WAYS OF SEEING SERVICE: SURROGATES FOR A DESIGN MATERIAL

DESIGN AND ITS WILD CARDS
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ABSTRACT

One ongoing debate in service design concerns what can and/or should be designed when working with services. I argue that, as service design grows both academically and in practice, the material of service design is collectively created by individual contributions to service development and design research. This paper looks at such contributions by examining representations, or *surrogates*, that designers make and use to visualise and prototype services. These representations inform us about what is considered part of service as a design material, including service concepts, processes and systems.

Keywords: service design, surrogates, materials

INTRODUCTION

Service design is not new or emerging, it has been around for some time. Lynn Shostack (1984) wrote Designing services that deliver in 1984, and in 1990 Evert Gummesson (1990) wrote the short titled paper Service Design. It is likely that the term has been used also in service providing companies for some time before that. In a study of 12 companies and their service development processes, 11 of the companies' had a step in their process called service design (Alam & Perry, 2002). In the same study researchers found that out of 10 development stages in total, service design was considered the 4th most important stage. The term service design has been used in some models of the new service development (NSD) process (Scheuing & Johnson, 1989). Especially in the operations management discipline, service design seems to have been important early on, as a way to improve the service delivery system by e.g. improving performance and minimising costs (Sasser, Olsen, & Wyckoff, 1978). Service design was also shaped into a special area of interest in the operations management discipline, with a special issue on New issues and opportunities in service design research in 2002 (Verma et al., 2002).

What is new about service design is that it is conducted by designers of various backgrounds. This is done mostly through design consultancies that either realise that they are actually designing services, or that rebrand themselves or expand their area of expertise to include service design. Consequently, a discussion about what it means to be a designer working with services as a design material has emerged (see e.g. (Clatworthy, 2011; 2013; Secomandi & Snelders, 2011; Blomkvist, 2014) and less explicitly (Holmlid, 2007; Sangiorgi, 2009; Wetter-Edman, 2014)). This papers is a contribution to that discussion.

SERVICE AS DESIGN MATERIAL

The most explicit discussions about service as a design material have been focussed on the service touchpoint (Clatworthy, 2011; 2013; Secomandi & Snelders, 2011). Sangiorgi (2009) has discussed the implications of working with service: "When the object of design becomes the way organisations conceive and redesign their own services, Service Design needs to become more familiar with the dynamics and issues of organisational change." (ibid., p. 418).

Holmlid (2007) compared interaction and service design from three perspectives originally proposed in Edeholt & Löwgren (2003): process, material and deliverable. Wetter-Edman (2014) included *stories* as an element of design in her Design for service conceptualisation, based partly on findings during a 10 month field study. During the field study Wetter-Edman noted that the designers "keep telling stories, retelling them or new versions of them" (p. 66) and concluded that they have a central role in designing services.

Perhaps less surprising is that touchpoints (or touch-points) are considered central ingredients in the service design vocabulary, and in the conceptualisation of services from a design perspective. The origin of the word touchpoint in service design is unknown (Howard, 2007; Clatworthy, 2011), but Bitner and colleagues (Bitner et al., 2008) used the term in relation to the blueprinting technique. According to Parker & Heapy (2006), the term was used by organisations to become more oriented towards a relational brand strategy. What is common to most descriptions, is that touchpoints are said to represent moments where customers interact with organisations, and that they are often described from the perspective of the customer where the focus is on the interactions between customers and the service provider. However, there is some confusion about the scope of a touchpoint.

Both Clatworthy (2011) and Secomandi & Snelders (2011) describe touchpoints as contact points between customers and organisations. To Secomandi & Snelders, this includes interactions with "clients, including material artifacts, environments, interpersonal encounters, and more" (p. 20). Clatworthy used a bank as example, where "touch points include its physical buildings, web-site, physical print-outs, self-service machines, bank-cards, customer assistants, call-centres, telephone assistance etc" (Clatworthy, 2011, p. 15). Another description focusses on the material aspect, by describing touchpoints as "tangible things that shape the experience of services" (Parker & Heapy, 2006, p. 26). This is part of a larger framework conceptualising services from a design perspective as an interface consisting of touchpoints, channels, architectures and journeys (Parker & Heapy, 2006).

SERVICE MOMENTS

Koivisto (2009) used a customer-centric perspective of services to propose a framework for structuring services and customer experiences. In the framework, touchpoints were divided into channels, objects, processes, and people, and described as points of interaction where "the service and its brand is experienced and perceived with all the senses." (Koivisto, 2009, p. 145). However, Koivisto (2009) made a distinction between touchpoints and so called service moments: "episodes or encounters where the production of the service and the interactions between a customer and service provider happen" (p. 142). An example of a service moment is a check-in process at an airport.

Unlike Clatworthy (2011) and Secomandi & Snelders (2011), Koivisto separated the physical attributes of channels, objects, processes and people from the interactions that take place over time. This means that service moments contain a number of different touchpoints, and interactions with the touchpoints over time. Hence, a service moment is defined by the characteristics of a situation, and the interactions that take place in that situation are distributed across touchpoints and in time. A customer can e.g. interact with a ticket machine interface, the ticket itself, a queuing process and a person behind a counter in the same service moment.

