Digital Experience Design: ideas, industries, interaction

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was working as producer and project manager during the dot.com boom years of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, 'experience design' was generally not in the vocabulary of industry practitioners. People had not heard of roles such as 'information architect', 'experience modeler' or 'user experience designer', let alone understood what such jobs entailed. In a few short years, I have witnessed a profession emerging that takes responsibility for the types of activities that were previously unnamed and unclaimed in IT projects. Parallel with this has been the awkward rise of a discourse and discipline finding its feet and which still needs to grow with support from its older cousins. Indeed, the necessity of turning to other design disciplines is acknowledged by Shedroff (2001: 2):

'Simultanously having no history (since it is a discipline only recently defined), and the longest history (since it is the culmination of many ancient disciplines), Experience Design has become newly recognized and named.'

The 'art' of experience design considers the holistic factors of a user experience that go beyond or extend the 'science' of usability (Forlizzi and Battarbee 2004: 261). Rather, it encompasses the more abstract, emotional and atmospheric elements of users' digital interactions such as attraction, seduction and engagement. It is those aspects of digital experiences that are slippery, difficult to articulate or capture, and for which there are no heuristics or formulae. This is why we need to turn to and learn from the terminologies, methodologies and models of other disciplines that are already well versed in experience design.

Scope

This is not a 'how-to' book, but rather a 'what might' book. It seeks to move discourse about digital experience design beyond just case studies and problem-solving (how to balance client and user requirements, how to display the same content across different devices, how to test designs, etc). Instead, it asks questions such as: what might digital experience design look like from the perspective of an architect? What might feminism contribute to interface design? What might we learn from filmmakers about designing user experiences? Thus, it approaches digital experience design from and through the experiences of practitioners who have trained in other

industries and disciplines, but who are now working and collaborating in the area of interactive media.

This is a book of ideas about digital experience design expressed through the voices of practitioners and seen through the lenses of the disciplines in which they originally trained. The discussion is exploratory in nature and intended to spark debate rather than agreement about standards. It presents departure points for broader and alternative ways of thinking beyond extant digital design practice by mining the theoretical and conceptual richness of other industries and disciplines. In doing so, it aims to inspire more intellectually and philosophically driven approaches to digital experience design.

The ideas and arguments extend to a range of forms of digital experience design, be it computer games, DVDs, touchscreen kiosks or mobile phones. However, there is generally more reference to Web design because this constitutes the majority of the work of the practitioners and it is accessible, ubiquitous and familiar. The Web is also arguably the medium that most requires design innovation, having been so technically constrained in the past by bandwidth, download speeds and file sizes that even when many of these issues have now improved considerably, it is still difficult to think outside the 'page paradigm' of text and still image. Addressing this as means that digital designers can no longer look at their practice as a shoemaker looks at leather. Using this metaphor as an example, we must do the equivalent of asking other professions such as fashion designers, furniture makers, automobile designers and bookbinders how they look at leather. Consulting other communities of practice allows a chair designer to apply techniques for working with leather from the making of saddles, and similarly a Web designer to learn from a filmmaker about the creation of user experiences.

Methodology
This book attempts to 'unpack' the diverse histories and perspectives of people working in the dot.com industries. 'Unpacking' refers to the baggage we bring with us to places, situations and relationships. In the context of this book, it is taken to mean the parcels of knowledge and ideas that are brought from one discipline into another, as most practitioners of interactive media come from diverse educational and

professional backgrounds having trained in other fields prior to working in the dot.com industries.

Another term for this unpacking is 'technology transfer', defined as 'the process whereby techniques and materials developed in one creative field, industry or culture are adapted to serve in other creative fields, industries or cultures' (Pawley 1990: 140). Others have described this using fruit as a metaphor:

'Emerging art forms will often take methods and approaches that were developed by previous forms, copy them, alter them, and drop from the vine before taking the role of seeding a newer art form that follows.' (Meadows 2003: 67)

The technology transfer that occurs within digital experience design is largely implicit, even invisible, embodied in practitioners as they move from other disciplines to work in this inherently interdisciplinary field. The book makes these processes explicit upon and through closer inspection of some of these practitioners.

Each chapter is co-written with professionals involved in the study, design and development of digital experiences, having originated from disciplines as far ranging as education, economics, film, food, fashion, architecture and art. How do they unfold their learning from these fields and tailor it to the design of digital experiences? Given that such disciplines have richer traditions and longer histories in the design of experiences, how can these older approaches benefit the newer area of digital media development?

