

Are you Experienced?

Methods of mapping behaviour and experience in transactional environments

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of tangible and intangible experiences both as a recording process and as a design tool. It is particularly focused towards the practical application in service and retail design and its development as a key part of the design process and as a control and test medium for existing situations. The methodology is purposely fluid to allow for a variety of situations and also to promote future development and exploration through collaboration.

The findings are applied to and explored within existing situations and proposed design interventions.

Keywords: *Experience, Blueprinting, Journey, Modal, Transactional*

1. Introduction

The initial inquiry stemmed from basic experience mapping of journeys through spaces and appropriate responses.

Through exploration of the psychological and phenomenological responses this was expanded to try and gain a richer method of communicating and recording. The research was also intended to strengthen the links between recording, analysing and integrating experience into the design process.

In the search for this some parallels were drawn between the work of visual artists and their recordings of experience. Which seemed to suggest some useful pathways to explore.

The research follows three key strands:

- Review and overview of writings of experience
- Dissecting the key components of experience
- Experimental methods of mapping and recording experiences as design tools

Where possible these have been tested in live situations and feedback has been gained to determine success and potential development and improvement.

2. Literature Review

The starting point came from the idea of the original experience by Gadamer in Coxon [1] from which it is argued that each experience might be considered unique. In the same volume Heidegger's ideas of the conscious and everyday experience begin to form a structure with ideas of the cumulative experience. This was paralleled with Kahneman's [2] Modes of Experience and his identification of the use of System 1 and 2 thinking, that of the considered and automatic response. These were merged to create a model of the two basic responses to experience which forms the basis of the Experience Diagram (Figure 1). The first part of the diagram recognises also the idea of time as a factor of experience and the idea of the cumulative experience, again from Heidegger in Coxon [1].

This is developed further through Adcock [3] and Kusume & Gridley [4] who provide a practical and relevant interpretation and implementation particularly related to retail and branding situations. This section develops the two systems of thinking and begins to apply

them to particular situations, in particular the ideas of instant and effortful decisions cited by Adcock [3]. These were further informed by Gladwell's [7] ideas of how we make decisions based on a variety of systems such as thin slicing small amounts of information to construct a scenario. These ideas inform the central section of the diagram and are connected to create some tangible areas for further exploration. Complementary themes were also identified by Hekkert & Karana [5] and Jacobs & Wintrob [6] through research into the ideas our experience with materials and also ideas of perception through cognitive signs and signals. These ideas, together with Kusume & Grindley's [4] idea of a '360° experience' are articulated in the final section of the diagram which merge and blur the earlier ideas of rigidly separated systems. The idea of blueprints or maps as a visual communication method was identified initially through Kusume & Grindley [4] and Garcia [8] and this was developed into a more visual strand through the work of Hockney [9] and Willats [10] to produce pertinent directions for application into site studies. These were particularly relevant in developing the ideas of time and the personal and subjective nature of an experience. These studies are summarised in the Experience Diagram (Figure 1) which provides an initial map of how the research themes relate to and combine with one another. This is an attempt to articulate and form linkages of experience research establishing common themes such as time and the subjective nature of experience.

Figure 1 – Experience Diagram

3. Research Methods

From the key themes established, the work developed initially from desk studies and experiments of mapping experiences with students on one of the design units that I teach at the University of Portsmouth.

The idea of a continuous experience, based on a series of stages or phases began to develop allowing the individual components to be examined as part of the overall framework. This also allows for the 'units or boundaries' recognized by Coxon [1] to be examined in a visual diagram. This research developed around the idea of an Experience Cycle (Figure 2), which provided a framework for exploration of both theory and practice and developing existing research whilst providing opportunities for new testing approaches. From this basic template ideas of the Experience Cycle were explored which is particularly relevant to the transactional environment. Research into existing mapping tended to focus on areas of success and fail points and produce a form of 'Sine curve' of experience. In the development of the research I was particularly interested in how the user moved from one experience phase to the other and the methods that can be employed to smooth and improve this with a particular focus on bridging the potential gaps between phases. The Experience Cycle in Figure 2 is an initial attempt to look at ways and methods to mitigate this. It responds to the key phases of experience developed from that of Marzano in Kusume & Grindley [4] with a modification by myself. These are denoted in the blue boxes at the top together with some key points of reference for each phase. The red dotted lines indicate potential points where the experience might fail with suggested attention points to raise or prevent this failure. The cycle should be considered as a loop system referencing subsequent visits, responses and additional external factors.

