
Modes of Transitions: A framework for Experience design

Abstract

In this paper, I looked at experience design from the perspective of transitions spanning from immediate to long-term interactions. Having decomposed the transitions into mobility, adaptation, habituation and adoption, I propose a new framework for experience designers called modes of transitions. *Modes of transitions* suggest a shift from physicality to action; product to experience, introducing a set of experiential qualities for designers to design with; namely routine, performance, narrative and ritual.

Keywords

Experience design, routine, ritual, performance, narrative, modes of transition, transitions.

ACM Classification Keywords

A.0 [GENERAL]: Conference Proceedings H.5.2: User interfaces, User-centered design

Introduction

Experience is defined as the form of self's interactions with an environment, and characterized with its practical, intellectual, and emotional qualities that cannot be reduced to its parts [5],[17]. This wholeness is related to the intertwining presence of self with the environment. Through this presence, people recreate

Copyright is held by the author/owner(s).

CHI 2009, April 4 – April 9, 2009, Boston, MA, USA

ACM 978-1-60558-247-4/08/04.

their experience constantly; with their actions towards environment and occurring reactions from the environment. This constant recreation is transitional by nature and set by *immediate* and *long-term* interactions. Immediate interactions shape our daily transitions, such as *spatial* and *micro-role* transitions, whereas long-term interactions shape *life-phase* transitions, such as *life-cycle* transitions, and *migration*. These transitions in return shape our experiences, so their qualities.

Immediate interactions with the environment create *spatial* transitions. Human beings naturally travel in between locations. This nomadic nature stays same even though the means of travel have been changing radically. A *spatial* transition of self can be characterized as the changing locations of an unchanging self. Self while traveling to a new location also performs roles, such as from being a parent to a professor, student to a son. In this type of *micro-role* transitions, self needs *adaptation* mechanisms switching in between these role enactments.

As means of *long-term* interactions, self-interacting with the environment encounter transitions that are defined around *habituation* and *adoption*. Change happens either in the self, in the environment, or in both. In *life-cycle* transitions, self is at the center of a paradoxical new and old. Transitioning from childhood to the adolescence is a good example. Sometimes life-cycle transitions involve both self and the environment. Going to a new school, marriage are those kind of transitions. In types of moving to a new city or *migration*, environment is at the center of changing and affects the unchanging self dramatically. Self adopts own self to a completely new environment. Long-term

transitions can mean both an opportunity for growth or a threat to decline.

Design disciplines aim to contribute 'transitional' nature of experiences with the interventions of artifacts. Transportation products like cars and communication products such as mobile phones, are good examples that help people in people's *immediate* interactions. On one hand, these solutions help people to advance their temporal and spatial arrangements. On the other hand, they trigger, issues related to *mobility* and *adaptation*. Take communication products as an example. Advances in mobile technology provide the opportunity to reach electronic mails, phone calls, and even Internet while on the go. This creates multitasking and role enactments regardless of time and space, which causes flattening of contexts; resulting in stress and decline of the experiential qualities in every day life. In case of long-term interactions, people encounter services, policies and unspoken customs that are designed for them. Campaigns helping people quit smoking; therapy sessions addressing dealing with a serious illness; programs helping immigrants are such examples of products for habituation and adoption.

The emerging question after unfolding the transitional nature of experiences and current state of artifacts is an obvious one: how can designers design interaction products and services that will address *transitional* nature of experiences? How can the designed product help people to have healthier, and perhaps constructive transitions?

To inquire into this question, one can look at how design fields approach to the products. From a poetical analysis, all forms of making are integrative and can be

analyzed based on its form, material, manner, and function [14]. Among these four elements, there exist various perspectives, some center design around manner- technology like engineering design, some center design around material qualities like art and craft communities, etc. However, in interaction products, as the interaction diffuses and becomes part of the form, material, and function, a traditional analysis of form, manner, function, and material is not adequate in the analysis as well as in the making of interaction products. In a sense, the nature of design have changed, designers begin to design actions for the sake of experience. The diffusion of interaction can be traced among the interpretations of action across state-of-art design research approaches. From an activity theory perspective, actions are operations and *materials* of activities [11], whereas for situated action theory, actions are generative *mechanisms*, manner of contingencies [13]. For distributed cognition perspective, actions are *functions* between those two. From an interaction design perspective, actions are unified *forms*, experiences [2]. From a critical design perspective, actions are dematerialized entities of the interaction products (with wireless technologies)[6].

