Mapping technological views in Human-Centered Design—A postphenomenological analysis

Abstract

Nowadays, Human-centered Design (HCD) is by far the most influential approach to User Experience Design (UXD) and Interaction Design (IxD). As such, HCD has a tremendous influence on the ways we experience technologies. HCD is about shaping artefacts to better meet human needs; it is about making technological complexity understandable and accessible. These principles are guided by particular views about what technologies should be, what they should do for us and, therefore, how we should lead our lives with them. Nonetheless, HCD's philosophical commitments about the nature of technologies and the kind of relationships we develop with them are far from explicit—although, arguably, they are heavily influenced by American pragmatism, phenomenology, and constructionism.

In recent years, some scholars have been drawing inspiration from strands of philosophy of technology such as postphenomenology and Actor–Network Theory to develop design research frameworks. These frameworks serve as toolkits that expand design practice but shed little light on the ways HCD and other established design approaches conceive technologies. This paper takes this gap as a starting point. Through the lens of mediation theory, it will analyse some key assumptions that HCD advocates take for granted about human–technology relations (e.g., that interfaces should be "ready-to-hand", as well as epistemic facilitators) to develop a critical map of their ontological and epistemological commitments. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to contribute to our understanding of how designers following HCD regard the artefacts they create, and the extent to which they impact human life.

Keywords: Human-Centered Design, Critical map, Postphenomenology.

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