

5.3 The art of noticing: using photography for storytelling

Objective

The objective of this exercise is to observe how the grouping strategy can be used to organize visual stimuli narratively. Grouping can be used to do more than simply organize objects into different categories solely for logical or functional classification. Another interesting use of this strategy is to weave facts into events and events into a story along a timeline. Unlike functional categorization, storytelling can help us navigate information by identifying unexpected connections and guiding action to show the next step in the story. This narrative interpretation of sequences of events and choices can help designers organize information so that users can understand and memorize more easily when they have to interact with a new product.

Instructions

1. For this exercise you will have to work with a partner. Each partner will have to take a photography walk during which he/she will take a series of pictures aimed at telling a particular story. Spend some time identifying a suitable subject for the story and a place where this subject will be portrayed (plan for a 30-minute to one-hour walk).
2. Build a substantial or immediately recognizable story. You can find ideas in photography manuals or websites with a narrative photography or photographic storytelling chapter/page where you can find ideas and suggestions. The references provided below offer resources and advice on photographic storytelling. Of course, you can just use your inspiration and imagination. One way to organize your story is the narrative arc model (see Lupton, 2017), in which the story starts in a seemingly trivial way. Something more or less unusual or dramatic happens, tension and emotion peak, until everything is resolved, and things go back to (a new) normal.
3. Each partner will be required to take pictures about the story and a few additional pictures of interesting subjects that the photographer will stumble into during the walk that are not related to the main story. Aim for a total of 10-15 pictures.
4. After the walk, the two partners will exchange their pictures and each participant will spend some time to infer the story that the other partner created (20 minutes).
5. Finally, the two partners will present their work to each other and will discuss together going through the following checklist:
 - Did you understand your partner's story as it was intended?
 - Was it easy to identify episodes of the story? Was it easy to allocate these episodes on a timeline?
 - How did you cluster the pictures together? Following which criteria?
 - How many and which pictures that your partner did not mean to be part of the story did you include in the story? Why? Was the story more interesting when it contained the 'wrong' pictures?
 - Observe how the power of storytelling can help us to make sense of unrelated things and discover potential and surprising connections among them.

References

Elegant Design: A Designer's Guide to Harnessing Aesthetics
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