Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
In Praise of Inconvenience: rethinking frictionless experience

• Author(s) Name:
Aaron Seymour

• University or Company Affiliation:
University of Technology Sydney

• Abstract (300 words):
Convenience, or effortless experience, is a central principle of ‘good design’. Its origins can be found in the Vitruvian virtue of *utilitas* (utility) and more recently as Modernist functionalism. Taylorism’s systematising of labour processes in the early 20th century aligned the idea of fitness-for-purpose to a capitalist concern with efficiency. The emergence of usability in the 1980s with its focus on the user and first person experience foregrounded a more expansive notion of convenience: the more invisible and affectively neutral an interaction the better.

More broadly, the postwar economic boom and its drive through culture of fast food, vending machines, and automated appliances entrenched convenience as a structuring principal of contemporary urban life. Today, the rise of the service economy offers the promise of outsourcing virtually all unwanted human effort, from body maintenance to emotional companionship. In both design and the larger world the value of convenience now goes largely unquestioned.
Central to notions of the convenient is the effortless; interactions that provide frictionless experiences while minimising cognitive load. This paper asks what shifting so much human agency into unconscious habit might cost, examining how value and meaning emerge from experiences that require duration and conscious engagement.

Drawing on the overlap between Western mindfulness research and Buddhist phenomenological approaches to attention—and the insistence of both on the benefits of such focus—this paper asserts that the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself. It argues that designers might strategically employ the inconvenient to immerse people in the richness of the present moment, favouring felt agency over efficient yet textureless interactions.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Aaron Seymour is a designer and academic whose research focusses on the affective capacities of design and the creative application of new materials and fabrication technologies.

He has designed numerous audience experiences for museums and cultural institutions, harnessing interactive technologies to bring museum and archival collections to life. These have included works for the Australian War Memorial, National Museum of Australia, Historic Houses Trust, Australian National Maritime Museum and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. His short films have twice been nominated for AFI awards, screening internationally at festivals, on television and in commercial cinema releases. They are held in the collections of state and national film archives.