

In the Beginning Was the Experience

The Experimental Reception Studies

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The tradition of media reception studies is primarily based on qualitative methods in which the informants are interviewed about their experiences and interpretations of the media or program investigated (Schrøder 2001). Their words are seen as the track to the conscious and unconscious experience from viewing, seeing or reading a media product in a naturalistic setting open for subjective interpretations.

The tradition of experimental media reception studies, are in contrast often using quantitative methods. The materials that are tested are often consisting of different versions of the same message or format and the findings are often contrasted to those of a control group.

The experimental media receptions studies are relatively few and in the following we will give an overview and seek to characterise the differences through carefully selected prototypes. These differences we see as based primarily on epistemological interests.

In this article we are looking at the two traditions and how they may merge, in an experimental reception study with is focused on the informants experiences, and which involve the action of selecting and judging as a process that constitute the experience at a pre-verbal level.

In the beginning was – not the word – but the experience. Our aim here is to establish and discuss the concept of experience as the foundation for the experimental reception study.

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What Is Experimental Reception Studies

'... the essence of the true experiment is control' is the core meaning of Iyengar & Kinder (1987:6). The control is given to the investigator to create the conditions under investigation; the experimenter randomly assigns individuals to those conditions; their intention is to hold extraneous factors constant, and ensures that individuals will encounter conditions that differ only in theoretically decisive ways.

The conditions can be the material to be tested; the situation where the test takes place; the participants for the test:

The material can have a wide variation: It can be manipulated ordinary TV-news, where during five days news-programmes one specific topic is inserted (Iyengar & Kinder 1987); An ordinary Tv-news where five topics are presented in four different ways (Findahl & Højjer 1976); A story in the newspaper written in four different formats (Thorndyke 1979) and (Denton 1993); A story in a popular science magazine presented in four different styles (Gjedde 1998); an article with four different newsphotos (Ingemann 1998, 1999a); 12 photos from the TV screen (Philo 1990); An exhibition at a museum (Ingemann 1999b); A myth (Bartlett 1932).

The situation can be at the laboratory, as when Iyengar & Kinder (1987) ask the participants to come to the university or to the Swedish Radio (Findahl & Højjer 1976). Philo visits groups of people e.g. at their place of work and Gjedde and Ingemann visits the informants at their homes. Denton (1993) uses telephone interviews.

The situation is more than practical arrangements. The participants can play the role of the test person at the university and can have the feeling of

being 'at school'. This feeling can be reinforced by filling out questionnaires. The informants can feel more comfort at their own homes or at their place of work and by more informal methods like group or personal interviews.

The participants can be as few as one but often the more qualitative projects use sixteen informants (Gjedde 1998 and Ingemann 1998); in the more quantitative projects the participants can be from 100 to about 1.000 persons. The projects use university students or carefully selected informants either to be representative to a whole population or to create a broad variety of knowledge and attitudes.

One could mean that what separates the experimental project from ordinary reception projects is that:

- the project consists of material in more than one version e.g. five different versions of elements in a news program
- the project establishes a control group that can function as a reference point to the groups presented the altered versions (Findahl & Höijer 1976)
- the project has a clear defined hypothesis that has to be tested
- the participants are so numerous and well selected that the results can be seen as representative
- the results can be presented as significant figures of the quantitative data.

Some of the projects above can not be characterised that way. What characterises experimental experience projects is that

- the project can consist of more than one version – but can be only one version (Ingemann 1999b) and (Bartlett 1932)
- there is no control group
- there is no clearly defined hypothesis but instead some fields of interest open to the informant to investigate
- the informants are few and the results are representative for the informants and can only with care be used to generalise
- the results only can be presented as well argued analysis of the qualitative data.

The most important feature is that in our experimental projects we want to create conditions where

it is possible to go below the most naturalistic reading of the media product. That means the projects are constructed in a way that the informant has to do something more than just talk. The construction has the intention to place the informant in the discourse of action.

The informant has to perform an action: The informant has to rank and make a choice between four different photographs illustrating a news-paper article (Ingemann 1998); The informant has to retell an article in a popular science magazine (Gjedde (1998); The informant's walk around in an exhibition in a museum is recorded on video (Ingemann 1999b) – and the informant's reactions are used to derive something from their experience. The definition of experience as 'condition or event by which one is affected (Onions 1979) implies that we look at affective conditions which are mostly emotional and aesthetic and which are not immediately possible to verbalise, therefore needing another way to make this knowledge available to the researcher, which is achieved by placing a set of actions in the design of the project.

