Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Programming for Empathy: Case Studies and a Question

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• Abstract (300 words):
Effective programming is crucial to the successful realization of design projects. Methods for gathering the necessary information to develop effective programs have long been established. Both authors have taught these methods in the context of programming for an independent senior project. The question arises, “Might there be methods for ‘programming empathy’ to help students go ‘inside’ the facts to establish an empathic connection to client/users?”

Over time we have noticed that students who have a personal connection to the project context, be it through personal experience or that of a relative or close friend, tend to program and produce the strongest final projects. As evidence we wish to present two case studies: one, the design of a healthcare facility for young adult cancer patients, and the other, of a veterans’ housing and care facility. In case one, the student was responding to her own experience of having cancer and the challenges she faced when she was receiving treatment and in recovery.1 In the second, the student was reflecting her brother’s experience as a combat veteran suffering from PTSD.2 Both of these students
were diligent in employing traditional research methods and applying the knowledge gained in their design development. But we suggest that an extra element contributed to their final success: empathy.

Not all students can bring that element of personal connection to every project. So the question remains: how best to instill the empathy factor? Hadjiyanni (2016) proposes “culture” as a directive for design. Brooker asserts, “Experimental creative arts practices have a role in shaping our urban development practices” (2018:2). As these authors suggest, we propose exploring the implication of wider exposure to and engagement in arts and humanities through literature, film and history, as a way to develop this sensitivity. We welcome more discussion and suggestions from conference participants.

Notes:

1 Programming and project by Alexis Dronet, fall and spring 2017/18.

2 Programming and project by Shauna Martin, fall and spring 2017/18.

References:


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

Professor M. Jean Edwards (MFA, FIDEC) taught at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (1995-2018), and served as Coordinator of the Interior Design program and Assistant Director of the School of Architecture and Design from 2013 until her retirement. Her undergraduate courses included studios at all levels, research methods, interior design history, and design survey. She also taught a graduate level urban history/theory course for architecture students. A professional member of IDEC since 1987, she was elected to the IDEC Council of Fellows in 2008.

She received two M.F.A. degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University, one in painting and the other in interior design. Her research has focused on studio pedagogy, interior design history, and most recently urban history and theory. She has delivered numerous presentations at regional and national conferences, most recently “Emerging 21st Century Interior Urbanism” with Jean Freeman at the “Inside the City” conference in London, November 2018. Her study “La Maison de Verre: Negotiating a Modern Domesticity” was published in the Journal of Interior Design in 2008. She has also authored “Lessons of the Bauhaus”, a Perspective for an upcoming issue of the Journal.
Assistant Professor Nadya Kozinets (MFA, NCIDQ) currently teaches at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where her course load includes 3rd and 4th year interior design studios, Professional Practice, Construction Documents, Research Methods, and FF&E. Prior to her appointment at UL-Lafayette, she taught at Kent State University in Ohio and Harrington College of Design in Chicago. As a practicing interior design between 1997 and 2010, she both managed her own studio (2007-2010) and worked for a number of architecture firms in Minneapolis and Chicago (1997-2006). She holds a BS in Interior design from the University of Minnesota, and the MFA from Columbia College in Chicago.

As a professional member of IDEC since 2010, she has presented her scholarship at both regional and national conferences. Her research interests include the psychological impact of design on users, and issues of proxemics and personal space. She also received a faculty advisor award for her work with students participating in the 2015 IDEC Student Design Competition. Their project won 2nd place in the competition.