

‘You are a product of your environment.’

W. Clement Stone

Research Methods & Communication

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Introduction

Chapter 1

As a creative, working in a mundane, white walled room can be difficult to fully connect with the creative side of your mind. Being in an environment that you can connect with and be inspired by is incredibly important in the sense of productivity and creativity.

“Feeling present is becoming aware that you stand in this space at this time, that you are alive... it strengthens our sense of being alive and of how we are held and nourished by the spaces around us.” (Farrell quoted in Ursprung, 2014:87)

Working in and around shape and colour can do more than inspire, it can allow the creative individual to gather new inspiration and fuel a type of creative flame that they may not have considered or been able to access whilst working in a bland and uninspiring environment. With this idea in mind, I would like to apply my design knowledge and skills to potentially create a series of interactive and functional wall cladding, varying in shape and colour. Designed to be used in open plan office spaces, that can often be lacking in inspirational décor, the cladding can also play a part in developing and enhancing connections between users.

Function and Materiality

Chapter 2

Brutalist architecture has and always will be a large influence on my work as its constructed features and intentions feed my interests and appeal to my analytical mind and clinical design process.

New Brutalism revolves around connective space and pays attention to materials and textures along with functionality and equality when constructing. Challenging traditional perceptions of what a typical building should look like, while also focusing on the functionality of the interior space as much as the exterior. Making features out of components that just serve a purpose into a key spectacle of the building, for example; ventilation and lift shafts. Aiming to create community was an important component of their design ethos. Building a sense of community through design where people often met and interacted due to close proximity. Considering the people inhabiting the buildings, Brutalist architects also paid close attention to the exterior of the building and how people around the architecture would interact or benefit from its design.

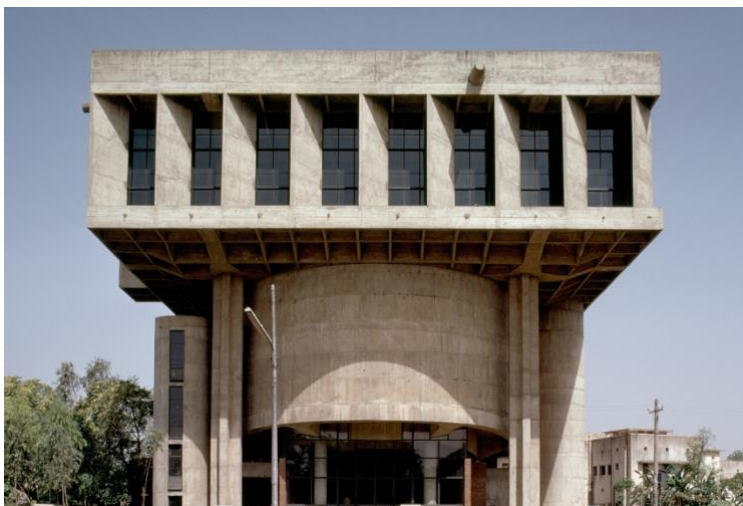


Figure 1: The Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts - India



Figure 2: The Met Breuer - New York

The Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts and The Met Breuer are two perfect examples of this. Both having been designed as 'top heavy' buildings featuring large overhangs, with no support structures. Not just through aesthetic design purposes but for functionality, benefiting its surrounding community as well as its occupants. Enabling the floor space inside the building to be increased without extending the building on the ground level therefore meaning more pavement and space around the building for passers-by. This feature creates a dramatic and impressive feat of architecture benefiting many people surrounding and using the building.

I have always been influenced by various types of architecture through the greater part of my design work. Not only do I draw inspiration from the unintentional angles and forms created through various perspectives of a building, I also understand the connective elements of a space and how the occupant interacts with said space. I feel a space and absorb what is trying to communicate to me, emotionally and psychologically. Indicating direction or a sense of freedom can be suggested by a building's layout; clear barriers and perhaps coloured lines on the ground, indicating direction like the London Tube system or high ceilings with greenery and natural light much like the Sky Bar in London. Spaces are able to emit an emotional feeling through well thought out design.

