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DESIGN THINKING IN PRACTICE | PAN STUDIO ON EXPERIENCE DESIGN

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“HOW DID WE GO ABOUT DESIGNING HELLO LAMP POST?”

BY PAN STUDIO
Hi, we’re PAN Studio, an experience design studio based in East London. In this resource, we aim to unravel one of our projects to share insights about design thinking we use in our work.

The example we will use is Hello Lamp Post, a project that was celebrated as good design by its nomination for the Design Museum’s 2014 Designs Of The Year exhibition. To reveal what made it a successful and boundary-pushing design, this resource will aim to answer:

- What is our typical process?

- How do we apply design thinking to experience focused projects?

As with most design projects, a good place to start is the context for the work. What are we interested in and what will we bring to the challenge? What does the brief allow or suggest as routes for exploration?

- LINKS TO PAN STUDIO VIDEO INTERVIEW
- LINK TO PAN STUDIO PROCESS DOWNLOAD

USING THIS RESOURCE FOR YOUR PERSONAL LEARNING

As a design student, or perhaps a recent graduate, consider how your process compares to the methods, techniques and working habits described in this resource.

You might find it useful to read PAN Studio’s account as a trigger for thinking about your own processes. Reflection can be an extremely powerful tool for gaining insights, deepening our understandings of what we do, and improving our efficacy and efficiency as creative practitioners of one sort or another.

What are your typical starting points? Think of a project in which you felt the outcomes were really successful. What actually happened, and in what order?
IN THEORY:
In the most widely used models of design thinking, projects are always initiated from a PROBLEM.

Our top three? You could learn more by reading:
1. __________________
2. __________________
3. __________________

EXPLORING THE DESIGN MUSEUM’S DIVERSE EXHIBITIONS FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE

1. ANALYSE THE BRIEF

Not all projects have a brief, so we use the word as a bit of a catch all here for the context you’re making for. What are you trying to do? What sparked the project or avenue of exploration. It might be available time, site of final work or an opportunity or problem that has been nagging you for a while.

In the case of Hello Lamp Post there was already a well written brief that set context. It still often takes time and early exploration to process a brief. Generally it’s easier to start a project with a brief to push against as undefined constraints can shift. The key themes in the playable city brief were:

The Playable City is presented as an alternative to the smart city.

What is the value of playing in public?

How do you invite a wide range of people to engage in public art?

OUTCOMES
One of the key outcomes here is our reading of the brief. Re-articulating in terms that are productive to your way of working is really useful.

NB: We had initially been planning to submit Run An Empire for the Playable City, but Hello Lamp Post grew out of it.

NOTES:
2. EXPLORE THEMES OF PERSONAL INTEREST

It’s important to understand one’s own role in design, any designer brings their own context to any work.

We explored what we were interested in as a studio. We’d been talking a lot about memory and how it related to the city space. We’d been exploring the idea of a scent camera as a mode of memory recall. A wrist watch that took photos as a way of interrogating how we use photography. I’d also just finished reading Austerlitz by Sebald, which got me reflecting on how location affects memory. We’d been particularly interested in Smithfields in London as a multi-layer part of the city that was only separated by time. We helped to define these areas and discussing them.

OUTCOMES

The outcome here could be described as provocations, changes or themes specific to us. In the case of Hello Lamp Post that meant shared experience of the city, connecting memory and place and challenging what public infrastructure was for.
3. DISTILLATION

We believe strongly in learning by doing, so we went out to identify the user visible artefacts of the smart city. The question we were asking was what does the smart city look like out on the street? How do we experience the public elements of the smart city? We went on walks collecting, photographing and discussing what we thought the smart city looked like. It was during these walks that we first identified the codification of objects as an interesting potential network to use. Their uniqueness was all we need to separate peoples location of input.

We kept talking about their potential as an underlying network for an app, but knew downloading an app was too big a barrier. This shows the value of being able to resonate studio values and ideas against external motivators or ideas. If we were offering a counter to the smart city as we’d identified in the brief, we couldn’t make an app. After that text messaging evolved quiet organically and Tom talked about his experience using it on the project we all worked on in Paris with Hide and Seek called the The Building Is…

We were really influenced by people like Mudlark and Nike Grid here. There use of existing infrastructure for playful outcomes was really important for us.

OUTCOMES

idea. It was at this point we pulled all this together into a submission to the Playable City award that used SMS and objects with codes as playful platform for sharing. Usually you won’t have such a definite point of articulation so early on in project but it helps to focus the project. Having now used kickstarter, this idea of articulating an idea before building has become quite common for us as a studio.

