Researching Experiences
Researching Experiences: Exploring Processual and Experimental Methods in Cultural Analysis

Lisa Gjedde and Bruno Ingemann

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The advent of a new media landscape has opened up new areas of research and necessitated the development of new processual methods that encompass the user’s media experience and puts it at the centre. In this context it has been very fruitful to carry out an interdisciplinary collaboration, discussing the often very complex processes at the heart of processual methodologies that seek to capture the user’s experience of mediated visual texts.

We would like to thank the many people that have been very supportive of this research. First of all, we are grateful to the more than sixty people who participated in the experimental studies as informants. They shared their experiences, leading us to insights that could never have been gained without involving the user-in-situation. We would like to thank the many colleagues who have participated in discussions of the projects at seminars and conferences, but we would especially like to thank professors Kim Christian Schröder and Søren Kjørup at Roskilde University for their support and critical comments on the papers in process and for challenging as well as encouraging the project in its various phases.

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Lisa Gjedde & Bruno Ingemann
In the beginning was – not the word – but the experience. This distinction is an important one to make about the basis of this book, which deals with the common methodological challenge of how to research experience in various media and mediated situations. The normal way of doing research on what media users experience is to make the informants recount their experience with the media some time after the experience has taken place. When there is a gap, however, between the experience and recounting the experience, what experience are the users actually talking about? Is it the experience they had in the actual moment or is it the one they constructed minutes, hours, days or years afterwards? And, what is the content of the experience?

We focus on capturing not just the part of the experience that can easily be verbalised, but also the pre-reflexive experience, which has not yet entered the realm of conscious expression and may never reach it. In order to capture the complexity of experience, it was necessary to design a methodology capable of capturing the experimental processes of the informant, or the person-in-situation, i.e. processual methodology.

As part of this process, a number of different projects have been developed over the last ten years. These projects, which all share the common goal of experimenting with new methodological ways of capturing and understanding the experience of the person-in-situation, have resulted in a collection of methodological tools and approaches we term the ReflexivityLab.

The three paths of inquiry

In 1993, at the outset, this research was motivated by the idea of exploring the experience of the informant or the person-in-situation and the reception processes that took place in a visual and mediated context.

The projects belong to different areas of inquiry, but with the unifying goal of exploring the users’ construction of experience. Even though the mediated experiences being researched range from newspapers and traditional magazines to museum exhibits, and from webanner to digital interactive storytelling, the focus on the users’ personal experience is an element shared by all of the methods developed.

The first area of inquiry looks into how informative media convey their
content to an audience. The first project in this series, which focused on how the user, i.e. the informant, created meaning from the news in the newspaper, produced the finding that the way informants actually use the visuals in the newspaper was often different than what the producers imagined it to be. The second project explored the role of the narrative in the communication of complex scientific news in the format of articles in the popular science magazine *Illustrated Science*.

The *second area* of inquiry focuses on experiences with media situated in the context of a museum or gallery. We designed research situations, which included objects and spaces in a museum and an art gallery, in order to look into the strategies visitors use to create meaning in relation to their personal agenda and identity. The first project examines an exhibition at a cultural history museum about the rise of democracy in the city of Copenhagen. The second project focuses on an art gallery and how a retrospective exhibition of a well-known Danish painter offers narratives to be reconstructed by the informants in order to tell painters’ stories.

The *third area* of inquiry is in the field of digital media, where the aesthetic and the narrative are important elements in the process of constructing meaning. The first project looks into the use of webart or netart, where the works used can be interpreted and interacted with in many different ways, but where the enigmatic aspect of the visuals can be seen as a positive quality. The second project is on the use of an interactive video presented using visual technology in the form of a large interactive plasma screen.

