

Weaving Place into the centre of Service Design: A reflective case study.

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Abstract

This paper proposes a design anthropology of place in the design of services, particularly when designing community based services for the elderly. Drawing on two service design projects located in the Byker area of Newcastle, UK, which brought together Ordnance Survey [OS], Age UK Newcastle and a Post-graduate Masters programme, in this paper it describes how design methods and practices captured and communicated a sense of place. The paper takes an anthropological perspective to reflect on how these methods make visible and tangible the every day informal networks that support the elderly community within Byker. Finally, the paper considers how this approach contrasts with the UK Government's perspective that reduces transactions to economic units and questions the role of service design and design anthropology in communicating the values that are so central to weaving place-making, values that cannot be reduced to simple metrics.

KEYWORDS: service design, place making, design anthropology

Introduction

Focusing on two service design projects, which brought together Ordnance Survey [OS] and Age UK, it describes the importance of design methods and practices in the understanding of place for service innovation. Initiated from a shortlisted crowd sourced project from the 2012 Geovation Challenge, the location for the research is in the Byker area of Newcastle, with the research undertaken by two MDes Service Design Innovation students under the guidance of their tutors. Drawing upon their findings, this paper proposes that an anthropology of place is central to the design of services particularly those looking to mapping and designing personal and community services for elderly people.

Thirty years ago Brubaker (1984, p. 29-35) noted the unifying characteristics of Western rationalism that emphasises calculation and standardization of processes and the displacement of social relations (for example, call centres and the automation of services). The notion of efficiencies of bureaucracies and reduction of many services to economic and automated transactions, characteristically leads to an approach defined by a growing

depersonalization of many state and private services, concomitant with the objectification of the recipient (Espeland & Stevens 1998). When applied to today's societal issues – for example, our ageing population and mounting chronic health conditions - this approach does not reflect the complex needs of the people who use the services, many of which are provided by local and national government, the charitable sector or contracted third parties (McVeigh, 2012; Ramesh, 2013). Furthermore, services based solely on economics ignore the role and knowledge of place in service design innovation which then limits the potential involvement of support groups and partnerships.

Outwardly the UK government appears to be embracing a more joined-up approach to place, with its launch in 2011 of its pilot programme 'Whole Place Community Budgets – Rewiring Public Services Around People.' Selecting four areas, Essex, Greater Manchester, the West London Tri-Borough (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster) and West Cheshire to pilot the approach, the emphasis was on the citizen's experiences, looking at the whole system rather than disjointed services. The programme was completed in October 2012 with the publication of their business cases and the establishment in March 2013 of the Public Services Transformation Network (PSTN) that will support new areas into taking a Community Budget Approach. According to the Ernst and Young report (January 2013), the four pilot sites identified their own projects as part of the development of the Community Budget programme. The themes agreed for the aggregation of these budgets were health and social care, families with complex needs and work and skills. It is not the intention of this paper to critique this current government scheme but to question how place is configured and to challenge 'the dominant framework of modern thought that knowledge is assembled by joining up observations taken from a number of fixed points into a complete picture' (Ingold, 2007, p. 88). Instead, this paper argues for an alternative notion of place, drawing upon literature from phenomenological thinkers and anthropologists who approach the understanding of place from a different standpoint. I consider how place is essential to bringing to life interwoven quotidian living, that is as life as lived, which is central to service design innovation for the elderly.

This paper frames the practice of co-design within discourses of design anthropology (Gunn, Otto & Smith 2013; Halse et al., 2010) and describe the methods and practices of co-designing that were used within the Byker project to thread together the lives of the elderly, to foresee and to improvise future scenarios. The project carefully assembled the daily ephemera and stories to create future scenarios that Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) (in Ingold 2013, p. 214) calls a method of hope 'where the lives it follows, are inherently experimental and improvisatory, with its aim to enrich those lives, causing them to become more sustainable'. With the current Government's emphasis on the need to redesign public services, applying a more consistent and unified- approach, it is proposed that we need to go beyond the current processes of commensuration and explore ways in which service design and anthropology can capture and convey the interconnected nature of place.

