

UX Boston Conference

Monday, November 17, 2014 : 9:30 AM to 4:15 PM

[Microsoft New England Research & Development Center \(NERD\)](#)

One Memorial Drive, Suite 100

Cambridge, MA

The Value of Impermanence in Design! (12:10-12:35)

by Chris Previte

Many spaces on the web (social media, photo sharing, genealogy sites, etc.) ask us to document so much of our lives. There is an implied permanence to these collections and they are used as currency in making and maintaining social relationships. This need to document and save everything is only half the story however. Here we will discuss the value of impermanence and ways we can incorporate it into our design practice.

About Chris. Chris Previte currently serves as the Academic Chair of the Design Department at the New England Institute of Art. He is a visual designer, photographer, and design educator. He has done work for the Seaport Hotel and World Trade Center, Fidelity Investments, Sail Boston, Wilson Farm and many organizations in the Boston area. An alumnus of the Massachusetts College of Art & Design, Chris is completing an MFA in Graphic Design at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Initial Thoughts

- Documentation/Impermanence = equal weight in the human story
- Tenant of Buddhism
- Oral tradition of stories
- Filtering an event through you
- How that event changes over time in your memory
- Making impressions
- Consider impermanence

.5 PREMISE (2:00)

Many spaces on the web (social media, photo sharing, genealogy sites, etc.) ask us to document so much of our lives. There is an implied permanence to these collections and they are used as currency in making and maintaining social relationships. This need to document and save everything is only half the story however. Here we will discuss the value of impermanence and ways we can incorporate it into our design practice.

1. DOCUMENTATION (6:66)

däkyəmen'təSHən | noun

1) the process of classifying and annotating texts, photographs, etc.¹

2) the photos taken during a night of sin that "document" all of the less than glamorous moments. These may include random drunk dancing, any shirt malfunctions, dress mishaps; ending with bare ass being visible to the public eye.²

BY THE NUMBERS

Facebook

- As of last year, there were over 250 billion photos on Facebook³
- That's an average of 217 photos per user
- Facebook users upload a total of 350 million new photos each day

Flickr

- As of last year, there were about 3.57 billion photos on Flickr⁴
- Users upload an average of 586 million per year, or 1.6 million per day

Ancestry, MyFamily, Genealogy.com

- Users and employees added about 1.2 billion documents to their database last year⁵
- 2.7 million users generate an average of 75 million searches per day

Twitter

- Every second, on average, around 6,000 tweets are tweeted (over 350,000 per minute, 500 million per day and around 200 billion tweets per year)⁶

DRIVEN BY SMARTPHONE ADOPTION

- 64% of all US mobile phones are smart phones⁷
- 80% of new mobile phone purchases are smart phones

¹ New Oxford American Dictionary

² The Urban Dictionary

³ "A Focus on Efficiency. A whitepaper from Facebook et. al.", 09/16/2013 (https://fbcdn-dragon-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-prn1/851575_520797877991079_393255490_n.pdf)

⁴ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/franckmichel/6855169886/>

⁵ <http://www.baselinemag.com/analytics-big-data/managing-securing-data-for-the-worlds-families.html>

⁶ <http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>

⁷ <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2013/smartphone-switch--three-fourths-of-recent-acquirers-chose-smart.html>

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTENT CREATION AND DESIGN

OPPORTUNITIES FOR USER ANXIETY

- This year, Zhiling Tu, Yufei Yuan and Norm Archer (of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario), writing in the “International Journal of Mobile Communications” explained that: Smart phones and other portable digital devices have led to more and more people “carrying with them” valuable data assets wherever they go.⁸
- A 2012 study showed that 73% of respondents would feel “panicked” and 14% “desperate” if some catastrophic event caused them to lose access to their mobile devices and online life.⁹

THIS NEED TO DOCUMENT AND RELIANCE ON CONNECTIVITY CREATES AN IMBALANCE IN THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

- Online culture and mobile connectivity will continue to grow, but it must also evolve.
- Alternative means of interaction that speak to the entire human experience can influence user experience.

⁸ <http://www.inderscience.com/dev/search/index.php?action=basic>

⁹ https://www.lookout.com/static/ee_images/lookout-mobile-mindset-2012.pdf

2. IMPERMANENCE (6:66)

im'pərmənəns | noun

- 1) The state of not being permanent.¹⁰
- 2) The term expresses the Buddhist notion that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is in a constant state of flux.¹¹

THE BUDDHIST NOTION¹²

Early Buddhism dealt with the problem of impermanence in a very rational manner. This concept is known as anicca in Buddhism, according to which, impermanence is an undeniable and inescapable fact of human existence. The early Buddhists did not believe in the existence of a permanent and fixed reality. According to them what was apparent and verifiable about our existence was the continuous change it undergoes.

