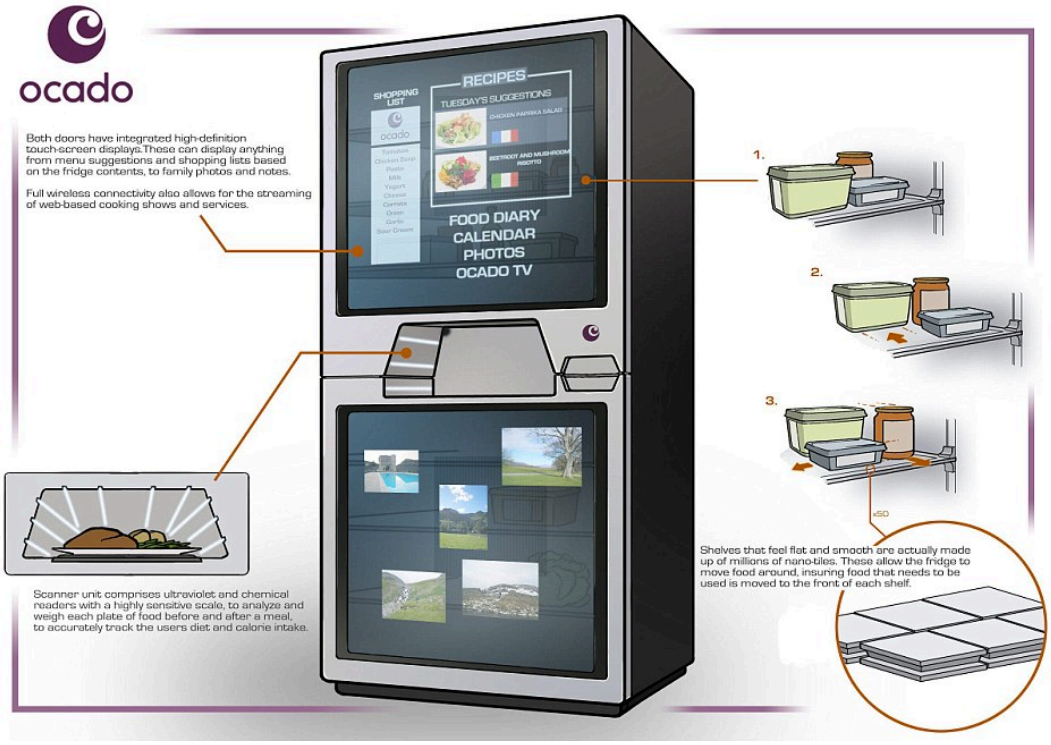
Position statement: Collaborative Formation of Issues

Our desires and aspirations are firmly intertwined with the realities of our society today. As Jan Chipcase from Frog design was heard saying, “The decision of whether to opt into or out of a product or service is increasingly becoming one of whether to opt into or out of society.” Every few months now, we outdo our knowledge in technology and thus our notion of development as a society is shaped by our intrinsic need and ability to accomplish “better”. But in the race for advancement, we might be detaching the original ideas behind creating objects, systems and services. A simple example would be of the refrigerators in our kitchens. They are swankier looking; technologically smart, bigger to display more. But are we not using them as instruments of storage without being mindful of its primary function? We are propagating wastage of food, excessive energy consumption and impersonalizing our most basic need for nourishment. Another example would be of our transportation system. We have wired our economies and industries to churn out automobiles that require massive infrastructural investments. By destroying earth’s natural terrain to create a network of roads, inducing heavy dependence and stress on fuel sources and dispelling harmful emissions in the air, we could not possibly be thinking holistically. As we progress towards a faster and smarter future, we might also be potentially moving away from functionally, emotionally and environmentally sound living.



A fridge of the future that tells you what to cook with your left-overs and automatically re-orders fresh food is being designed in the UK.

The fifth generation road: a road that is adaptable, automated and climate change-resilient (whether motorway, rural or urban, and regardless of region or country).

Design research and anthropology is focusing on mining people's unmet needs and desires. By placing the user and the context in focus we want to achieve desirability, viability and feasibility. The core of design lies in proposing something that nobody has thought of, is instantaneously understandable, affordable, and has no or only tolerable unanticipated consequences. Many design firms now argue that business and design have become one. Success of a solution is measured by the success of the business. But this also means that introducing anything radical or deviating from the current would result in adapting too much too quickly. We have shaped our societies in a certain way for this long. How do we disrupt this inherent deep-rooted belief system? We have tuned ourselves to a culture that is driven by technology. How do we bring people to respond to analogous environments equally enthusiastically?

The bigger challenge for design anthropology today to inquire into people's level of acceptance to change. Today a "successful" individual has that big refrigerator in their kitchen and a swanky car in their garage. In order to induce behavior change to create awareness around meaningful environments, we might have to rethink as a people the future we want to build for ourselves. As a culture what do we mean by 'success of an individual'? What is development and where are we going? In this process of self-inquiry we will inevitably disrupt economies, businesses and notions of comfort and ease. Does that still make for good design? We cannot tackle these issues as designers or anthropologists alone but in collaboration with society as a whole. And thus we will have to device tools that engage and question, create and reflect, explore and define issues of the future for varied segments of humanity.

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