Now we must look at how materials can be used, which in turn, create emotional and psychological feelings; for example, the Tate Modern's Switch House. Flowing through from the Tate Modern's original building the industrial atmosphere continues but develops into a rawer quality of architecture through materials; concrete and steel. Architecture's Herzog and De Meuron "give their materials a perceptual twist, such as making the heavy look light or the transparent solid." (Moore, 2016)

Using such a strong material to create such a beautiful curved staircase, flowing gently down and merging into the soft polished floor with grace, thus playing with our perception of the material.



Figure 3: Tate Modern Switch House - London

The swirl of this immense structure creates a sense of movement and directional flow, engaging with the visitors to explore what may be above this blanket of concrete. Feeling visually soft and almost effortless the staircase amongst the other features of the buildings are quite contrasting in shape and feel; combining straight and curved lines to create a caressing element while still drawing architectural vibes from the high rise city that it sits amongst. With space and structure in mind from Herzog and De Meuron it becomes an enriching experience simply being present in the building which encourages in the visitor an interest to explore other parts of the building, making it as much of a piece of art in itself.

When experimenting with various materials, I often aim to explore the materials capabilities and question the range of processes that can be applied. Creating new surface textures and patterns to a material can lead an observer to question the initial properties of the material and how it may have been manipulated. Take for example my previous creation of magnetic leather; this material is usually associated with luxury clothing or lounge furniture. In contrast, through experimentation, I blurred the lines between a material's aesthetic properties and its functional properties. This was completed by fusing two materials together to make almost, a 'new' material. I intend to implement such material exploration within my functional wall covering concept.

Space

Chapter 3

When observing a creative studio atmosphere, I have a strong belief that the environment where one operates has a large part to play in a creative individual's productivity and inspiration. For example, at Swansea College of Art, The Surface Pattern Design studio is full of creative energy and encourages students to display their work on and around their desk to influence their creative process, as well as those that pass and work nearby. Experiencing this first hand, there is certainly an energetic and positive impact on my creative process, operating in such an awe-inspiring and vibrant workspace only pushes my ideation and creativity further. Being surrounded by others, with common interests, there is a huge sense of community and a strong dialogue regarding work. Exhibiting examples of process and new ways of drawing and designing has a positive creative influence when surrounded by this ever changing work space.

This particular atmosphere fuels myself and other students to create and to be more productive and even communicate better throughout our work day. Physically, visually and sensually being able to connecting with a physical workspace in a practical sense is key to my personal ability to create. "Being physically emotionally and psychologically aware of the spaces that surround us and of our place within them could be described as having a sense of presence." (Goodwin quoted in Ursprung, 2014:36). Being encouraged by our lecturing staff to fill our given desk spaces with inspiration from artists' work, drawings, photographs, as well as our own sketches, designs and experiments provides a constant stream of creative information that connects with me on various levels and inspires my ideation process. Colour, texture, shadow and shape all fuel a creative individuals' mind when working. Displaying a range of works different or similar to my own stimulates my creative thought process. Making me question the 'what if?', I feel a surge of energy, an excitement to try something new. A new method? Technology? Material? Colour? The opportunities become endless. Whereas, in contrast, a chillingly boring working environment can do quite the opposite, and leave the individual to what can be compared to staring at the 'blank canvas' for too long. As described by Coster, "The way a workplace is designed can impact

on the extent to which an employee connects and identifies with their colleagues and the organisation as a whole.” (Coster, 2014:17). My understanding of this is that an employee will work more efficiently when feeling a connection with the space and workplace as a whole, a number of factors such as facilities provided, location and aesthetic attributes within the work space are all important. The working environment should feed the soul and mind of a creative and excite them to work within a space. George A. Akerlof and Rachel E. Kranton stated that “if employees think of themselves as firm insiders, rather than outsiders, the pay differentials needed to induce higher effort will be lower” (Akerlof and Kranton 2010, as cited in Coster, 2014:5). When an employee feels as if they are an important part of a workspace and are not pressured by a hierarchy, in a structured space they almost become ‘one’ with the environment and feel extreme cohesion between the space and the other employees, boosting morale and productivity. All these elements can drive a future employee to be attracted to a job via the environment and work ethic in the given space. Understanding Coster, work place aesthetics have a great influence on a potential future employee’s attractiveness to the position, each element of the space should be considered with the employee in mind (Coster, 2014:3). For example, a busy and dynamic work atmosphere tends to be regarded as a happier place of work. This is evident in open plan offices, which in their nature create more of a ‘social space’ where workers can interact freely and feel more relaxed in their institution of work. The aforementioned Surface Pattern Design studio is a prime example of this. When working in this studio space on a daily basis I find that there is a constant sense of freedom, even when workshops and tasks have been set. We can also recognise through this teaching space that activity based learning is more beneficial than regular methods of teaching for creative minds; feeding creative inspiration without feeling forced to work to a set of rules (Coster, 2014:3). The Surface Pattern Design studio’s ever changing landscape, and the deliberate creation of social spaces used ideally for interaction, promotes dialogue and in return a working method of motivation for its students.