The second aspect of experience is the 'knowledge resulting from observation'. For instance this knowledge is found through the informants experiences of photographs, a popular science magazine, or the walking around in an exhibition. It is also the experience we achieve as researchers of the informants and their actions and choices, in the common space we construct together with them in the research situation.

One can say that when Iyengar & Kinder (1987:6) defines the core meaning as '... the essence of the true experiment is control' they construct the researcher as an objective and uninvolved person, one who looks at the participant as responding to some impulses coming from the outside which are interpreted in a rational manner. The relationship between researcher and participants is hierarchical and dualistic.

In our projects the focus is on a situation with dialogue with the informants which offers us as well as the informants the potential to extract knowledge from the experience ; the experience they gain is personal and our experience is guided by the epistemological interests defined by the concrete project.

Our focus on the experience is much more complicated than e.g. factual knowledge, which means that inductive complexity is part of the projects. We look at the means of expression and their epistemological consequences for a reader, but our focus is the meeting between an expression and a reader

and our aim is to deduce which complex features and elements are important for the experience. That is why the experimental concept is important for us. We want to make new ways to create experiences for our informants, and look at the ways they create experiences for themselves through their relations to what they are presented to.

Where the aim of Iyengar & Kinder is to control and to generalise, we in contrast see our projects as founded in ‘grounded theory’ and thereby in the strength and the cogency of the concept and idea.

In the following we will be exploring the idea of a methodology for experimental reception studies with experience as a main notion and tracing its roots back, and pointing to some of its theoretical and methodological predecessors.

Bartlett – The Background Story

The British cognitive psychologist Sir Frederic C. Bartlett’s work, has been groundbreaking in the way he has used the experimental method; He insisted ahead of his time on using “ecologically valid” tasks and on retaining complexity, in the experimental design and approach to the analysis.

Bartlett writes about the setup of his experimental work, that he was: “determined to try to retain the advantages of the experimental method of approach, with its relatively controlled situations, and also to keep my study as realistic as possible. I therefore built up, or selected, material which I hoped would prove interesting in itself, and would be of the type which every normal individual deals with constantly in his daily activities”. (1932:xvii)

The experiments that Bartlett describes were carried out between 1913 and 1932, when his seminal work on memory *Remembering – a Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, was first published. In this book he describes a number of different methods for exploring perception and imaging and remembering. Common to the methods is the use of series of retellings or drawings over time in response to visual or verbal material, using a relatively small number of informants, or sometimes individuals with a specific cultural background, or a group. An example of his work is his experiment with the North American Indian story: “The War of the Ghosts”. It was presented to 20 subjects, who read it twice, and then after 15 minutes wrote it down for the first time. Then at intervals according to opportunity, not a fixed schedule they would write it down again individually, the last reproduction a subject produced happened ten years after

the first. And these repeated reproductions were then providing material, for an analysis of changes and reconstructions that happened over time, providing material for Bartlett’s seminal theories on the constructive character of memory, and his schema-theory.

Bartlett is exemplifying aspects of the methodology which are dealing with the construction of experience in his reconstructive perspective on how the process of memory is working. He is interesting because he sees the process of memory as related to contextual factors, and related to what he call the effort after meaning: “...it is fitting to speak of every human cognitive reaction – perceiving, imaging, remembering, thinking and reasoning – as an effort after meaning.”...”When we try to discover how this is done we find that always it is by an effort to connect what is given with something else.”(Bartlett 1932:44)

Seen from a perspective of his relevance for today, it is quite strange to read this critique from the foreword to the latest edition of his book, in which renowned cognitive psychologist Walther Kintsch writes about what he perceives to be the shortcomings of his method. Since it quite accurately reflects the clashing between two paradigms it is relevant in what it highlights:

...he was mostly concerned with experimental conditions be as natural as possible and did not worry much about replicable, stable experimental conditions. There are no statistics, and there is little data aggregation. What we get are selected examples. In my opinion this is the weakest aspect of the book... (Kintsch 1995:92).

What Kintsch is criticizing here would within a qualitative research paradigm be characterized as a research which was providing ecologically valid tasks and produced qualitative analysis of the case studies, on which he based his theories. But Bartlett has posed a critique directed towards the prevailing tendency to regard the experimental method, or to set up experiments that were too simplistic and did not take into account the complexity of the mental processes and their interdependency with context and personal background.

