THE POWER CORD
- AMBIENT DISPLAY FOR ENERGY AWARENESS

Use of energy is increasing all over the world and particularly in Western countries. In Sweden, households have doubled their energy consumption in the last 30 years. While industry has been successful at optimising their use, no such development has taken place within households. Instead, we are buying increasingly more products for our homes; entertainment and household appliances, personal information and communication products, computers and accessories. Product design has a crucial role to play in this development ever since the days when Peter Behrens was appointed by AEG to design product that would raise use of electricity. However, energy use is explicitly hidden in products and buildings. There is little to reveal if a stereo or freezer is active or not. There are very few who know that the mobile phone charger uses energy even if the phone is disconnected. 'Static! is a design research project at the Interactive Institute funded by the Swedish Energy Agency, that aims at raising awareness of energy use in everyday products. The project investigates interaction and product design as a way of visualising energy consumption and to stimulate changes in behaviour. Static! develops critical design prototypes that will be used as a basis for discussions, and to support awareness of design issues related to energy use. The Power-Cord is an electrical cable that reveals how much energy flows through its transparent shell. When an appliance is connected to the socket the amount of energy that is used is represented by a pulsing, blue light. Depending on the amount of power and number of connected appliances the light pulses with different intensities and frequencies. Preliminary results from users studies show that the Power-Cord helps users to understand how much electricity is consumed by connected appliances. The paper argues that designers should use their powerful ability to transform everyday life and behaviour in issues related to energy consumption.