Lefebvre states that “space is a social concept. It is “not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products”. (Lefebvre as cited in Trotto, 2013:4). This quote suggests that social space is an environment that can not technically be owned by anyone but rather, can be used by everyone in its ever-changing state of occupancy. This brings me to look at

the advancements in modern and innovative office spaces when creating social space through interior contents. The Google Headquarters in London is a prime example of a working environment that creates dynamic social spaces for its employees. Designed by Bjarke Ingles and Thomas Heatherwick, Google HQ themselves describe it as “exercising your creativity” within their “quirky” spaces (Google, 2017). Their “diagonal staircase” that runs through the centre of the building, creates a sense of natural movement and direction through the space and encourages a fluid work atmosphere while creating various opportunities for dialogue with employees of different sectors. Spaces like this enable the employees to be comfortable in their work environment and have enjoyable interactions with other employees in the contemporary meeting environments created.



Figure 4: Google HQ - Granny's Flat



Figure 5: Google HQ – The Lala Lab

Spaces such as “Granny’s Flat” and “The Lala Lab” are prime examples of social space, created by Ingles and Heatherwick. “Granny’s Flat is furnished with chintzy chairs and fittings that wouldn’t look out of place at your nan’s.” (Penson, 2016). Recreating a warm, domestic like feeling to this area of the office, allows the users of the space to feel ‘at home’ while being at work. While being very whimsical, the comforting ‘home-like’ design of this space most certainly would connect with the users on an emotional level, therefore influencing how they choose to use the space. For example, if a user of the space perceives it as a ‘homely’ atmosphere, they may consider holding relaxed or more informal meetings here. Whereas, a user who perceives the space as a sentimental environment, may use it more as a place of relaxation, utilising the ability to take a break and ‘wind down’ here for some time during the often frantic work day. Google HQ was evidently designed by Ingles

and Heatherwick with the users' experience and their emotions at the very fore front. Ingles states, "It's all about human beings and that's it. Think sunken snugs, comfort, fun... fresh air and you'll get what its all about as a HQ" (Ingles cited in Penson, 2016). Creating freedom through the unconventional themed open plan office spaces that they have, the designers have established a modern, dynamic work space for the 'modern' worker.

Acknowledging research from *The impact of office design on business performance*, modern work spaces are on the up-rise due to open plan work spaces becoming more and more popular within various companies and organisations (CABE, 2005). With this sheer growth comes a desperate need for the development of functional work interiors, just like the spaces that Ingles and Heatherwick constructed in the Google HQ project. Companies such as Offecct and Orangebox have flourished in this market and are manufacturing products for creative work environments while incorporating innovative design and materials. Offecct design products for "active meeting places" (Offecct, 2017) for public areas or the work place. Promoting friendly meeting environments to enable users to communicate with ease interacting and using their modern product designs. Likewise, Orangebox offer a range of products on both ends of the user experience spectrum. Some products are targeted to aid collaborative meeting environments while others offer users to work quietly and individually in an internal and contained space. User interaction and experience is a discernible key point to their companies' design process, enabling users to form a connection with themselves and the product.