In the first area of inquiry, the focus is on the communication of intentional meaning from the newspaper or the magazine. The second area of inquiry, which takes place in a museum and a gallery, involves the body in motion navigating the spaces available and also involves more senses in an informal learning process. The third area of inquiry stresses the interactivity between the user and digital artefacts, and the processes involved in meaning making in the complex environment of multimodal non-linear media. The shared underlying approach of these three areas and the six projects is a focus on researching experiences.

Experiences are the core of human existence, but what is interesting is the intention and the focus of attention of the user having the experience. Ference Marton, a Swedish phenomenologist, writes rather humorously:

If we were capable of the total experience of situations and phenomena, a sort of panaesthesia, and if we actually made use of this capability all the time, things would always look the same all the time, for all of us. Our way of experiencing things would no longer be driven by specific interests, wishes, capabilities, or previous experiences. Nothing would be more or less
important than anything else; the world would lose structure. All meaning would disappear, as meaning actually derives from the figuratively differentiated structures of awareness. When meaning is total, we lose it. (Merton & Booth 1997:101).

We want to explore meaning as the user constructs it, as driven by “specific interests, wishes, capabilities, or previous experiences”. From our perspective, this meaning is founded in the everyday life of the user and in the meeting between the user and mediated communication. In this case, our interest is connected to media research, or more specifically, to the dramatic change in media research that developed in the 1970s with the introduction of reception research, which is closely linked to cultural studies (Hall 1973). The focus shifted from the content of the media and the message conveyed to a more complex interest in the actual user’s listening, seeing and reading of the actual mediated material, e.g. television. The interest in how and what the actual user conceptualised and created meaning became very interesting to and challenged the established agenda of researchers and of professional media corporations.

Nevertheless, even the use of qualitative methods like individual in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and observations (Hall 1980, Morley 1980) about the interest in the message conveyed focused more on the role of the media as ideological oppressors in the class struggle as shown by the use of concepts such as ‘preferred’ or ‘oppositional’ reading (Hall 1973).

To reiterate what is widely acknowledged among researchers, you tend to get the results you decided to look for. The idea of looking with the eyes of the user, which is the case with reception studies, is inspiring and important, but the often rather closed theoretical guidance of what is being looked for influences the outcome. We begin not by looking at the experience of the person-in-situation from one single theoretical perspective, but prefer to be informed by experiences as seen and reflected upon by the users.

The aim of examining the experience itself has led us to work from a phenomenological point of view and to look for the subjective understanding and meaning of the experience. Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz finds that it is the everyday world of activity that is archetypical for our experience of reality and finds that what he calls province of meaning only can be seen as modifications of this archetype. To him, the province of meaning is the art, the fantasy, the play, the insanity, and the science, each of which has their own cognitive style (Schutz 1962:231). We want to understand the mediated situation from the perspective of people’s everyday lives by an emphatic understanding of their subjective universe of meaning. From the phenomenological stand point, we want to investigate the world as the
participants experience it. This concept leads to an interest in what the subjective meanings are and how they are constructed. In the process of developing methods on how to research experience we have found ways to capture different aspects of how the person-in-situation creates meaning and we have applied approaches and concepts relevant to that. In this book, we provide a framework for researching experience that draws on new models of experience as well as models of reading strategies and narrative thinking combined with detailed descriptions of the uses of technologies for capturing experience.

This original contribution to the development of the methodological field of researching experience is what we call the ReflexivityLab. Based on a range of projects with very different scopes, the following describes the concept very simply.

The ReflexivityLab in brief

Processual methodology has evolved over time and some elements have come from the different projects that have been part of the process. Deliberately selecting a very important word from the humanities and another one from the hardcore sciences, we have termed this methodology ReflexivityLab. The connotations of the word ‘lab’ include experiment, repetition, and registration, while the connotations of the word ‘reflexivity’ are subjectivity, looking-back, and open-talk.

We intertwine these two worlds, but it is often the lab-like starting point that makes it possible to single out aspects of the complex real-life materials used and to put the informants into a situation that is unfamiliar to them and makes them more aware of the whole situation.