Figure 2 - Experience Cycle

Some initial testing and validation was carried out relating to my project work which was initiated through a series of snapshots taken of a simple visit to a

coffee outlet. This was an attempt to mirror some of the explorations of Willats [10] whilst relating specifically to some of the ideas of Jacobs & Wintrob [6] and Gladwell [7] particularly the ideas of gathering small, sometimes peripheral, amounts of information and using these to shape a response.

Figure 3 – Recording Experience

Although this begins to record experience and identifies some of the areas and methods of interest it is really a stepping stone towards more meaningful recording. The position of the outlet within an area of small scale businesses is evident and this provides a degree of priming for the experience. This is also evident (but not recorded) in the people visiting the outlet and how the small outside area spilling out onto the pavement begins to shape the experience. In some ways this mitigates potential fail points such as traffic obscuring the entrance.

Important touch points such as service and delivery are intuitive and accommodating whilst maintaining an intimate and authentic experience. In particular the making area is visible and open and speaks of ‘knowing the product’ even to the extent where cleaning equipment is not considered offensive. However the experience is not consistent across outlets and the lower set of images illustrates that in another outlet cleaning equipment is visible but, due to the context, was not considered to reflect positively on the experience.

This formed the basis of further research which I was able to carry out through a live design project as an appraisal of a potential site and design response.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The key objective of the research was to explore new methods for mapping and designing experiences in the built environment both using research but also from an exploration of the methods of

visual artists as referenced. From this I have used ideas to record and communicate a range of experience stages and modes which are explored from a theoretical perspective but also applied to my work in both education and practice. The initial outputs of these suggest a range of approaches and the initial results have provided useful insights.

The final output provides a simple application of theory and combines some of the explored ideas in a simple and straightforward manner using a range of methods.

The study is based on the initial appraisal for a retail unit set within a vibrant residential, retail and cultural area of London which is home to a number of high end brands and smaller businesses. The corner site is at a busy junction both in terms of pedestrian and vehicle flow with some potential conflicts.

The initial study focuses the Anticipation and Recognition phases of the experience and particularly relates to how the retail environment might respond to this. The approach begins at a macro level placing the building in a site context and here is particularly concerned with how the overall experience is shaped and relates to external factors. A level of more individual detail is applied through snapshots of two potential directions of approach to the site through the lenses of priming and shaping to begin to understand in what frame the user might approach the site. This broadly covers elements such as the immediate environment, external links and scale as well as an attempt to gauge the pace of arrival. These have been combined into a composite diagram of two approaches to provide an Experience Overview (Figure 4). There is an attempt here to explore the methods of Hockney [9] and Willats [10],

combining to form a meaningful interpretation.

Figure 4 - Experience Overview

From this initial exploration it was clear that the approaches to the building provided a variety of experiences: that of a busy retail thoroughfare compared with a more leisurely approach from principal transport links and a cultural hub. When examining the building as a composition it's relationship with context appears with equal weight from either vista.

Traditionally this might suggest a visual response proportionate to this, with a retail perspective focused towards the retail thoroughfare and little response to the more residential street.

However, when we examine the approach to the building in more detail with a particular focus on time and the '360° experience' approach of Kusume & Gridley [4] the experiences are more variable. Through the pace of arrival and the expression of retail identity of the main thoroughfare the Recognition phase tends to focus on the principal/traditional retail level at ground level. The response here might be expressed as a more linear solution and recognition (and the link to welcome) is a narrative at this level.

Conversely the approach from the cultural hub is more measured and is expressed in a more vertical dimension reflecting a relationship with the scale and residential nature of the buildings. These became evident when viewing the building as a whole although this is only a brief snapshot in the experience.

This is expressed in Figure 5 as a response to these immediate experiences whilst offering a continuation through to the

Welcome phase and beyond. This process unearths the possibility of two different responses that the building might present to it's immediate and even more distant contexts.

Figure 5 – Recognition Response

The work presented is at an 'in progress' stage and further developments and exchanges are encouraged. In particular the idea of a variety of visual methods is a potential avenue I intend to explore. To this end I have included a closing piece of initial ideas which begin to link the phases of experience studied above with those of the retail journey. This has been incorporated into a simplistic sketch which also explores some design themes and attitudes.

Figure 6 – Retail Journey

This applied research forms strong links between academic and industry practice and one that is particularly pertinent to those working in a brand environment. The intention of this work is to both contribute to this but also to develop approaches from other areas of practice to provide new visual methods of communication and representation.

5. References

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