The diversity of interpretations does not necessarily show the better or worse of the interaction products phenomena. However, they depict the collapse of a traditional analysis and making of products (Figure 1). To analyze and design interaction products considering the transitional nature of experiences, there is a need for a shift, from products to experiences. Such a shift from product to experience requires new set of qualities to design with. The previous qualities regarding form, matter, and function are not adequate to capture the richness of an experience. Transitional nature of

experience already gives us the dimensions of mobility, adaptation, habituation, and adoption. To address these dimensions, a dynamic mechanism, centered on action, necessary.

I developed a theoretical framework called *modes of transitions*, helping designers to design experiences considering core experiential qualities. As human nature is shaped by character, similarly experiences are formed by (actions with) character. These experiential qualities are a new set of four: *routine* depicting the material; *performance* the manner (technology); *narrative* the function; *ritual* the formal qualities of any experience.

Routine materialities: Routine is a mechanical performance of an established procedure. Prior research shows us routines are automated actions people unconsciously perform; they are unremarkable in character; glue of everyday life [15]; taking shape with creativity [16]; unexpectedly can become social and predictable. Analogically, routine resembles temperament of human character. Routine's relationship with other qualities is a crucial one, without routine; any experience lacks its foundation; it defines the material qualities of an experience.

Performance as techne: Performance by definition means the execution of an action. For human experience, it is the self's role enactments in various contexts. Suchman's interpretation on situation and action claims that actions are founded on local interactions with our environment, are highly contingent, and based on the improvisations of the person. For Kapferer, "performance constitutes a unity of text (representation) and enactment, neither being

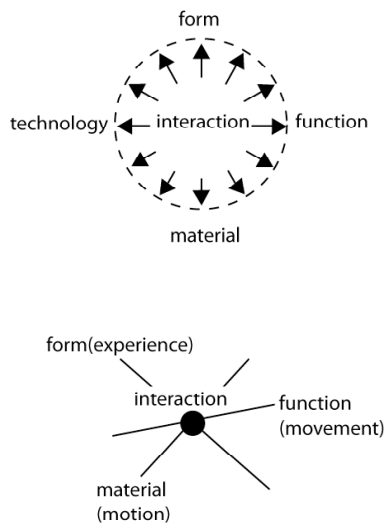


Figure 1. Diffusion of interaction results in collapse of traditional form, function and material distinctions.

reducible to the other.”[9] Performance as a quality situates itself as a facilitator in between routine and rituals, and helps narrative to construct its dramatic quality.

Narrative functionalities: Narrative simply means the narration of a story. In literature it refers to analysis or/and synthesis of a particular story; in psychology it is an interpretation in which humans make sense of the world; in drama, it is the performance of stories in front of an audience. In cultural studies it is the manifestation or embodiment of a cultural structure or thought. With this richness, narrative points out functional qualities of an experience; from interpretation to representation, performance to embodiment.

Ritual forms: Ritual in an eloquent definition means a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership. [3] Ritual is the ultimate form of an experience, includes routine, performance, and narrative qualities. Ritual refers to expressive and symbolic activity, composed of several set of performances, which happens in a repetitive manner [12]. Levy classifies rituals into spiritual, cultural, group, individual, and biological types [10]. Rituals differ from routines in their meaning-making aspects. Family rituals, for instance, provide engagement to the family activities and enhance personal identity [1]. Fiese et. al. found that the meaningful aspect of family rituals is related to adolescent identity [7] and to marital satisfaction during the early parenthood [8], whereas the routine practice alone is not related to this directly.