Some chapters were based on in-depth interviews with the editor. Other chapters emerged from earlier unpublished writings by the practitioners themselves. Underpinning all chapters is extensive collaboration and dialogue between editor and practitioner, whereby ideas from one industry or discipline had to be 'translated' by the practitioner and communicated to the editor in terms that were applicable to the field of digital experience design. This traversing of disciplines and industry terminology in the space of each chapter meant that it was only feasible to offer introductory concepts from a respective discipline as starting points. It is more a 'pick and mix' of theories and ideas selected for their relevance to digital experience design

than the kind of comprehensive thesis seen in sole-authored books by practitioners such as Donald Norman and Nathan Shedroff.

Chapter outline

The authors explore their digital experience design practices through the lenses of disciplines as diverse as education, health sciences, cinema, television, fine art, architecture and hospitality. **Linda Leung** is a Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Interactive Media & Learning, University of Technology Sydney and director of graduate programs in interactive multimedia. As an educator, she considers her primary users to be 'learners' or 'students': can digital experience design benefit from making this conceptual leap from users to learners, shifting the focus from the purely utilitarian motives of the user to the information needs of the potential learner? Every kind of digital experience demands some form of tacit learning on the part of its users. Therefore, she argues in chapter 2 that basic educational principles can be implemented in the design of digital experiences both informally (such as in wayfinding) and formally (such as in e-learning).

Sara Goldstein is a usability expert in the business of fashion who has to contend with the tensions between these disciplines. Fashion manufactures systems of desire which offer consumers the promise of an image or lifestyle. This, too, is relevant to digital experience designers in terms of creating an ideal to which the user aspires, rather than just catering for the 'real' user (as is the case in interaction and experience design). Sara contends in chapter 3 that there is much that can be borrowed from the fashion industry in relation to the selling of personal expression as a seductive experience. This can extend from clothing and accessories to the choices users make about their online representation.

Cinema has refined the ability to seduce and immerse its audiences into the filmic world, engaging them emotionally and convincing them to suspend their disbelief. What can designers for computer screens learn from techniques of the silver screen? **Carla Drago**, (a former film and television director, now interactive media producer) discusses the techniques of traditional storytelling and how they are evolving and being adapted for the interactive age in chapter 4. **Mark Ward** contributes his knowledge as a cinematic sound designer in chapter 8, examining the ways that sound

might enhance the emotional life of digital environments in similar ways as it does to filmic worlds.

In chapter 5, **Daisy Tam's** doctoral research into the philosophy of the Slow movement offers some refreshing ideas for the dot.com industry to consider. As designers, we are constantly told that users want convenience and will not tolerate anything otherwise. The 'slow food' movement presents an interesting antidote: just as many people do not favour fast food, perhaps users are prepared to savour good content and take the time to enjoy rich and hospitable digital experiences.

Adrienne Tan's work as a product management consultant in the interactive television (iTV) industry is examined through a feminist lense in chapter 6. Using iTV as a case study, she asserts that the gender imbalances that were identified in analogue media industries are being repeated in the digital arena. In attempting to address audiences in ways which are inclusive rather than simplistic, a feminist perspective offers an alternative means of approaching the issue of accessibility.

Helen Kennedy researches online accessibility and cognitive disability. An interactive media educator and practitioner, she draws from models used in the health sciences, especially speech and language therapy, to understand the diverse experiences of disability in chapter 7. Consideration of this in digital experience design means going beyond blanket application of accessibility guidelines to a focus on differences in how people learn and process information.

Fine art challenges its users to engage with abstract concepts that may not be easily articulated and require introspective reflection. As an Experience Architect, **Scott Bryant's** art education has helped him rethink digital experiences as more than purely task-oriented, utilitarian processes which universally necessitate speed and efficiency. Having also studied information management, he discusses in chapter 9 how he reconciles the (artistic) abstract and (information) scientific elements of his disciplinary backgrounds and translates these into coherent user experiences.

As a trained architect who has traversed the design of buildings, clothes and software applications, **Meaghan Waters** reflects on the differing approaches of built

architecture and digital experience architecture, comparing 'hard' and 'soft' design disciplines and their utilisation of 'space' in chapter 10.

The book will be of interest to both dot.com industry practitioners as well as those teaching and studying information technology, interactive media, e-learning and any other digital design-based disciplines. It does more than just unpack the ideas and frameworks from other disciplines for the field of interactive media. It tries them on, looks at them, spins them around, mix-and-matches them, wash-and-wears them, then tailors them accordingly.

References

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