Background

With over two hundred years experience mapping the UK, in 2008 Ordnance Survey embarked on an open innovation competition called 'Geovation'. Organised and delivered by the service innovation consultancy Nonon, each year a social challenge is identified and developed by a panel of experts. Central to each is the notion of creating social value to a specific location through the application of OS's digital open geographical data. Ideas for the challenges are then developed using crowd sourcing methods within the UK .

In 2012 Age UK Newcastle was shortlisted for the UK's third Geovation challenge "How can we transform neighbourhoods in Britain together." Formulating and presenting an idea from daily experiences of working at Age UK in Newcastle, an employee from the organisation proposed a solution called 'Where Next' that would use community maps to enable vulnerable older and isolated people to better engage with and integrate into their local community. Although the project was unsuccessful in the final round of bidding, it was considered by the organiser of the Geovation Challenge at OS and myself (a judge for the competition), that the idea had great potential, both in exploring digital geomedias in community based services, and in offering an opportunity to demonstrate the role of design methods and practices in understanding place in service design innovation. On meeting the employee at Age UK Newcastle it was decided by her and her manager and the tutors from LCC, University of the Arts, that Byker in the East End of Newcastle would provide a suitable location for the project with the focus on the development of some form of peer-based, person centred network of services for the elderly.

The Byker Estate, built between 1968 and 1982 and designed by Ralph Erskine, an architect recognised and acclaimed for his social housing, is a notable landmark in the area. According to Pendlerbury & Gilroy (2009, p. 179) the Byker Estate adjacent to the main shopping street in Shields Road, has an unusually and distinctly strong sense of a place-bounded community and pre-dates the housing development, creating a unique character for the area. However, it is also noted by the authors that Byker is economically deprived with high levels of unemployment that reflects the decline of traditional industries (13.5% of the ward is unemployed compared to the Newcastle average of 8.0%, with the never-worked or long-term unemployed totalling 4.1% compared to the City's 2.4%). The percentage of elderly people living in the ward is 65-74 years of age comprising 8.1% of the ward compared to the City average of 8.4%, with the residents who are 75+ of age representing 7.4% of the local population which is below the average of 7.6% across Newcastle (Newcastle Census, 2001).

Theorizing Place

Understanding place is not a distinctive standpoint, other academic disciplines (computer supported collaborative working CSCW and sociology) have also recognised and explored the importance of "place as a social product, a set of understandings that come about only after spaces have been encountered by individuals and groups" (Harrison & Dourish, 2006). Equally Gieryn (2000) speaks of a sociology that will be most effective if it is informed by place, tying in three defining features, location, material form and meaningfulness. He emphasises how "place saturates social life; it is one medium (along with historical time) through which social life happens" (p. 467). Valuable as this literature is to understanding place, because of the nature of this Service Design project, which is focusing on the elderly, I have chosen to explore and theorize place from an anthropology perspective and within a phenomenological tradition, as it is concerned with "the human encounter, experience and understanding of worldly things, and with how these happenings come to be possible" (Thomas ed. Tilley et al., 2006, p. 43). Seminal work by the anthropologist Appadurai (1996, p. 178) sees locality as "primarily relational and contextual rather than as secular or spatial." Extending this explanation further he presents place as "a complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of the social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts." Appadurai openly acknowledges the work of Malinowski (1961) and his recording of the "magical ways, in which small scale societies do not and cannot take locality as a given. Instead, they seem to take it for granted

that locality is ephemeral, fragile and unless hard and regular work is undertaken to maintain its materiality, it will disappear.”

Gupta & Feguson (2001) question how understanding of locality, community and region are formed and lived and answer by suggesting that we look away from the common sense idea that such things as locality and community are simply given or natural and turn towards a focus on social and political processes of place making conceived less as a matter of ‘ideas’ than of embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances.”

Casey’s (1997) phenomenological stance also sees local knowledge as ingrained in place stating:

“Local knowledge is at one with lived experience if it is indeed true that this knowledge is of the localities in which the knowing subject lives. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in”. (Casey, 1997, p. 18)

According to Casey: “Places gather, they gather things in their midst, they gather experiences, memories, even languages and thoughts.” He reminds us to think of what it feels to return to a place you know, how place triggers memories of familiar things, which are contrasted with the new and the strange.

How design uncovers knots and weaves the threads that help us understand place.