Take for example the life of an individual. It is a fallacy to believe that a person would remain the same person during his entire life time. He changes every moment. He actually lives and dies but for a moment, or lives and dies moment by moment, as each moment leads to the next. A person is what he is in the context of the time in which he exists. It is an illusion to believe that the person you have seen just now is the same as the person you are just now seeing or the person whom you are seeing now will be the same as the person you will see after a few moments. Even from a scientific point of view this is true. We know cell divisions take place in each living being continuously. Old cells in our bodies die and yield place continuously to the new ones that are forming. Like the waves in a sea, every moment, many thoughts arise and die in each individual. Psychologically and physically he is never the same all the time. Technically speaking, no individual is ever composed of the same amount of energy. Mental stuff and cellular material all the time. He is subject to change and the change is a continuous movement.

Impermanence and change are thus the undeniable truths of our existence. What is real is the existing moment, the present that is a product of the past, or a result of the previous causes and actions.

The Value of Impermanence¹³

- Impermanence brings us hope.
- Impermanence embodies the spirit of freedom and shatters the concept of predestination.
- Impermanence denies the control of gods.

¹⁰ New Oxford American Dictionary

¹¹ The Urban Dictionary

¹² <http://www.hinduwebsite.com>

¹³ <http://www.ibps.org/english/master/Impermanence.html>

IMPERMANENCE IN ACTION

Oral Tradition

The “oral tradition” refers to “the lore of cultures. It is transmitted by word of mouth and consists, as does written literature, of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and the like. Nearly all known peoples, now or in the past, have produced it.”¹⁴

Person Perception¹⁵

- Refers to the different mental processes that we use to form impressions of other people.
- Can be a very subjective process that can be impacted by a number of variables.
- We often form impressions of others very quickly with only minimal information.
- We frequently base our impressions on the roles and social norms we expect from others.

The Rest of the Story¹⁶

- Understanding the value of personal perception as it relates to the events in our lives.

The Importance of Imagination

- Imagination is the ability to form new images and sensations in the mind that are not perceived through senses such as sight, hearing, or other senses.
- Imagination helps make knowledge applicable in solving problems and is fundamental to integrating experience and the learning process.
- A basic training for imagination is listening to storytelling.¹⁷

- The Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher, Jean Piaget¹⁸ posited that perceptions depend on the world view of a person.
- The world view is the result of arranging perceptions into existing imagery by imagination.
- Piaget cites the example of a child saying that the moon is following her when she walks around the village at night.
- Imagination is needed to make sense of perceptions.¹⁹

¹⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/212142/folk-literature>

¹⁵ <http://psychology.about.com/od/socialpsychology/a/person-perception.htm>

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rest_of_the_Story

¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagination>

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Piaget

¹⁹ Piaget, J. (1967). The child's conception of the world. (J. & A. Tomlinson, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. BF721 .P5 1967X

3. BALANCE (6:66)

'baləns | noun

- 1) A condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions.²⁰
- 2) The ability to remain on ones feet.²¹

LEAVING A PLACE FOR THE VIEWER

- It has been said that no work of art is complete until someone experiences it.²²
- Classic art often left room for the viewer.²³
- What the mind can imagine, is often better than what you can show.²⁴
- Respect your audience's intelligence.²⁵

AN EXAMPLE OF BALANCE

SnapChat²⁶

- Building Snapchat has taught us a lot about what makes conversation special.
- An application for sharing disappearing pictures.
- The notion of deletion by default.
- Keep what you want, and we'll get rid of everything else!
- Snapchat was missing an important part of conversation: presence.
- There's nothing like knowing you have the full attention of your friend while you're chatting.
- When you leave the chat screen, messages viewed by both you and your friend will be cleared.

Impressions

- Through conversation and observation we create impressions of one another.
- Impressions however, are impermanent and with the addition of more data over time, evolve.
- Some impressions disappear entirely.
- A tool based on the impermanence of impressions could be useful in many situations utilizing a variety of ever-changing data.

CONSIDER IMPERMANENCE

3.5 QUESTIONS? (3:00)

²⁰ New Oxford American Dictionary

²¹ The Urban Dictionary

²² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-aesthetics/>

²³ [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c0/Supper_at_Emmaus-Caravaggio_\(1601\).jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c0/Supper_at_Emmaus-Caravaggio_(1601).jpg)

²⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zUaNBQ04c>

²⁵ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/s/spikelee590059.html>

²⁶ <http://blog.snapchat.com/post/84407744185/putting-the-chat-into-snapchat>