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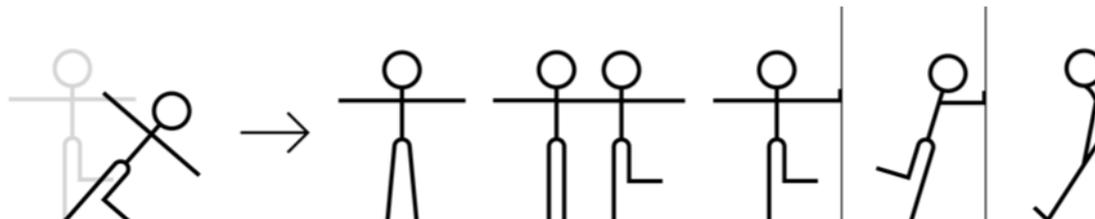John Waterworth

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GROUP PROJECT: DESIGNING WITH BLENDS

Design Assignment: Supporting Personal Balance

For this, the major assignment of the course, groups of students should design and evaluate a website and/or phone/tablet/wearable/installation app, using the "designing with blends" approach. The aim is to help the user achieve balance in their lives – personal balance.

This "personal balance" might be, for example, in relation to:

- Activity/inactivity

- Work/private life

- Overeating/undereating

- Planning ahead/living in the moment

- Socialising/spending time alone

- Spending money/saving

- Controlled/uncontrolled

- Some other dimension

The app/service will help users track, understand, and gain control over the target, through experiences that allow them to recalibrate some aspect of their behavior, in order to improve their lives.

Your design could be for a website, a social network, an app, a place or a combination of these, or anything that provides a person with a designed-for experience through interacting with it. It might be used via a PC, a tablet, a phone, a wearable, an installation in a physical place, or a combination of these.

You will need to envision the design, so that you can test it. This could be anything from scenarios to sketches to mock-ups to video prototypes to partial or complete working applications. If you choose to implement the service, you are free to choose any development tool from those available through the department or others you have may have access to.

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The application must illustrate the use of blends to produce a designed-for user experience and it must be your own original work, although you may well be inspired by or adapt existing services and design ideas. When presenting the design, make clear what is your contribution and what is not.

Designing with Blends

Designing with blends means you should (not necessarily in this order):
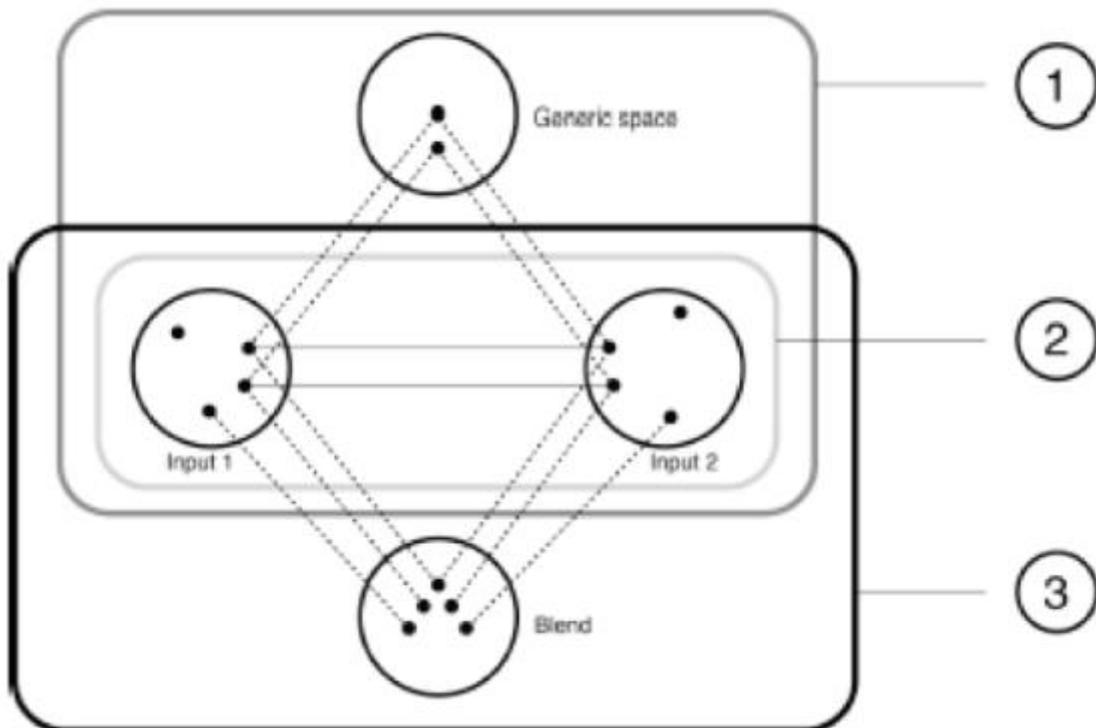
1. Identify a generic space – the kind of thing you want to make, with associated features/characteristics. How do you want to identify and affect how people feel? What should be their experience through interaction?

2. Find and explore possible input spaces and their features, with associated experiences, maybe based on stories or other sources. Find the features/characteristics that map directly onto those provided by the generic space, and the other ones that are specific to the input spaces.

3. Blend pairs of possible input spaces to create a new blended space that you can perhaps try to implement aspects of. Explore what follows from this blend in terms of features and user experiences - How will people interact, and how will they feel? What will be their experience?

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Don't decide what to develop too early – explore multiple possibilities with open minds first. Ask yourselves: Can this blend guide the design of an application that will have appropriate and usable features and give the experiences we are designing for?

If not, repeat above (at least from 3, and maybe 2 or even 1). Remember that input spaces to form a new blend will often be blends themselves. It might be helpful to think about what the constituent spaces to these blends are.

If yes, you should be able to complete this sentence: "The …….. is a ………". This is the primary metaphor behind your blend.

Evaluating Your Design

Each student group will evaluate their own application, assessing the success of the design in terms of user experience and usability. You will need at least one appropriate method for each.

User stories are likely to be useful for evaluation. What words/concepts do people use during or after interacting with the system? You may also probably want to apply methods that are used for assessing affective experiences of users. There are many other methods you might use, some of which may not involve users. Refer to the course literature and/or other sources.

Presentation of your design

Your designs are presented 27/9 in MA456. Each group are given a slot of 25 minutes to present their design, 15 for presentation and 10 minutes for questions and discussion. Not all group members need to act as presenters, but all should be there.

Individual Write-Up

Each student writes up the whole study as an individual report. Your individual report should describe the application and the design concept behind it (including the blending aspect), how it was evaluated (method(s), test participants, procedure followed), and what the findings were in terms of user experiences and usability. The evaluation methods used must be motivated. Think in terms of a short paper for publication, 3000-4000 words. The report template provided through Cambro should be used.

It is important you should comment critically both on the design of the application you tested - including in relation to the blends approach and its usefulness - and on the evaluation methods used. References to other designs, design approaches, and evaluations are encouraged.

You should comment on the limitations of what was done, and identify further design work/research needed. Speculate on how blending could be extended in the future, for example to support balance in a more blended physical/virtual way.