Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Critical Immersion: Experiential Design as Public Pedagogy

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• Abstract (300 words):
This paper articulates a conceptual model for thinking about experiential design as a performatve public pedagogy. If pedagogy is understood as a process of effecting change in knowledge, attitudes and practices, public pedagogy re-affirms the social, political and environmental context of that process. It is premised on the participant being situated and engaged in that environmental context with the critical and conceptual tools to engage in the process of change. This process is described as Critical Immersion.

As a theoretical model, environmental context is given a pedagogic imperative through Derrida’s 1988 articulation of context as an unconditional opening to the other inciting a view of environment as a shifting knowledge network of human and non-human actors/agents, drawing on Latour’s actor-network-theory (2005) and Soja’s Third Space (1996). A public pedagogy, and indeed practice more generally, in this context is predicated on an act of critical immersion in the situational everyday.
The conceptual model has been tested as a public environmental consultation in the UK which used a digital instruction work (geocaching game) as a means of critically immersing participants in an environment and stimulating an exploration of less trodden sites as a means of developing a critical knowledge of place. The results forming a community narrative map and environmental planning guidelines.

The paper will articulate the conceptual framework of critical immersion as a key element of an authentic design process at both individual and collective, and private and public levels. It will also present a working prototype for a critical immersion tool, a multi-modal instruction work enabling the participant to undertake a walking journey and performing a narrative archaeology of place; peeling off and placing on layers of meaning.

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

Matt Hawthorn is Head of Design at the University of Derby, UK, and previously held Design leadership roles at the University of Lincoln and York St John University. His pedagogic practice centres on the development of creativity and research capabilities through interdisciplinary, collaborative approaches to knowledge production, this work has been presented at a range of international conferences, and has been supported through grant funding from a range of sources including the UK Higher Education Academy. Hawthorn’s practice and research crosses performance, new media, participatory culture and architecture, and is founded on a critical investigation of the experiential relationships between people, narratives and environments (physical, cultural and political). The works arising from this practice have been presented as artworks at international festivals, and as participatory design projects with communities.