Kintsch’s perspective on Bartlett’s qualitative experimental methodology indicates some built in expectations, that this methodology automatically belongs within a positivistic realm of research and should conform to its rules and standards. This might be one of the reasons why the field has not been very developed.

Defining the Field

Bartlett is referring to experimental psychology as “a method of *systematic* exploration of human reactions.” (Bartlett 1932, 1995:36). The “experimental reception method” can in line with this be defined as “a method of *systematic* exploration of human (cognitive) reactions to different media products.” The term reactions is, however, not to be seen within a narrow behaviouristic impulse-response paradigm, but rather as involving a very complex set of patterns that activates the respondent’s meaning construction activity and involve them at an experiential level. This level of personal experience can reflect both affect, imagery, values, thoughts and action.

The tradition of qualitative research is often based on interviews with or observation of the informants. It can be combined with quantitative data to provide a cross-validation, but most often these data are based on verbal material that might not adequately involve what is below the threshold of consciousness. Methods have been developed that involve techniques for imagery and drawing, to elicit responses from deeper levels of mind, and to the extent that they require an experimental design with an activity and a purposeful set-up that is related to the perception they may be seen as having similar epistemological interests and approaches as the “experimental reception method”.

The definition of experiment (Onions 1979:1) as an: “action taken to discover or test something” makes the activity part of it obvious – and it is this activity that reflected in the human consciousness, is translated into experience. We propose:

- that this experiential dimension, will involve different fields, and
- that is based upon a phenomenological point of departure,
- that the added performance of ecologically valid tasks offers an extension to qualitative research, while maintaining its groundedness.

These qualities might be valuable in media and communications research, where there might be strong reasons for gaining better insight into the qualities of different modes of presentation, or the affordances of different media.

Experience as Cognition

Most experimental cognitive research (also reception/communications related studies) is focused on factual recall and comprehension, as separate from the informants life history, field of interest and temperament. Something that Bartlett is pointing to in his work. Also the cognitive psychologist Bruner (Bruner 1990:46) has pointed to the need for focusing cognitive psychology on interpretive processes related to experience and the construction of meaning. This stance can be described as an expanded form of cognition – expanded in the sense that it expands the scope of the investigation from within the predictable, into an area that is more fluid. It is also expanded in the way it offers a view of cognition that involves a complexity and a multidimensionality.

It does not only reflect on what is seen as abstract mental processes. But it is based on experience, and therefore less liable to conform to a hypothesis testing that is based on an assumption that the human response can be limited to what is expected in just that experiment. In his methodology Bartlett is very explicit in his attitude to this problem. He is presenting the informant with the story or image he is using in order to explore their perception of it. In his analysis he is focusing not only on the renderings of the stories he gets back, but also on the personal backgrounds that are influencing the way it is retold. So he is being aware of contextual factors on a personal as well as a social level, and keeping this complexity intact in his analysis and theoretical framework.

There are four different fields of experience involved in this:

- Knowledge
- Emotions
- Values
- Actions

They can be seen to influence the readers’/informants’ reception process and form a part of the concept of experience as fundamental to cognition and perception – and therefore also to the reception of different media.

It is through the various dimensions of experience that “the effort for meaning” becomes acti-

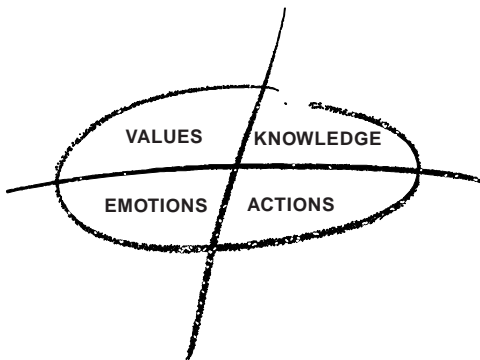
vated. There is a link in the processes between perception and meaning where the different dimensions of experience become connected to what is perceived. It can be seen through activities – either it be reading and then retelling it, or looking at pictures and making choices and rating them, or expressing the feelings or sensations they engender.

Bartlett is fundamental in that he is focusing and bringing to attention the function of meaning. He is also focusing on the context. And the cultural schema, that people bring to the experiences. So it is not something that can be seen apart from that larger picture.

The paradigmatic or limited approach to cognitive studies in reception is based on a positivistic approach and believes that the effects of elements of the material can be studied separately from context and background of the informant. The concept of expanded cognition indicates an approach based on ecological validity in the study and a focus on the concept of experience as fundamental for the process of reception.