The main concept of the ReflexivityLab as a research method is very simple: There is always some kind of technology involved because the informants’ process of interacting with the media product (the work) needs to be registered to provide the foundation for an analysis, making it possible to look and look again at the process and the visual event. It has been recorded and it is repeatable.

The ReflexivityLab concept is more than just technology. For example, when an informant uses a media product (the work) for a set period of time, the sequence is broken down into minor parts either beforehand or while the event is in process. Reflection gaps lasting five or ten minutes each that are not schematically predetermined are included intuitively and questions are asked during the reflection-gaps. Dialogues are proposed that question or even challenge the informants. Afterwards, informants return to their real-time state.
After using the media product, researchers encourage a deeper state of reflection, sometimes by showing the tape from the real-time experience or by bringing up topics that were not touched upon or that had elicited a reaction.

The overall goals are simple:
• to encourage informants to verbally express their immediate impression of what they have seen – the narrative perspective;
• to encourage informants to find relations between the media product and their personal lives – the pragmatic perspective;
• to encourage informants to relate the media product to something in society or to other mediated communication – the intertextual perspective.

Video is often the technology used to record and capture the complexity of the physical and verbal expressions of the person-in-situation, the media being used and the interactions involving another person or the researcher. The resulting complex material provides the corpus for the analysis. Part of the methodological concept applied includes using screen dumps and the editing of the video as tools in the analytical process in order to condense the rich material available.

This basic presentation of the concept of the ReflexivityLab will be elaborated upon when the six projects we have been working with are presented.

Some of the following chapters are based on previously published articles and have been expanded by applying one of the following:
• Postscripts - which answer interesting questions that have been raised by fellow researchers;
• Colour Plates - which expand the material used in the individual projects;
• Zoom_ins - which explore selected topics more in-depth, e.g. around the ‘experience model’ (p. 115).

Chapter 1 examines the use of photos in newspapers and questions whether the producer’s and the reader’s intentions are the same. Currently, two very different tendencies emerge in which photographs are either a reflection of reality and only provide factual information or are aestheticised, staged and manipulated. In the Mirage–Project, these tendencies are investigated from the person-in-situation point of view by constructing four different visualisations of an article and then asking 16 individuals to rank them and then argue for their values and relations to the outer world and the informants’ pre-understanding of mediated news.

Chapter 2 further explores the concept of creating different versions...
of the same material, purposely changing elements in the material. In the ILLUSTRATED SCIENCE_PROJECT, the focus is on exploring how the use of narratives generates a better sense of understanding of the content of the text in the magazine. How the understanding relates to qualities like comprehension, relevance and credibility, and how the narrative responses relate to the different genres being examined.

Chapter 3 deals with methods for researching experiences at a museum, and deals with objects and space. During the first MUSEUM INSIDE_PROJECT, the walk-video concept was developed. In the project, two informants enter a cultural historical museum and one of them is wearing a tiny video camera on a baseball cap that records when and where they move and what their conversation is about. The video recording forms the basis for the analysis of their walk and their conversations.

Chapter 4 covers the second MUSEUM INSIDE_PROJECT, where the video cap is used by one of two informants to create a walk-video, which allows a close view of their experiences in the actual moment. The informants visit an art gallery with a retrospective exhibition about one painter. In the project the art historical and everyday experiences are contrasted and used to create a narrative understanding of their personal experience through the analysis of the relation between body, space and conversation.

Chapter 5 presents a theoretical and historical perspective on our methodological approach. A discussion is raised about the use of quantitative and qualitative methods and in this discussion we identify the challenges and possibilities involved in our approach. The aim is to establish and discuss the concept of experience as the foundation for experimental reception studies. Another important aspect is to develop an understanding of the users’ experience by drawing on the work of cognitive psychology and especially on the work of British psychologist Frederic C. Bartlett. In this chapter, we also present the model of the four experience fields.