When considering design’s role in the design of services and social innovation it is easy to overlook this weaving together of lives as lived, the everyday journeys of the “wayfarer” and the role location plays in defining who the person is” (Ingold, 2007, p. 76). Design’s role can be seen as the intersection of these often fragmented pieces and experiences of daily living and turning them into stories of places, connected by visits, ephemera, and diaries. This approach was adopted by the students whose understanding of Byker flourished, and provided inspiration for their service concepts.

Age UK initially suggested focusing on three sites of service provision for the elderly in and around the Shield’s Road area of Byker: the leisure centre and its coffee shop, a community lunch club run by volunteers at the Byker Community Centre, and an Age UK lunch service at a local Church. The aim was to map and visualize the daily lives of those using such services. Through observational work it emerged that there was an intertwining of services that were not specifically designed for the elderly but were places that were particularly socially enriching and significant to them.

In this section I adopt an ethnographic stance using my own descriptions soon after visiting two of the locations:

In the Shield’s Road a popular hairdresser Pam’s, serving 38 to 40 ladies a day, many of them elderly, was a busy meeting place where the walk-in appointment scheme, no need to book in advance, created a lively atmosphere for cups of tea and a chat before a wash and blow dry. Permeating the misted-up windows the friendly warm atmosphere spills on to the street. Talking to the customers and to the staff and photographing the scene, students were told of people’s long-term relationship with the hairdresser many using it for more than 15 years (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Pam's on the Shields Road. Throughout the day a steady stream of elderly ladies queue and wait to have their hair done.

Across the road from Pam's is Blossom's Cafe. Converted from an Indian Tandoori Restaurant the owner's now run it as a busy cafe offering special pensioner lunches for £2.95 (correct at 2014) for a two course meal.

On entering, the cafe the sound of the chatter is loud. Drifting from the kitchen the smell of roasted meats, potatoes fill the seated dining area. A view into the kitchen shows a man busily preparing a range of dishes. All the tables are taken, elderly people with daughters, sons, grandchildren and friends are seated absorbing the friendly atmosphere as steaming plates of food are delivered from the kitchen and orders taken. Catering for a range of tastes, hearty meals of roast dinners, egg and bacon rolls, curry and all day breakfasts are on offer.

Moving on to the students' work, two lunch clubs were visited where the students helped out, observed and undertook co-design activities. The first lunch club is run by Age UK at St Silus Church, where the elderly people, as a result of their frailty, are picked up by the Age UK bus service and spend their morning at the centre with planned activities and lunch. A second group arrives later for the lunch and then stay on for the afternoon session. These sessions cost £10.00 each and for many of the members they find this too expensive but value it socially as it is the highlight of their week. There is a waiting list for this service and each person is only allowed to use the club once a week although there are three weekly sessions in St Silus. For some this is their main hot meal a week. The second lunch club independent of Age UK is situated one kilometre away from St Silus at the Byker Community Centre. This lunch club takes place once a week and is run by volunteers and costs £2.00 for the lunch.

Using co-design tools such as picture cards, diaries, the students gathered the snippets and trails of daily lives from both the Age UK St Silus lunch group and the Byker Community Centre lunch club. With the shopping receipts, diary records and photographs taken by the lunch club members the students were able to thread together lines of human life, "as a process that involves the passage of time" (Ingold 1993) (Figure 2a and 2b). And it is the combination of place and time that was central to the findings of the students – one cannot be understood without the other.



Figure 2a. A lunch club member at St Silus being introduced to the camera and diary to capture the highs and lows of their week. Figure 2b Shopping receipts and diaries collected from some of the lunch club members.

The students used diaries and cameras as cultural probes (Gaver et al., 1999) Figure 2b, to sensitively collect stories of memorable occasions, events that the people had visited and their concerns and hopes for the future. The lunch club members shared their earliest memories from being evacuated to the countryside during the war, their experiences and stories of living overseas and how they have knitted since childhood. In a diary entry in response to the question "What was the most interesting thing that happened to you during the week?" Margaret an 84 year old lunch club member wrote:

"I looked to the Northern Skies to see falling stars anticipated in August. Cloud cover prevented the wonder but the dark clouds strewn to the west were dramatic."

Here we see place as immersive, extending beyond terrestrial boundaries. For Ingold (2011, p. 120) "wherever there is life and habitation, the interfacial separation of substance and medium is disrupted to give mutual permeability and binding."