This larger picture is then focalised in the different fields of experience – they are, of course, theoretical constructs that are closely interrelated and intertwined – but for the sake of clarity they are seen as separate dimensions.

We will look at the way experience relates to these different fields or dimensions in different ways, and we assume that the transaction between the reader and the aesthetic experience is based on how the reader can relate to the presented material in the different experimental projects.



Field of Knowledge

The field of knowledge has to do with acquiring new knowledge and to use this knowledge that is presented to the informants and is present in the situation – it can be factual knowledge, which is anchored into a situation and a context. It also has

to do with the reader’s previous knowledge that is active in the situation.

In Findahl & Höijers project on remembering different versions of the same TV–News program, they focus on knowledge and who that can remember what. “But there are also big differences between people in knowledge and life experience depending on the conditions they have lived with and the possibilities they have had to acquire knowledge about the world outside their own.

When we compare people who are well–informed... with people who are not, the people who are well–informed can remember double as much of the news program...

The poorly–informed can remember only few features and nothing of the rest of the program, but the well–informed can remember a great deal from all features.

... Missing knowledge often leads to that one finds it very difficult to remember the content of a news program. (Findahl & Höijer 1975:10).

The way people remember is here imbedded in factual knowledge and life experience, but the project focuses on what the participants can remember from a given material, and in this way the participants ability to remember information is tested, on how much and, how correctly they remember the content of the TV News program.

The remembering of knowledge can easily be tested and transformed into figures and be statistically prepared.

The field of knowledge in an extended way is of course always present in every experimental reception project. In some projects’ the scope is limited and the other fields are given lesser emphasis, maybe in order not to complicate the overall picture.

Field of Emotions

The field of emotions can be seen as the connection to people, animals, nature and physical objects in themselves, and in the social relations and actions that are connected hereby. In the media these connections takes place through representations and thereby the aesthetics plays an important role. The aesthetic can be boring or provocative. The aesthetics can influence emotions through the use of colour, shape and composition or through narratives with use of emotive and imagery language.

In the MacGregor&Morrison video editing project, the respondents were making their own version of the story on the bombing of the shelter/

bunker in Baghdad in 1991. And they found that “Viewer–edited versions did not use more detailed shots of the dead and wounded than had already been transmitted. Grieving Iraqis present at the scene were chosen in nearly all versions, as were badly burnt children in a nearby hospital. Respondents wanted to show the effect on survivors rather than the horror of dead bodies.” (MacGregor & Morrison 1995:147).

They don’t go into the field of emotion to explain or understand why these reactions occur, but it is reasonable to analyse the choices and to say that the respondents’ reaction are based in emotional reactions against the most horrifying pictures.

The field of emotions is a part of internal representations and constructions of the informants in response to certain textual and imagery element in the material or the situation. It is closely related to creativity and involving the informant at a deeper level. In terms of experience, this is part of moving the level of experience from the outer to the inner realms of the informant.

In the reception process you can never neglect the field of emotions. They will always be active but in the concrete experimental project there can be or there cannot be focus on the field of emotions.

Field of Values

The Field of Values is related to collective and personal systems of value, norms and moral. These values play an important role as the foundation for relevance and immediate reaction to the material.

In Greg Philos project about the miners’ strike in the UK he wrote about the groups of informants where he finds “... some sharp differences in political culture, class, and personal experience. It was remarkable how quickly some of the groups established the parameters of their own political culture. With the Glasgow women for example, the presentation of a ‘BBC News’ was greeted by calls of ‘they tell lies, the BBC’ and ‘ITN was worse’... such comments revealed what was assumed to be ‘known’ by the group and also what assumed to be ‘acceptable’. It was not simply cultural competence, which was being displayed here, but also an element of cultural policing. The assumed political culture could exert considerable pressure on anyone who disagreed.” (Philo 1990:132).

Here the field of values is explicit concerning the political values. In this focus-group context, the negotiation of meaning reveals the pressure on the

individual, and that is what you can expect is going on in focus groups.

When using individual interviews, the field of values in relation to given material is often more blurred. Most of the values are often hidden to the informant and maybe also to the researcher on the superficial level, and has to be closely analysed to be revealed.

Field of Action

This field has to do with everyday activities, of crossing over from the state of being an observer, to actually making informed choices about actual experiences. The Field of Action involves the body. You can have the knowledge of how to ride a bike, but that is not the same as actually riding the bike. Your body has to try and to learn to hold the balance and to turn the pedals and to control the wheels.