Chapter 6 presents the theoretical background behind the cognitive aspects of narrativity and provides an introduction to the dual concepts of narrative construction and narrative expression, and their role in the user’s construction of meaning. These concepts are important in the methods that are presented on researching experience.

Chapter 7 is an example of how the four experience fields can be brought into practice and applied using the ReflexivityLab concept. Webart is a new area of inquiry and in the WEBART_PROJECT we investigate how users create their experience based on interactive works. In this project we add an extra dimension to the traditional usability-lab not only by recording the users’ activity but also by moving the researchers’ focus from the standard usability issues to issues regarding the users’ construction of narratives and strategies of reflection.
Chapter 8 includes the further development of the methods presented using even more complex material and a video set-up with four different simultaneous video recordings in order to capture the action and interaction of the informants, the researchers and the interactive artwork. The VALA PROJECT uses a prototype of an interactive video film on Nordic mythology, which is presented to participants who worked in pairs exploring the film on a giant interactive touch screen. Part of the project investigated whether the informants were aware of or influenced by a sense of being in public, i.e. being in a public zone during their interaction in front of the flat screen. Research questions such as the following were posed: How does the visitor create meaning in interactive artworks in a public space? What influence does the notion of the public have on the users’ construction of meaning?

Chapter 9 places the projects, their content and their methodology in relation to theories of visual culture. We examine the role of the visual in the projects. Two central functions are discussed, namely the function of the visual as a mode of representations and as a mode of reminiscence.

This method of researching the users’ experience has brought forth some issues that are of relevance to communication design as well as research. They relate to the visual mode of representation and are presented as ten dilemmas to be considered in terms of planning and implementing communication strategies, and they provide a bridge between the theoretical aspects of researching experience and the design of user experience in the field of communication.

The target group for this book

This book, which offers a methodological approach to studying experience in a range of different media, provides insight into the design of proses-sual methodologies that can be used as a guideline for designing experience research. There is a lack of theoretical and practical writings on this rapidly expanding field of researching media from the angle of user experience. This book makes a contribution based on a number of research projects, which can be used as a source of inspiration in designing research and research tools. The research design presented for carrying out inquiries into the various media is relevant not only for students and researchers in media and communication studies but also for practitioners within the fields of media, communication and experience design.

Additional material plus multimedia examples of research cases can be found at www.researching-experiences.net
We are researching experiences in mediated situations which means that we are looking into processes with the *person-in-situation*. The situations which we are researching, are the reading of text in magazines and looking at photographs in newspapers, using WebArt on a screen, walking into the exhibition in museums and galleries and using interactive films.

These situations involve the person-in-situation in a broad range of activities where the bodily expressions to the mediated products are important. From a methodological point of view this has directed us to use video as the main recording technology. By recording the person-in-situation the whole process of the users experience can be re-seen and re-heard several times with all the nuances of bodily expression and tone of voice, pauses, intonation, smile, sadness, anger, …. all the expressions of feeling that we react to in the real situation but which disappear and are forgotten if you just have to recall them from your memory.

The researcher gets informed, but sometimes to an extent that makes it difficult to extract the important insights from the overwhelming mass of details. The difficulty lies in the richness of detail and we have therefore developed methods to make a sustainable framework for the analytical process. One method is a condensation process in which the recorded video is edited with the aim of catching the main points of the process, in a way that would also make it meaningful to others. In this reducing and condensation process, ten hours of recordings are reduced to a program lasting maybe eight minutes. In this process one of the baselines is analytical dialogues pinpointing the important elements in the videos and exploring the narrative points and the narrative flow. Another tool in the analytic process is to stop the flow of the videos by freezing the images in order to analyze the expressions of the participants more closely. In such a process we would produce around one hundred screen-dumps from the videos. We would also include the verbal interactions by making transcripts of the dialogue and the interviews.

In the situation of the person-in-situation we developed different ways of methodological tools to use the video equipment for different purposes.