NOTES:
4. DEVELOPMENT

Before we built anything there were lots of questions to answer so we set about working with paper and pens. We needed to know:

- What was the flow of conversation, where were we trying to take players?

- What did repeat visit look like?

- What was the voice of the objects and why were they now using it?

We modelled conversations and used lots of post-it notes trying to work out how smart the system would be. We quickly realised that we didn’t have to answer all of the questions explicitly, but we needed to have a philosophy. In the end, we didn’t say why the objects were waking up, it felt more powerful just to tell people they were and let them fill in the blanks. We took this approach to lots of narrative stuff. There were things that needed more definite answers like how long conversations should be and what the syntax for addressing an object should be.

OUTCOMES

A specification for the first draft of the actual SMS game.

NB: This was one of the most fun bits of the project. Shuffling pieces of paper around, argu-ing over where things like name, familiarity and repeat visits came into the mechanic.

NOTES:
5. BUILD

Using the brief for what the system should do we set about building a minimum viable version of the platform. We built an online interface to test and quickly model the conversations. At this point language became more and more important so testing all the combinations was essential. It was interesting seeing this come together, the whole system felt so much more complete when on a phone out in the city. The objects themselves were the vessels which personality was stored in.

NB The build came together quickly. We talked a lot about what the number should be. A short code, a free number or a local one. In the end local felt right, it really gave the game a sense of place.

OUTCOMES

A playtest-able version of the game.

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6. PLAYTEST

We were constantly play testing through the build phase, with friends and with small groups but our first public, invitation playtest was really important as we gathered a bunch of people we didn't know.

Playtesting is so important to get structured, outside feedback on experience focused work. It helps to have clear sense of what you're trying to achieve and make sure you build in plenty of time for user feedback afterwards. Also, buying people lunch helps.

Our first play test was a disaster, you normally need a bad one to get you in shape. At the time we really felt we had made something horrible, but we went away and within 24hrs we had another playtest that addressed a lot of peoples concerns.

OUTCOMES

A final specification for what the project will be. A clearer sense of what we're making.

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GLOBAL DESIGN MUSEUM

IN THEORY

TO WRITE
1. __________________
2. __________________
3. __________________

GARMENTS FROM THE POPULAR HELLO, MY NAME IS PAUL SMITH EXHIBITION, NOVEMBER 2013 – JUNE 2014

7. REFINEMENT

One of the biggest learnings from our playtest was that people found the objects overly familiar, they were asking very personal questions early on. People just didn’t want to engage with objects that almost seemed prying.

We also learned to make the objects a little stupider. Trying to pretend they were clever wasn’t working so we reduced the smart-ness and made them more obviously programmatic. This helped manage expectation, but also meant when they did surprise people by remembering them, knowing the weather or asking a very location specific question it was all the more rewarding.

NB: Copywriting became a bigger part of the platform than we ever imagined. For something that felt so technical, language, positive reinforcement and simple bits of personality need up being vital.

OUTCOMES

We had a launch party, city wide branding and local press. This was all really important as the system was largely invisible. Although it was an idea that had caught people imaginations, with out regularly reminding them what the phone number was, it was not going to be straight forward getting people playing. Luckily it all went really well and almost all eventualities had been covered in the play testing. On launch day there was a moment when a child was texting object sand we realised we hadn’t really built a way of handling a child sending loads of messages in a row.

NOTES:
8. DEPLOY

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NB: Watershed were amazing in producing Hello Lamp Post and getting it into tall the places it needed to be, form press to banners and a lovely launch event.

OUTCOMES
A live platform

NOTES:
4. REFLECT

Reflecting on how the platform is working, using both live data and anecdotal stuff is really important. For us this process was at its most active whilst the game was still running, meaning we could develop new modes of play and add language changes to keep things moving forward. During the run we added a few things, one was a narrative adventure that people would find if they spoke to the right object. Another was giving voice to an old bell that already had its own twitter account.

Once the run was over we had a more detailed look at the data to see where people were playing, what they had spoken to and what the language most used was.

People played all over the city, something we had wanted since the start. It was also great to see

OUTCOMES

One of the main outcomes from regularly reflecting is knowing what you would do differently if you were to run it again.

NOTES:
IN SUMMARY
PAN Studio’s account of Hello Lamp Post shows that ‘design thinking’ does not entail procedures to be followed slavishly in a certain order or a pre-determined way. Rather it characterises a creative process that designers use flexibly to adapt to the problems they are trying to solve, and the contexts and people that these involve.

DISCOVER MORE
Student events and resources are continually being added so keep an eye on
WEB designmuseum.org/designstudent

EMAIL: learning@designmuseum.org

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FINAL QUESTION

FURTHER RESOURCES & LINKS
One of the main o

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