In relation to media reception experiments, the informant has to do something else than talk.

In the MacGregor&Morrison project the respondents have to select and edit a video feature and of course use spoken language. But the basic idea with this project is to use action as a way to activate hidden emotions, tacit knowledge and values.

One can also say that the field of action is extended to what can be seen as the learned cultural technique, which in this project is how to construct a video sequence.

Philo used a series of 12 still photographs in his work on audience perception of the 1984-5 miners’ strike, and Kitzinger has extended his technique of ‘the news game’.

It is easy to see that more than one field is active in daily life. And even in the experimental projects mentioned above there is more than just one field that influences the experience.

The idea of looking on experience as four fields: Knowledge, Emotions, Values and Action must be seen as an analytical tool. But it can also be used in the construction of The Experimental Experience Projects. We will describe three projects that we are involved in, and all of them focus on involving as much of the four fields as possible.

Fatamorgana – the Reality of the Press and the Readers (Ingemann 1998 and 1999a)

The intention with the project is to investigate which qualities the readers experience in press photography in relation to concrete news articles. Sixteen informants are individually presented for

four different articles visualised in four different ways. The method is qualitative.

The epistemological interest is to set the informant in a situation where (s)he in relation to one article can select and rank the four different pictures according to preference. Through this discourse of action the informant constructs the values underlying the choice. Through an interview the informant constructs a discourse of talk about his/her choice and rejections. And through the analysis of the interviews and the choices the informants reading strategies is brought to light. There is a common trait in their reading strategies that is not so much depending on gender, education or age than on their different psychological attitude. This leads them to being challenged and surprised, or to be confirmed in their attitudes in advance.

The interest of expression is focused on the concrete use of different pictures in relation to a concrete article.

The interest of dissemination is partly that the results of the project can be used by professional editors as a fundament to discuss the common sense values in the use of pictures in the newspaper. It also includes seeing The Experimental Experience Method as a possible foundation for similar projects.

From an experience point of view the informant first of all enters through the Field of Action: The informant has to rank pictures and later on to make a 'story' about the article and the pictures chosen. This action involves the Field of Emotions where the informant associates through his/her aesthetic experience to unknown personal and mediated knowledge and hereby involves the Field of Knowledge. At the end, the Field of Values is activated and comes to light in the analysis of the whole situation.

To give an example: One article was about unemployment and the headline was 'One in five is a loser'. The informant has to select and rank four different pictures to this article. One of a fat man with his beer-belly and a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other; one with a happy couple where she is sewing and his is playing on his accordion showing activity and happiness; one with a middle age man torn-away his face in front of a wall showing a loss of identity; one with the same picture of a lonely woman in a landscape repeated seven times and showing how uniform every day is.

One informant, a woman (39) is in her daily work confronted with many unhappy problems, and she selects the picture with the happy couple and the Accordion. She says that she gets into a good

mood by looking at them and their close relationship and she finds that they feel good and it looks like they have a good teamwork.

But she brings herself into a dilemma. She means that it is a good picture, but on the other hand it looks too positive in relation to the content of the article. She establishes a conflict with 'me' and the 'other' because she recognises that the picture of the man with the beer-belly looks more like the normal way to visualise unemployment.

Her field of knowledge is partly mediated knowledge, but also personal knowledge of people she knew as unemployed, and they are positive and active. And at this level she recognises a conflict.

Her field of emotions is activated in the recognition of the happy feelings between the couple and their teamwork. At a deeper level she connects her field of values of being together with a man and to establish a close relationship with another human being.

This superficial analysis can give an impression of the use of the four fields of experience in the construction of the project and the aim of getting a more complex picture of the reception process.

The Museum Experience Project (Ingemann 1999b)

The aim of this project THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE PROJECT is to get closer to the real walking-around in the exhibition and to the meaning potential the visitor has a chance of realising. To do that the project consists of equipment that can be used to register how the visitor walks around in the exhibition and what they really look at, to create the empirical foundation for the analysis of the visitor's values. The visitor wears a cap on her head with a very small video camera that records where the visitor moves her head and what she looks at.

The informant walks around in the exhibition with a friend or a girlfriend because the museum visit is primarily a social activity. At the same time this construction creates a natural way how the informant speak-about the walk around in the exhibition. What is recorded in this walk-video is partly pictures of what the informant looks at, and the conversation the two visitors have with each other in the walking around in the exhibition.