*The registration video – The*
The purpose of the registration video is to register the situation that is set up, as a fly on a wall. This is the most obvious and simple way to use a camera, to monitor and record all the activity in a given location. In this set-up the video is used to register the situation as a fly on a wall.

*The Walk-video* – The purpose of the Walk-video is to see *with* the eyes of another: what he is doing and what interests him. In order to record this a new tool has been developed, a tiny video-camera on a cap worn by an informant – this is an innovative way of using video to register the exact visual area of the informant.

*Interaction video* – The purpose of the interaction/reflection video is dual: to register the exact activity on screen and the informant’s interactions and reactions to it, as well as having the informant revisit and reflect on the experience. A traditional usability lab set-up is used, which video records the actions on-screen through a scan-converter as well as registering the informant performing these actions. In the subsequent interview we present the informant with the video and record the reflections made by the informant reviewing the situation.

*The Quatro-video* – The purpose of the quatro-video is to concurrently document the activity from several angles including the interactions between researcher and informant. It is a complex setup in which we use four different cameras focused on different parts and activities in the room. This four-fold point-of-view set-up recreates observations that extend the experience both of the researcher and the informant.
One camera pointing at one spot to monitor what happens.

One informant wears a tiny video camera on a cap, recording where his body and head moves it. Records conversation at the same time.

A recording of the action on the computer screen. The camera records the facial and bodily reactions to the experience. A researcher is watching the combined image.
A very complex set-up. Two informants perform in front of a big touch-flat screen.

The whole set-up is recorded with four different cameras with varied focus on the persons and their activity. The four video signals are gathered on one tape and screen to get a visual overview of the whole action.

The video recordings are edited in an analytical process in order to reduce the huge amount of information.
The written transcript focuses on the dialog of the elements and, more sparingly, on the visuel. The timeline holds it all together.

The video-tape contains a richness of information. Make screen-dumps to condensate the expression of the visual.

Look at the video-editing as more than preparing a presentation. The selection process is also part of the analysis of the material.
CHAPTER 1:
THE EXPERIMENTAL RECEPTION METHOD AS AN ENTRY TO PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS AND THEIR READERS – THE MIRAGE PROJECT

The Mirage Project focuses on how readers ascribe meaning to the pictures in the newspaper. The conventions of the newspaper, predicated on truthfulness, reliability and authenticity, see the photograph as data, as information. But the photograph is more than that.

In the project 16 informants’ reception of four different pictures is analysed in relation to the news articles to which they belong. Through the use of different visual variants for the same article, the reader is given the possibility to be critical and to choose between different pictures.

THE MIRAGE PROJECT gathers this chaos of the readers’ choices and arguments for their choices through a series of analyses. As is the case in the new digital culture, the reader makes a different frame of understanding than newspaper conventions normally offer. The readers are disobedient. They have other values and other demands on quality than expected.

This chapter is a presentation of a reception project where the experimental method is developed, which both extends the semiotic meaning potential, and defines the readers’ values and preferences.

The American sociologist Barbara Rosenblum saw the readers’ use of photography this way,

I suspect that viewers do not read news pictures as impoverished or insufficient sources of information but rather see the image as evidence and data. One reason is that a photograph often accompanies a story. A second reason is that the viewer reads the image as a categorical one, that is, a brief episode of other similar type images (1978:15).

This very simple way of seeing the relation between the image and the reader has been challenged by the whole tradition of reception studies and photo theory (Barthes 1977, 1981, Burgin 1982, Sekula 1982, Hall 1973, Ritchin 1990), most elegantly formulated by John Berger by writing about the increased information in the photograph, „This increase is achieved by
coherence of the appearances – as photographed at that precise conjuncture – extending the event beyond itself. The appearances of the event photographed implicate other events. It is the energy of these simultaneous connections and cross-references which enlarge ... beyond the dimension of instantaneous information.” (Berger 1982:121).