While both touchpoints and service moments are useful constructs, they are not inherently material but must instead be filled with content. Rather than being material they can be described as strategies for manifesting services. In addition, touchpoints focus on interactions between customers and service providers, thus leaving out a big part of services (such as backstage, support, maintenance, customer actions and so on). Instead of focussing on touchpoints, or any other theoretical construct, this paper attempts to understand service as a design material from the bottom up. It does so by looking at how service designers represent existing and future services in their work today. These representations are described here as *surrogates*.

SURROGATES IN DESIGN

It is proposed that representations of services, such as visualisations and prototypes, can be understood using Andy Clark's idea of a surrogate situation (Clark, 2010). "By surrogate situation I mean any kind of real-world structure that is used to stand in for, or take the place of, some aspect of a certain 'target situation'" (Clark, 2010, p. 24). These situations are constructed when the actual thing we are investigating or trying to understand is not physically present or accessible. Clark has connected the concept of surrogate situations to design by reference to Gedenryd (1998), who has detailed many different uses of surrogate situations, such as sketches, prototypes, thumbnails, storyboards, and scenarios, to name but a few. In short, a surrogate has properties that allow you to better understand another situation, or to relieve cognitive resources that are occupied in "real" situations (Clark, 2010).

To be useful, surrogates in design must be related to the actual services they represent, regardless of whether they are existing or imagined services. If the surrogates in design are not related to the actual material or object of design, then they cannot be used to inform the design process. A person who is designing a chair is not helped by sketching vases (at least not directly). We must also assume that the techniques that are used in design are, in some way, useful. So, by using this logic, the surrogates that designers use in service design say something about what aspects of services they are able to represent, understand and influence. Furthermore, this means that surrogates provide a way to study the materials service designers work with.

SERVICE SURROGATES

By investigating what techniques service designers use to represent services, it is possible to generate a list of service surrogates and the associated materials. A list is generated here, by surveying the techniques in (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010) and comparing them to several studies of service design practice (see also

Blomkvist & Segelström, 2014), to find the ones that represent, or use representations, of services and that are not categories of techniques in themselves (e.g. prototyping). This is the resulting list:

- Roleplay – making enactments of specific touchpoints or service moments and exploring them, using e.g. theatre methods. Does not require props made for the occasion.
- Customer journey maps – a depiction of the customer's journey through a service with a focus on the experience.
- Blueprints – a depiction of all components, actions and interactions involved in a service delivery from back office procedures to receipts.
- Design scenarios – a description of a potential service use, used to explore certain aspects of the service.
- Storyboards – similar to customer journey maps, but focusing on the interactions and actions. The depiction is built in the same fashion as comic stories.
- Desktop walkthrough – using play dough, small figures, and whatever is available a service location is created and explored.
- Service Staging – one or more locations are built, complete with props that support immersion in the service experience. The service is then enacted. Can be done together with external stakeholders.

These techniques, in turn, generate a list of eight, more or less, well-defined *objects* (the word objects are used here in the sense: the things toward which effort is directed) of design. The first three objects: components, things, and locations, are tangible and to some extent physical surrogate materials. The next three objects: actions, procedures, and interactions, are related to events that unfold over time, and the last object is perhaps the most abstract: experiences.

Table 1: The objects of service design techniques and associated design disciplines compared to key concepts in New Service Development (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996).

NSD element	System	Process	Concept
Objects of service design	*Components, things, locations*	*Actions, procedures, interactions*	*Experiences*
Associated design competence	*Architecture, product, graphical*	*Usability, interaction*	*Experience design*

To make sense of this set of objects that are represented in service designers' surrogates for service, notable contributions concerning the nature of services in service research was examined (e.g. Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996; Grönroos, 2008; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Lovelock, 1983; Gummesson, 2007; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Though somewhat dated, the best match was found between the New Service Development (NSD) concepts proposed by Edvardssson & Olsson (1996) and the objects (in *italics* in Table 1).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The obvious next step for this research is to empirically investigate what the objects are more specifically, by asking questions such as: do service designers design products and locations for organisations? If so, what types of products and/or locations? How are temporal events, such as interactions and procedures, and experiences communicated and documented by designers? Are there other objects of design that do not fall into any of the suggested categories? How then, are those objects represented in design?

This list also implies that service design encompasses a whole range of disciplines, from architecture to experience design. Does this mean that service designers should be trained to acquire all those design competences, and are there specific service design skills on top of that? A more reasonable approach is probably to have multidisciplinary design teams. However, the question of specific service design skills remain interesting to consider. It could be argued that service design is an approach that considers an ecology of stakeholder interactions, and constructs a material surrogate to manipulate and observe that ecology.

This paper has made a bottom-up contribution to the discussion about what service designers design. It is not meant to be normative, but rather a snapshot of the current, (potential) extent of service design. Since the proposed objects were generated by looking at the techniques that service designers use; system, process, and concept are areas of organisations that service design can contribute to and influence. At least there are tools available to do so.

Implicitly, this means that by designing these aspects of services, designers are suggesting what they can improve by using a design approach. Hence, they are creating the mandate for what the design contribution is to the larger context of service development. This is why this discussion is so important – it potentially influences what the boundaries are for design and its contribution and relevance for the larger context of service development. The ambition today will influence the extent to which service design is included and relevant during service development in the future. At the same time, by promising too much there is a potential backlash if service design is unable to deliver on the promises.

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