The empirical part of the project is collected in two ways:

- The walking-video
- The interview-video

Where the walking–video can be seen as a rather undisturbed walking – I afterwards ask the informant to select three objects or areas of the exhibition that are of special interest for her personally. This interview takes place in front of the selected objects and I am the one with the videocap now. The intention with this interview is to make the informant talk–about the experience and the associations connected to the selected objects.

These two videos are analysed by focusing on the relations the informant creates between the object in the exhibition and the informant. It is relations as internal relations, external relations, recognition relations, sensation and media relations. These relations are assembled through an analysis of the informants reading strategies.

The epistemological interest is what and how does the visitor experience the exhibition at the museum?– And how does the visitor create meaning?

The interest of expression is what is necessary to start a narrative process. This means that the interest of expression is focused on the concrete objects and texts in the exhibition and the whole design in relation to what the informant relates to in the receptions process.

The interest of dissemination can be seen as how an exhibition is really used, and this insight can give professional curators a more detailed understanding of their exhibitions and the meaning created by the user. But the project is also investigating some sort of organised reality, and can thereby reflect the naturalistic experience of daily life.

From an experience point of view the informant first of all enters through the Field of Action: They walk around in the rooms and through their walk construct their physical narrative of where they stop and look. The most important is the Field of Emotions: at a local history museum the feature of recognition is very important. Through the objects and the text the informants remember and rediscover forgotten connections and memories. This kind of knowledge is highly aesthetic. They only get very little new factual knowledge, and the Field of Values is from the beginning very active in their choice to go to the museum at all. They need to find this action interesting and valuable for them to spend time at.

Narrative Dimensions – The Construction of Meaning and Experience through Narrative in Popular Science (Gjedde 1998)

The project aims at exploring the use and qualities of narrative in a popular science magazine in a naturalistic, ecologically valid study. A set of 4 dif-

ferent articles in the original version and three reconstructed versions with different degrees of narrative were used, and presented in the magazine's usual graphical design, in order to give the readers a naturalistic experience.

Sixteen natural readers (subscribers) to the magazine were presented with the articles in four different versions with varying narrative elements, and asked to retell and to rate the articles on different dimensions involving interest and comprehension.

The epistemological interest is to learn something about the relationship between the level and degree of narrative and the readers cognitive involvement on an expanded level that includes the experiential dimension. And to explore the narrative qualities and the readers construction of relevance, interest and motivation.

The interest of expression is to see how the different degrees of narrative elements, like emotive and imagery language and the structural components, influence the readers experience, interest and cognition within an expanded view of cognition.

The interest of dissemination aims the research at contributing to production theory, regarding applied communications and science communications. And at creating a platform for informed choices regarding the qualities of narrative in these areas.

The informants are involved in the experiential Field of Action through their process of reading and retelling the articles, and finally of making choices of rating and ranking them.

The Field of Emotion is active through the process of reading the articles and relating to their emotive and imagery content. The Field of Value is also active both in the rating of the different articles and the content and style of writing and in the interview following the reading.

The Field of Knowledge is activated through the retellings where the informants are rendering the knowledge of the articles and supplementing it with and embedding it within their own previous implicit or explicit knowledge on the subject.

Towards a Conclusion

How can the experimental experience method add to the theoretical soundness of the field of audience research and reception studies? We are arguing that the experimental method has been used in innovative reception studies, research that has been pending in the space between quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Some of the studies are predominantly within one paradigm, some within the other, but most of them seem to overlap in some ways. We are also

pointing to how these projects have been focused on different epistemological interests, but have a common denominator in the experimental design, which implies a focus on planned and controlled activities.

The experimental experience method is grounded in an epistemological interest, which is related to the concepts of experience, activity and choice, and to a phenomenological epistemology.

It is thus primarily situated within the qualitative research paradigm, which also draws on ideas reaching back to non-cartesian thought, including the Kantian notion on choice and activity: "*decision-making presumes human freedom. Likewise every situation that requires practical action has an empirical status and a moral status.....What to do relates not only to what is, but also to inseparable notions of what ought to be.*" (Hamilton 1998:118)

By looking at the informants' role and construction of meaning in situations where choices and actions are involved, we are ourselves looking for meanings that go beyond what can be verbally expressed and directly rationalized. The process is more fuzzy than the mere testing of hypothesis as it resembles the exploration of an unknown landscape seen on a moonless night, more than an active testing of an already made up hypothesis. Rather than confirming the already known, this process aims at explicating on that which cannot be

said, because it is implicit knowledge – or insights only about to be put into words, realizations experienced by the informant by being exposed to this particular situation.