These experiential qualities work together in immediate and long-term interactions to form an experience. The relationship in between these four qualities of experience is in parallel with Suchman’s *resources of action* model, which defines itself as opposed to plans or controlling structures, where “the outstanding problem is not to improve controlling structures, but to understand *what kind of resources they are.*”[13] By addressing varying transitions of mobility, adaptation, habituation and adoption in certain ways; they become the *modes of transitions*. Modes of transitions form an organic mechanism where people shift in between the modes easily, depending on their intentions, and the immediacy of enactments. In case of mobility, it is the mode of routine, whereas in case of adaptation, it is the mode of performance; in the habituation and adoption, it is the mode of narrative and ritual. As the nature of experience suggests, it is hard to dissect the whole in to its parts, so if ritual is the mode of transition, meaning that other modes are still part of the experience with varying strength and influence; however, ritual is more prominent than others.

To understand how a designed product can play a role in shaping people’s routine and ritual, we first looked at home domain, and created the Reverse Alarm Clock (RAC), an interactive system with the function intention of keeping young children in bed at night and the experience intention of making parents feel they are becoming better parents. Having completed the field studies, we found out that even in a small number of families and short amount of time, our design piece has an affect on shaping people’s bedtime rituals and routines. Currently, we are inquiring into mobile domain to advance our insights that we have gained from the previous project. We are working on a project called Saferide, looking at the spatial and

micro-role transitions of commuting in between home, work and leisure. This research starts with open-ended interviews with people who currently carpool, and who don't want to carpool. Interviews aim to reveal participants' commuting routines; how they initiate conversations through rituals; and stories they shaped after commuting. Having done the ethnography, we will

design three conceptual experience designs, which will embody the *modes of transitions* framework. The selection of the conceptual design works will explore the interrelations between the experiential qualities and aesthetic qualities of each mode.

Citations

- [1] Bennett, L. A., Wolin, S. J., McAvity, K. J., Family identity, ritual, and myth: A cultural perspective on life cycle transition, C. J. Falicov (Ed.), *Family transitions: Continuity and change over the life cycle*, New York Guilford Press, (1988), 211-234.
- [2] Buchanan, Richard. (2001). Design Research and the New Learning. *Design Issues*.
- [3] Collins, Randall, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton University Press, 2004
- [4] Crabtree, A. and Rodden, T. (2004). "Domestic Routines and Design for the Home." CSCW v7. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press, 191-200.
- [5] Dewey, J., *Having an experience. Art as Experience*, Capricorn Books, 1958
- [6] Dunne, A. (2005). *Hertzian Tales*. The MIT Press.
- [7] Fiese, B., H., Dimensions of family rituals across two generations: Relation to adolescent identity. *Family Process*, 31, (1992), 151-162
- [8] Fiese, B.H., Hooker, K.A., Kotary, L., and Schwagler, J. Family Rituals in the Early Stages of Parenthood, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55, 3 (1993), 633-642
- [9] Kapferer, Bruce.(1986). Performance and the structuring of meaning and experience, In W.Victor

Turner, M., Edward, Bruner, (Eds.).*The Anthropology of Experience*. University of Illinois Press.

- [10] Levy.Sidney.J., Marketplace Behavior-Its Meaning for Management, *Chicago:AMACOM* , (1978), 20.
- [11] Nardi, Bonnie.(1996). Studying Context: A comparison of Activity Theory, Situated Action and Distributed Cognition. *Context and consciousness (Ed.)*. The MIT Press.
- [12] Rook, D. W., Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, (1985), 251-264.
- [13] Suchman, Lucy A. (2007). Human machine reconfigurations- 2nd edition of Plans and situated actions. Cambridge University Press.
- [14] Telrand, Kenneth. (1961). *Aristotle's Poetics- Translation and Analysis*. University of Press America, page 63.
- [15] Tolmie, P., Pycoc, J., Diggins, T., MacLean, A. , Karsenty, A., Unremarkable computing. *Proc. CHI (2002)*, ACM(2002), 399-406
- [16] Wakkary, R., Maestri, L. The resourcefulness of everyday design, *Proc. Creativity and Cognition 2007*, (2007), 163-172.
- [17] Wright, P., McCarthy, J., Meekison, L. Making Sense of Experience, *Funology*. M. A. Blyth, K. Overbeeke, A. F. Monk and P. C. Wright (eds). Kluwer Academic Press, (2004), 43-53.