The reader looks at the picture and the picture looks back on the reader and it is in this double movement that the picture is ascribed a quality. The quality of the picture is not only that it is aesthetic, expressive and well composed. The quality of the picture arises when the reader can transfer knowledge, experience and memories to the picture.

**Reception as method**

According to the tradition within reception studies, an authentic material is selected, analysed and presented to some informants. They are interviewed individually or organised in focus groups, and the interview-discourses are taped, transcribed and analysed by the researcher (Jensen & Janowski 1991).

The Mirage Project uses constructed material like the project of Philo (1990), Kitzinger (1990, 1993) and MacGregor & Morrison (1995). Philo (1990) focused on how the image of the British miners’ strike in 1984-85 was constructed by the media. He chose 12 still pictures from the television news as a starting point to let focus groups select the picture they found to be most adequate in relation to their imagination about the strike two years after the event. He asked them to write a news story from their selected picture and the whole setting functioned both as a reminder of the conflict and actualised the scheme of the event as created by the media.

Philo used focus groups interviews, because he was interested in the long-term influence of a certain major event as it showed up in the social construction of audience discourses. In the *Mirage Project* I used individual interviews to get an insight into the evaluation, the argumentation and the attitudes of every individual in relation to topics that were not ‘big’ or founded in a specific event.

MacGregor & Morrison (1995) were very critical of the method of letting the informant put words on experiences. The words of the informants are spoken, recorded, written down, read and interpreted by the researcher. Language in fact comes to equal both the tool and the object of research. (MacGregor & Morrison 1995:143). They wanted to create something that could solve that problem. They created a situation where groups of people could discuss and execute the production of a television program. They got one hour of raw footage of a situation from the Gulf war and created a story...
and got help by a professional editor. By crossing the line of only talking and entering the field of creativity and selection, the members of the group created a response that “was substantially more subtle and had greater depth than in simple discussion” (MacGregor & Morrison 1995:147).

I believe that the problem with the Gulf video project is that the informants have to learn to think and act like real editors, write a manuscript and learn the special work process necessary in order to do a professional production. They are not acting in their ordinary role of viewers but act in a new and unfamiliar role.

In the Mirage_Project I wanted the informants to stay in their familiar role as readers, but also to use the idea of bodily action and in practice select and order different pictures in relation to an article.

Description of the Mirage Project

In order to create a situation involving both bodily action and seeing, the informants in the project were forced to sort and rank four different pictures of a constructed article that looks like a newspaper article. Each article the informant was presented with, for example, problems associated with high-tension power lines was illustrated with four different pictures.

The experimental design thus forced the informant to choose between the four options and to rank them in relation to each other. Traditional reception analysis dictates that the informant has no choices. They watch, for example, a film like “Dynasty” and then, immediately afterwards, are asked to respond to the material.

My experimental design not only gives informants choices, but allows them to develop their opinions on the basis of these choices. This situation forces informants to choose between different alternatives and offers them a rich source of material to talk about. It is not just a question of whether a picture is better or worse aesthetically or as a narrative, informants are also compelled to reconstruct the reasons for their choice. These reasons are a reflection of the picture’s contents and form, of the context in which the picture is placed, of the informant’s expectations of newspaper pictures, of the informant’s knowledge of the subject or related subjects, of the informant’s repertoire of genres and knowledge of the media, and of the informant’s attitudes to objectivity, credibility and truth.

The empirical data consisted of in-depth interviews with eight young informants (20-30 years) and eight older informants (40-56 years). Both age groups were evenly distributed with respect to gender.
The session itself consisted of 5 stages:

1. First, the informants were presented with 16 pictures without text and were asked to sort the pictures according to the following question:
   “Which picture do you like the most?”

2. The informants were presented with the same 16 pictures, but this time they were placed in sets of four in the context of an article. Each picture and context was constructed for the experiment, and therefore not authentically matched. The stories presented in the articles were, however, authentic and taken from newspapers no more than a year old.