We have been reflecting on some of these projects, trying to make visible the contours of a number projects with the common denominator of including the fields of experience and how it is reflected into different projects

We will not argue for the global applicability of this method or its superiority to any other, but rather point to the epistemological interest that is driving it, which is based in a context of applied communications within a variety of different media. Whether it is the newspaper photography, the museum or the popular science magazine, they are all contexts that are dealing with the dissemination of knowledge embedded in experience. This knowledge is not part of a formal study, but rather of the democratic and cultural process as well as being a media product. This calls for certain communicative qualities in regards to the audience, not the least on an aesthetic and experiential level.

Bringing the reflexivity of the different Fields of Experience into the process of design and analysis will include the complex processes of the audience. This might serve the dual purposes of gaining insight into and respecting the complex processes of the audience and for building theoretical constructs that can be applied to production theory.

Overview on Experimental projects

Author: Bartlett (1932, 1995)

Project: Experiments on Remembering

Method: Using a method of repeated reproduction of a tale or picture, he is having his informants write it or draw it, at intervals providing material for an analysis of changes and reconstructions that happen over time, or in a social group.

The epistemological interest: His interest in perception and remembering has led to his seminal theories on the constructive character of recall, the effort after meaning and the notion of schema which he defines as "the active organization of past reactions or for past experiences."

The interest of expression: He is using material which he "hopes will prove interesting in itself", he is trying to keep the study as realistic as possible, to give it ecological validity.

The interest of dissemination: His writing is aimed at the academic field. A number of his concepts and methods have been inspirational and seminal beyond his own field of psychology.

Authors: Findahl, Olle & Höijer, Birgitta (1976)

Project: TV–News.

Method: The construction of four different versions of five features. Shown for groups of about 25. The participants make queries. The data is used statistically. Participants: 617.

The epistemological interest: Knowledge, understanding and memory.

The interest of expression: To investigate how pictures and text can create better understanding of place, involved, cause and consequence in every single feature.

The interest of dissemination: Democratic interest. Wish the producers to understand the importance of background and context.

Author: Perry W. Thorndyke (1979)

Project: Knowledge Acquisition from Newspaper Stories

Method: The construction of four different versions of four newspaper articles from the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times. He uses a quantitative analysis with two dependent variables: free recall and question-answering performance.

Participants: 105. (University students).

The epistemological interest: Memory, comprehension. Specifically which mode of different textual organizations including narrative mode, is the most effective for comprehension and recall of information.

The interest of expression: How the content and the structure can help the acquisition of knowledge.

The interest of dissemination: A contribution to the academic field: The development of schema-theory, suggesting that there may be multiple structural schemata available.

Authors: Iyengar, Shanto & Kinder, Donald R. (1987)

Project: TV news and agenda setting.

Method: 1) Constructed news programs shown over five days. Use of queries before and after to construct the differences. 259 participants.

2) A sample of characteristic news features shown to 772 participants and then queried. All answers used statistically.

The epistemological interest: Focus on knowledge, understanding and memory and how TV is setting the agenda for the knowledge of the viewer.

The interest of expression: Investigating the influence of the structure of the news by increasing the amount of news about a topic and the placing in the flow of news.

The interest of dissemination: To create attention to TV as political influential and may to change the practise of the producers.

Authors: Denton et al. (1993)

Project: Ways with Words

Method: An experimental design with the construction of four different versions of the same story,

published in four local areas on the frontpage of the local section. Selected subscribers were contacted for telephone interviews. The purpose was to investigate the influence of writing style on four dimensions: Reading: if they did read the story. Quality, their judgements of the story, Knowledge, if their true-false questions were answered correctly, Involvement, if the readers cared about the subject or wanted to know more after having read it.

Participants: 1174 (a combination of natural readers and students at a college)

The epistemological interest: Interest, involvement, comprehension. Investigating the relationship between certain groups of readers' preference for certain ways of representing the story.

The interest of expression: How different textual modes and structural elements affect the readers' interest and comprehension.

The interest of dissemination: Wanting to find out how to reach and interest various groups of readers, that might not read the newspaper otherwise. Democratic interest.

Author: Philo, Greg (1990).

Project: The long-term effect of television in relation to Miners' strike in UK 1984-5.