The two students participated in Tai-chi classes at the local leisure centre and tea dances at the Community Centre, capturing and recording the places and interweaving of activities making a week memorable and social occasions possible. A diary entry describes a week of activities:

"On Tuesday we went to St Dominic's Church Hall to a sequence dance organised by Age UK. Although we no longer dance, we meet with friends and enjoy their company and the music. On Friday we meet with friends and go to another dance."

Of particular relevance to time within place is the work of another phenomenologist Shutz (1962, p. 16). He sees life as characterized as a process of "growing older together." For him sharing a community of "space implies that a certain sector of the outer-world is equally within the reach of each partner, and contains objects of common interest and relevance. For each partner the other's body his gesture his gait"(1962, p. 16). Shutz adds that connecting place to a community of time concerns not only of outer (chronological) time, but of inner time implying that each communicating partner participates in the "on rolling of life of the other, and can grasp in a vivid present the other's thoughts as they are built up step-by-step. They may thus share one another's anticipation of the future as plans or hopes or anxieties."

At Byker Community Centre, one of the two MDes Students, captured the importance of time, its passing and place. Joyce 79 years of age, attends the Tea Dance and volunteers to support Gladys (85years of age), the Community Champion who runs the Monday lunch

club. Gladys has been involved with the Community Centre since 1965 and joined with her husband for the dance club. She fears that once she is gone no one will run the lunch club and with government cuts the threat of closure of the Centre, will mean that many of the users will have no where else to go. Joyce shares the story of two couples who met during the activities at the Centre who are now living together as elderly couples; thus the Community Centre reflects the entanglements of place and time.

Before describing the students' proposals it would be worthwhile to explain a particular service design methodology that was excluded from gathering information. Customer journey maps common to most service design projects were intentionally not applied to this project as they convey the sense of a start and finish, an 'a-to-b' destination approach. Contrastly, the students' developed place making personas in which the lives of individuals were drawn out as places of knots and lines Figure 3. Ingold (2007, p. 98) refers to how "lines, to indicate possible moves, may join locations or positions on a map and how they form a network in which every place figures as a hub."



Figure 3. Place making personas. How individuals move and dwell is essential to understanding place.

Prototyping Future Visions

For Ingold in (Otto & Smith, 2013, p.145) the creativity of design is "found not in the novelty of prefigured solutions to perceived environmental problems but in the capacity of inhabitants to respond with precision to the ever-changing circumstances of their lives." Making the distinction between creativity and innovation and creativity and improvisation Ingold (2011, p. 216) views the latter as reading forward, "following the ways of the world as they unfold rather than seeking to recover a chain of connections from an end point to a starting point on a route already traveled." Critically examining the service proposal, prototyped for the Byker project (Figure 4a and 4b) by the student, what we see is how the threads and knots of daily life are made visible and drawn together, life as lived; responding to the pressures of an ageing population and the changing landscape of elderly services.

The students' service design proposal invites the lunch club members to sign-up for a paper based locally orientated Age UK reward card at either St Silus or Byker Community Centre. Personal details are collected by Age UK and the reward card is issued. This card provides discounted services at participating businesses in the area. When the card is complete it can be dropped into a lucky draw box at either St Silus or Byker Community Centre where

winners will be picked out at lunch club events. Local Age UK volunteers are also allowed to sign-up for the card. The participating businesses will sign-up on-line and their details will be used to locate them on the Age UK website and local map. In return they will receive advertising on Age UK's website and also an Age UK business partnership certificate for their premises.

Through the use of OS open data to map the participating businesses, Age UK volunteers and out-reach workers will be able to better understand the range and diversity of informal services for the elderly as well as their own within the area of Byker.



Figure 4b. A prototype of the Age UK Byker Reward Card.

The prototype deliberately adopted a low-tech approach for the card. The need for simplicity emerged from the observations and stories gathered from the lunch club members and the word of mouth experiences that loop together the places in Byker; the anxieties of an age in which technology moves so fast.

I find the 'digital' world of today very difficult, screens send me to sleep and I cannot keep with the speed of reaction on the computer..."(Lunch club member St. Silus).

