

NEW MEDIA AND THE TURN TO EXPERIENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

Roy Bendor (rbendor@sfu.ca)
School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the design of new media technologies for engaging the public on the political aspects of urban sustainability. Focusing on new media's "responsive aesthetics", it asks, *how are interactive experiences designed to mediate the underlying political culture of sustainability?* In order to provide initial answers to this question, this dissertation draws on phenomenological approaches to the philosophy of technology, critical theory and contemporary work in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), to develop a framework for considering the politicizing aspects of interactive experiences. At its centre is a conception of interactivity as a form of *world disclosure* that mediates being, perception, action and meaning. The validity and utility of the conceptual framework is demonstrated with a variety of case studies that include Mash Notes, a public interactive installation; MetroQuest, a sustainability decision support tool; public engagement processes facilitated by UBC's Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP); and several "serious" games.

The design of interactive experiences is discussed on the background of what is identified here as an incipient *turn to experience* in environmental communication. Perceived as a response to the decline of the dominant science communication paradigm, known as the information deficit model, the turn to experience is explained as an appeal to resonant, felt, meaningful aspects of the public's perception of, and engagement with, environmental issues. It is illustrated by two communicative strategies: the first aims to evoke *resonant experiences with politicizing effects*, while the second aims to create *consonance between the public's everyday experiences and the issues underpinning political decision-making*. The dissertation's critical analysis of the relations between politics and design aims to provide environmental

communicators with a better understanding of the potentials and limitations of designing interactive experiences to engage the public on sustainability, and provide technology designers with a more comprehensive and nuanced conception of the political significance of their creations.

Keywords: new media; design; interactivity; phenomenology; critical theory; political aspects of sustainability