Method: The participants function as 'journalist' to recall the events. Through queries and focus group interview with established groups knowledge and attitudes are revealed. The qualitative and quantitative data is used statistically. 169 participants in groups.

The epistemological interest: How the media construct meaning and how it is modified by personal experience and social constructed.

The interest of expression: 12 photographs from the TV screen function as triggers for the participants. Focus on the content and the involved principal characters.

The interest of dissemination: To warn against the media focus on conflict and violence. And maybe to get the professional journalist and editors to think again.

Author: Kitzinger, Jenny (1990)

Project: Aids – as long-term effect.

Method: In focus group there are used queries and different methods like news game, card game and advert exercise. All methods with the intention to trigger knowledge and discussion.

The epistemological interest: To find out what knowledge (and correct knowledge) is present for the participants. But also how the focus group members modify and correct knowledge.

The interest of expression: Selected pictures and ads function as triggers of memory and knowledge. And how the media create the agenda and the frame of reference.

The interest of dissemination: Partly to effect the professionals who create campaigns to do better work. Partly to question ordinary opinion pools.

Authors: MacGregor, Brent & Morrison, David E. (1995).

Project: TV and editing of the Golf war features.

Method: From given footage the 52 participants in construct their own version of the feature in smaller groups. The participants plays the roll of the 'journalist' and the whole situation is recorded on video.

The epistemological interest: How does the participants want to present a feature with focus on the process and thinking behind the process.

The interest of expression: How the concrete feature is framed and structured.

The interest of dissemination: To make the professionals to understand that the viewers want different ways of telling a story. And to advocate for action as a better way to understand reception.

Authors: Lydia Plowman, Rosemary Luckin, Diana Laurillard, Matthew Stratfold, Josie Taylor. (1996)

Project: Multimedia in Education and Narrative Organisation

Method: Three different versions of a multimedia programme were produced as a research tool only altering the structure, but not the content.

Participants: 36 students between 15-21 years old.

The epistemological interest: How does the degree of narrative organisation in educational multimedia affect learning processes.

The interest of expression: how does different structural organisation affect the learner's cognitive process.

The interest of dissemination: Directed to the field of production (producers of educational multimedia) and to the academic field of education and cognitive science.

Author: Ingemann, Bruno (1998 and 1999a)

Project: News photographs and the readers

Method: 16 informants are individually presented to four newspaper articles each of them visualized by four different photographs (naturalistic or constructed). After ranking and selecting the informant has to verbalize his choice. The complex material is analyzed from the theoretical perspective of reading strategies. In the field of action the ranking and selecting function as a pointer to values and emotions and knowledge at an unconscious level.

The epistemological interest: The intention with the project is to get close to the informants experience and values for quality in the relation between reader and news photographs in their context.

The interest of expression: The project focuses on the aesthetic and content quality of different pictures in relation to a concrete article.

The interest of dissemination: To give professional editors an insight in the readers' preferences in the use of photographs. And to give other scholars a concrete example of the use of The Experimental Experience Method.

Author: Ingemann, Bruno (1999b)

Project: The museum experience.

Method: The informant registers, by use of the video-cap his walk through the cultural history museum exhibition, his walk and talk with a friend. The action of walking makes it possible to get beneath the talking. This is supplemented by an interview at four selected objects he finds interesting.

The epistemological interest: Focus on experience and personal relevance.

The interest of expression: The aim of the project is to find out what is needed to activate the narrative process. The objects, text and setting in the exhibition and the informants relation to them.

The interest of dissemination: To give an understanding of how meaning is constructed in a form of 'organised reality'. At the end the results of the project can be used to construct more useful exhibitions.

Author: Gjedde, Lisa (1998, 1999)

Project: Narrative Dimensions – The Construction of Meaning and Experience through Narrative in Popular Science.

Method: The construction of 4 different versions of 4 articles from a Popular Science Magazine of varying degree of narrative, in an ecologically valid design using the original graphics and a group of 16 natural readers, regular subscribers.

The epistemological interest: To explore the qualities of different elements of narrative in relation to the readers' experience and construction of meaning and relevance within an expanded view of cognition.

The interest of expression: How the use of different degrees of narrative with its structural, imagery and emotive elements is used by the readers. And how it is reflected in their experience, interest and construction of meaning and relevance.

The interest of dissemination: To produce an insight into the qualities of narrative in order to inform production theory. To add knowledge to the multidisciplinary academic field of cognition and narrative by making a study that allows for the complexities and includes the notion of expanded cognition.

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