In the current climate of local authority cuts this simple reward scheme would enable Age UK to connect to non-Age UK elderly services and make visible the non-formal services that are used by the elderly. The card would draw together the fragmented approach that is so common to many services and reconstitutes place "in which all life, growth and activity are contained" (Ingold, 2007, p. 96). For Age UK the use of OS mapping data to capture and visualize local services will enable their volunteers and frontline staff to better understand and emesh place through the services on offer.

In the second Service Design proposal the downloadable OS App/ Map and place specific data, was translated into an actual 3D representation of the people and places, moving them within the physical landscape of Byker, like counters on a gameboard. Kjaersgaard (in Otto & Smith, 2013) calls such material manifestations, "knowledge pieces, transitional objects facilitating the move from individual research knowledge to tangible and collective design material" (p. 58). He sees these as "liminal objects mediating between knowledge and design, present and futures, as well as between different knowledge traditions." For the student this physical 3D mapping and design ethnographic work illuminated "place not by location but by histories" (Ingold, 2007, p. 102).

As a result of this dynamic map and the design ethnographic work, the Byker Community Centre became the primary focus for one of the Service Design student's project. Established in the 1930's the Centre now runs as a charity for the local community. With the current local authority budget cuts, the council can no longer support it and the Centre faces the challenge of becoming self-sustaining by 2015. At present, the income attracted to, and generated by the Centre is £35,313 and this includes the local authority funding. Part of the

service proposal by the student is to pull the Age UK services that are dispersed across the community to the Byker Centre, increasing the usage of the Centre and creating greater visibility of Age UK activities; knitting of baby clothes to be tagged as Age UK, Byker Community Centre products, Tai Chi, dance classes and craft activities to be delivered, with some sessions opening up for inter-generational engagement to increase the usage of the Centre and to fill the gaps in their booking schedule.

Taking a phenomenological perspective regarding place and time in the design of services, and considering this case study in the light of the work of anthropological academics, raises the question of anthropology's role in the design process and how this informs the design outcomes. There are of course differences. Whilst noting the similarities between the methods and practices used in design and anthropology, that is, "of integrating observation and reflection," Otto & Smith (2013, p. 3) distinguish the aims and results of these two disciplines. The main aim of anthropology "is to produce generalizations and theories beyond the particularities of ethnographic case studies," whereas "the purpose of design is to create products, processes and services that transform reality." In summary, design is practical and transformative, entrenched in the social world, but the anthropological method of observation and data gathering, as equally embedded in lived experience as an anthropologist's ethnography, is critical for effective design outcomes.

Commensuration and Concluding Comments

In contrast to the phenomenological perspective that this paper has so far proposed as the theoretical underpinning for the design methods adopted in the Byker project, commensuration takes us back to my introductory comments regarding the reduction of transactions to economic units. Espeland & Stevens (1998) define commensuration as the "harmonisation of disparate measurements with varying units to a common metric." For them it is a process that allows the discarding of information and organizing what remains into new forms. Most significantly the authors argue how everyday experience, practical reasoning and empathic identification become an increasingly irrelevant base for judgement as context is stripped away and relationships become more abstractly represented by numbers. The authors explore commensuration as a fundamental feature of social life that is essential to how we categorise and make sense of the world. Commensuration changes the terms of what can be talked about, how we value, and how we treat what we value. Returning to the Government's recent introduction of the Public Services Transformation Network (PSTN), to support new areas into taking a Community Budget Approach, it appears on the surface to be a more joined-up approach to place. For each of the projects piloted under the government's scheme there are elements of design methods, such as the customer journey map, the citizen experience and co-designing to problem and solution finding. Ernst & Young's report (2013) recognises the financial benefits that can result from this approach whilst acknowledging that it is dependent on the role of governance and leadership, socio-economic and local factors on its implementation. When reviewing the section on health and social care, which focuses on integrating commissioning arrangements between public sector partners, it is noteworthy that the benefits are commensurated by budgetary values, which not only fail to reflect place, but also reconfigure it by the very act of drawing conclusions via budgetary values. By contrast, the values that emerged through the OS Age UK Byker project had to be felt and followed before being gathered and acted upon by the students. The question that emerges from this contrast of approach, how can Service Design, coupled with design anthropology, make visible, capture and communicate the

values that are central to place making, values that are incommensurable with models that reduce them to metrics, values that are tied-up with the fragility and ephemeral nature of place making.

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