Figure 6: Smallroom Plus, 2000 - Offecct



Figure 7: AIR-23 – Orangebox

Aesthetic and Emotional Design

Chapter 4

When studying the relationship between aesthetics and the user experience, Norman's theory and Khalid's study suggested that "hedonic attributes" (Khalid, 2016:197) mean a product must provide an emotional connection to the user while still maintaining functional and aesthetic characteristics to be good. Khalid expressed that there are three abstraction levels of design to be considered when creating a product. The first being its functionality. We must question whether the item in question is easy to use and also enables the user to perform their task adequately? The second is user emotion; does the user connect with the item when using it? Does the item evoke a feeling or influence the users approach to the product? Finally, does the item provide the user with aspirational qualities? Will the user experience a sense of social status while using or owning the item? (Khalid, 2016:197) These three factors should be considered when conceptualising a product to enable the user to have a greater affinity with said product. This is something that should be mandatory when considering my designs of functional wall cladding. The users I am inevitably designing for enable the product to come to life and become a functioning feature within a space. Creating a connection with the user while still being able to bring desirable aesthetic qualities to a product is an essential element to feature in items that I design. This notion is supported by Norman, stating "In emotional design, pleasure and usability should go hand in hand, as well as aesthetics, attractiveness, and beauty." (Norman (2014) cited in, Khalid, 2016:197). All these qualities should work in cohesion for a strong affiliation to be achieved by the user.

Take for example how a user would interact with my potential wall cladding product; different methods of interaction can vary depending on the choice of material. If a user is presented with a document on a piece of cartridge paper and a document on a laminated

piece of cartridge paper, they would hypothetically hold more value and attachment to the laminated document as more time had been put into protecting it. Following interaction through material choice, the users would then be presented with an interactive wall with sections of cork board and some sections of magnetic board. If they were asked to attach both documents onto the wall but can only attach one document to each section. It could be hypothesised that they would attach the laminated document onto the magnetic board and the cartridge paper onto the cork board; suggesting that they have less attachment to the cartridge document as they are willing to pierce a hole in it. Therefore, giving people a choice of interaction through material choice and allowing an aesthetic and emotional attachment to the product.

Integrating the concept of “Funology” (a term spawned from human computer interactions) (Khalid, 2016:197) which is created through emotional design, therefore allowing the user to have fun and enjoy while using a product. ‘Funology’ is something I believe to be lacking within corporate spaces and offices. My purpose is to create a product that aims to serve a function while also enabling connections with multiple users in a work place to build social communities within a normally restricted and ridged environment. Building a habitat for the users to feel able to interact with other office occupants as well as the building itself.

Ursprung states, ‘It seems that we are becoming aware once more that the relationship between ourselves and buildings can no longer be merely visual.’ (Ursprung, 2014:47) The aim is to change the stereotypical concept of a work place by embracing it as a ‘work habitat’, suggesting that it should be a place that you positively connect with rather than just occupy.

Circling back to Orangebox and Offecct; creating private spaces within work environments with their furniture. Orangebox create options for group meetings or individual private work, producing physical and acoustic privacy. Their products can create social-able elements through comfort and innovative design, aiming to ‘connect people, not furniture’ (Orangebox, 2017). Offecct similarly describe their products as creating ‘active meeting places’ (Offecct, 2017) for the work place and for public areas, aiming to bring people together, face to face, promoting enjoyable meetings and activities. Their products target

creating informal meeting spaces while highlighting their aim of contributing to design culture.

‘The boundaries of work spaces have become more fluid now days...evolved from tightly controlled production units to open, dynamic environments for creative individuals...Environments with a focus on mobility and flexibility; that celebrate people’s differences and the unique needs of every activity.’ (Offecct, 2017)

Intentions

Chapter 5

From this, the next task on my agenda is to implement such research and material exploration into a final product. With consideration of aesthetic and emotional design along with my understanding of connective space, I aim to take these aspects of design forward into potentially creating functional and decorative wall cladding for office spaces. Its my understanding that there seems to be a gap in the market for such product. The initial steps include various design methods including scale modelling, practical research and endless testing of materiality. The aim is to create a product that will deliver a decorative, yet functional coherence to a space and bring users together at the office ‘hub’ like feature. Its extremely important that I establish the functionality through material choice for elements such as sound proofing, notice boards or even room dividers. Ideally all materials will become linked with an applied pattern inspired from architecture, developing them into what I see as ‘Physical Patterns’. Combining the arrangements of materials to create a juxtaposition of texture and colour emitted from the natural finish of the material, bringing a new, dynamic ambience and visual coherence to what’s generally a bland, boring space.

Glossary

A Creative or Creatives' (plural)

- A person or persons' whose field is in design.

Social Space

- An environment that is not technically owned by someone but can be used by everyone in its ever-changing state.

Hedonic

- Enjoyable or unenjoyable sensations.

Funology

- Pleasurable sensation through a product.

Physical Pattern

- Pattern that becomes 3 dimensional while also offering a functional element.

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