   The articles were grouped into the 4 subjects mentioned above:
   • High-tension power lines
   • The long-term unemployed
   • Plastic bags
   • Global Warming

   Each subject was visualised in four different pictures—what I call a ‘set’. The informants were then presented with a ‘set’; for example, the four pictures pertaining to the topic of high-tension power lines, and he or she had to rank the four pictures in relation to each other. “Which picture do you like the best?”

   During the course of the interview the categories which the informants found important in their selection and prioritisation of the pictures were identified and discussed. The informants went through the remaining three sets of pictures in the same way.

3. Next, the informants ranked the four sets of pictures/articles in relation to each other focused on the topics of the articles. This part related to their interest and their evaluation of importance to themselves.

4. In order to be able to discuss the manipulation of pictures in terms of truth, credibility and authenticity, the informants were presented with the cover of a weekly tabloid, where two pictures had been manipulated into a single, highly realistic picture.

5. Finally, the informants were asked to describe their newspaper reading habits.

   The whole session with the informant was tape-recorded and transcribed and this transcription was combined with observational notes from the actual handling of the ranking part of the session.

The aesthetic experience

The pictures were first shown out of context, that is, in relation to the meaning the reader attributed them. Then they were placed in the context of
a news article and were attributed another meaning. But the latter meaning could only be obtained by way of the transaction between reader, article and picture. This transaction is characterised by the mutually dependent inter-relationship between all three aspects of the context. It is not something that happens immediately or quickly. As the interviews show, the meaning was established over a prolonged period of time. One could say that the informants reached a conclusion about the meaning by talking about the pictures, articles and themselves.

The elements of this transaction happen primarily between reader and object, but they are mediated in the form of three different dimensions (Csikszentmihalye & Rochberg-Halton 1981:175):

1. aesthetic quality
2. awareness
3. judgement (objective)

The first dimension in the relationship between reader and object is its aesthetic quality and is based on John Dewey’s distinction between perception and recognition. Recognition describes a return to earlier schemes of interpretation or stereotypes when one is confronted with an object, but percep-
tion involves an active reception of the object such that its qualities can modify pre-established schemes or habits. “Perception, on the other hand, occurs when we experience a thing and realise its own inherent character.” (Csikszentmihalye & Rochberg-Halton 1981:44) The point is that the object imposes certain qualities on the viewer that creates new insights, which is what makes any experience aesthetic in Dewey’s perspective. Perception is essential for aesthetic experience and leads to psychological growth and learning. Recognition, which occurs on the basis of the person’s already-existing experience, serves only to keep the person within the realms of conventional beliefs.

It is a little confusing that Dewey employs a term like perception, because, in the field of psychology, it designates something other than what he means with the word. I have, therefore, chosen to re-christen Deweyian perception as extension.

The second transaction in the relationship between reader and object is how psychic energy is channelled (Csikszentmihalye & Rochberg-Halton 1981:184).

The aesthetic experience highlights the inherent qualities of the object. The reader’s awareness is required in order to realise a mental transaction. When one considers how mental energy is channelled, it becomes clear that the reader’s attention plays a key role in limiting and directing of mental energy. When an informant has to choose between four different versions of the same article, the aesthetic qualities of the picture partly direct the choice based on the question: Which picture do you like the most?

The preference for one picture over another is an expression of the attention attracted by the picture and thus the mental energy the informant invests in the picture. Each conscious experience lies on a continuum which goes from boring monotony at one end, to pleasant variation in the middle, to a frightening chaos at the other end. But, it is in the pleasant middle region that our attention is most effectively attracted (Csikszentmihalye & Rochberg-Halton, 1981:185).

This optimal involvement of the informant’s experience or flow stands in contrast to the extremes of boredom and anxiety which can be seen as forms of alienated attention. This alienated attention is a waste of mental energy because it consumes energy without setting some form of development process in action. The optimal flow is, on the other hand, a sort of integrated awareness which directs the person’s mental energy towards the realisation of his or her objectives.

The third aspect of the transaction between person and object is the aim of
the transaction. To start with, it can be an aim in itself to look at a newspaper picture or read a newspaper article. It can act simply as entertainment or a way of passing the time. This is, in other words, more an example of what Roman Jakobsen calls a ‘phatic’ function, i.e., to show that the channel is open for communication, but that what is communicated is not actually essential.

Secondly, the aim of the transaction can be to reflect oneself in the picture and thereby relate it to one’s vision of a good life.

Thirdly, the aim of the transaction can be to keep oneself informed as a normal member of society about personal and societal relationships. To keep informed, to keep oneself up-to-date with the societal and cultural debate. In other words, a continuous expansion and supplementation of the knowledge and experiences one has. Newspaper pictures and articles play a role in this social construction together with all other media influences and personal communication.

The theory of the Four Gazes

The three dimensions in the experience of the reader are not precise enough to catch the complexity of the response from the informants. Through a grounded theory approach the MIRAGE_PROJECT has developed the theory of The Four Gazes.

A theory of reading strategies and the values that are important to the reader needs to include the aesthetic and referential in relation to topic, expression and content; it needs to include the personally relevant and previous knowledge; it needs to capture that the actual readers’ values are not constant but are fluctuating all the time and through the reading act there is a shift between different reading strategies. The theoretical frame gathers the aesthetic, the referential, knowledge-related and emotional elements in four gazes:

**The Locked Gaze** – focuses on the photograph as a categorical picture that is a stereotype and primarily confirms the schemes the reader already has. It is through recognition that we can be confirmed in what we already know.

**The Opening Gaze** – focuses on the photograph that in itself has inherent qualities that can function as an extension of the readers’ own experiences. This is an aesthetic gaze that focuses on extension, surprise and new meanings. The aesthetic and emotional qualities mean something in themselves.

**The Pragmatic Gaze** – focuses on what the reader can learn from the newspaper and how the information can be used in his or her personal life.
The picture and the topic need to touch the reader and his or her daily life.

**The Reflecting Gaze** – uses the picture as a mirror – not of reality but of itself. It is through this reflection of other people’s happiness and misery that the readers can get a clear understanding of their own identity and values.

It is an important point that it is not the concrete photograph that can be said to contain certain reading strategies. It is the individual reader who can use different reading strategies on the concrete picture. Even the most conventional picture can contain elements that for one reader invites the use of many different reading strategies. Even the most conventional picture can for some readers be seen with The Opening Gaze.

It is another important point that the reader may shift between different reading strategies in relation to the concrete picture. The four gazes are used in a dialogical process in the readers’ reflection process. In this process the picture changes meaning. A picture is more than it shows.

**One in five is a loser – an example**

We can take a look at an example from the project, focusing on two of the pictures in the set where the content of the article was about unemployment. We will here focus on two of the sixteen informants in order to get an overview of the material in the project.

The informants were presented individually with the different versions of the article and I asked them to rank the four different versions. The question I posed to each one was, ‘Which one do you like best?’

Very quickly the informant ranked the different versions - and then we started talking about what (s)he saw in their pictures and what (s)he was thinking about them and how (s)he related personal experiences to the picture in its context.

This ranking process was surprisingly short. Within 30 to 60 seconds the informant had chosen the most interesting picture and ordered the other three. In this process the evaluation criteria were unclear and subconscious at the level of verbal explicitness, but very clear and conscious for the body in action.

In the interview situation (Kvale 2000) the dialogue within the informant herself was continuous while the bodily guided actions of selecting and acting were modified by the talking process where the criteria and arguments for his/hers choice contradict the primary bodily movement. This sometimes led to a change in the ranking of the different versions of the article.

The lead to the article with the headline ‘One in five is a loser’ - goes like