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THE PEARL DIVER

the designer
as storyteller

DESIS PHILOSOPHY TALKS:
STORYTELLING & DESIGN
FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

EDITED BY

Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam,
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FOREWORD BY Marisa Galbiati & Ezio Manzini

DESIS
NETWORK
Design for
Social Innovation
and Sustainability

*To our beloved friend and colleague Mika 'Lumi'
Tuomola. Words as smooth as stones from the sea,
thoughts deep as the ocean, generosity without end.*

Thank you, Mika.

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THE PEARL DIVER

“This thinking, fed by the present, works with the ‘thought fragments’ it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths of the past—but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of the extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what was once alive, some things suffer a ‘sea change’ and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune from the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living—as ‘thought fragments,’ as something ‘rich and strange.’”

Hannah Arendt

DESIS PHILOSOPHY TALKS

Since its start, DESIS Philosophy Talks have been performed in a variety of places by a bright network of researchers, professionals and students and hosted by different Schools or research centres dealing with design for social innovation and sustainability. The Talks have always kept a spontaneous form as invitation seminars addressing a variety of themes. The Storytelling series, then, introduced new experimental formats for eliciting the discussion such as the video-statements, which provide contributions also from testimonials (designers or philosophers) that are not able to join the conversation in person. Therefore, we started to collect thoughts as digital videos and also documentation repertoires as tools for continuing the self-reflection experience with a process of open and continuous discussion. One of the main goals for the DESIS Philosophy Talks is to make all this material available to the large community of interest and to keep the tension between theory and practice using that footage as fragments of the “design for social innovation narratives” which we are contributing to build and co-generate.



DESIS Philosophy Talk Dublin, 2013



DESIS Philosophy Talk Eindhoven, March 2014



DESIS Philosophy Talk Milan, May 2014



DESIS Philosophy Talk Eindhoven Dutch Design Week, October 2014

**01 | DESIS Philosophy Talk Series:
Storytelling and Design for Social
Innovation**

Storytelling & Social innovation

November 2013

Dublin, National College of Art and
Design Dublin, Cumulus Conference

Virginia Tassinari, Francesca Piredda, Elisa Bertolotti, Walter Mattana, Andrea Mendoza

with Eleonore Nicolas, Ezio Manzini, Davide Pinardi, Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola, Francesca Valsecchi, Yongqi Lou, Anna Meroni, Sonia Matos

**02 | DESIS Philosophy Talk Series:
Storytelling and Design for Social
Innovation**

Designers Telling Stories

March 2014

Eindhoven, DAE

Virginia Tassinari, Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda, Heather Daam

with David Hamers, Liesbeth Huybrechts, Sophie Krier, David Parkinson, Bas Raijmakers, Marja Seliger, Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin (Studio FormaFantasma)

**03 | DESIS Philosophy Talk Series:
Storytelling and Design for Social
Innovation**

**Designers Telling Stories and
Making Meaning**

May 2014

Milan, Politecnico di Milano

Virginia Tassinari, Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda, Heather Daam

with Luigi Ferrara, Davide Pinardi, David Parkinson, Walter Mattana, Elisabeth Sikiaridi & Johan Frans Vogelaar (Hybrid Space Lab), David Hamers, Joana Casaca Lemos, Valentina Anzoise, Nik Baerten

**04 | DESIS Philosophy Talk Series:
Storytelling and Design for Social
Innovation**

A Conversation About Time

October 2014

Eindhoven - DAE - Dutch Design Week

Virginia Tassinari, Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda, Heather Daam

with Bas Nik Baerten, Pablo Calderón Salazar, Alastair Fuad-Luke, Michael Kaethler, Bas Raijmakers

05

| **DESIS Philosophy Talk Series:
Storytelling and Design for Social
Innovation**

Pearl Diver, Designer as Storyteller

June 2015

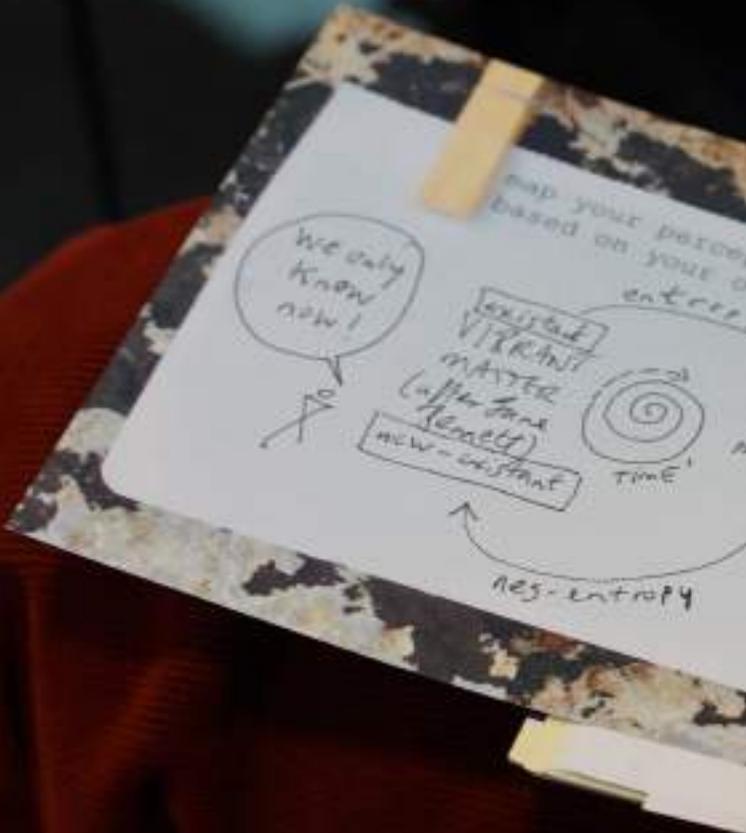
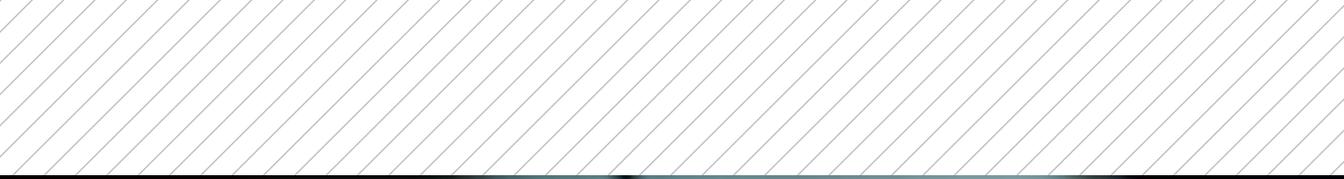
Milan - IED - Cumulus Conference

Virginia Tassinari, Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda, Heather Daam

with Francesca Antonacci, Valentina Anzoise, Sophie Krier, Donatella Mancini, Ilaria Mariani, Walter Mattana, Andrea Mendoza, David Parkinson, Davide Pinardi, Daniel Anthony Rossi, Roberta Tassi, Francesca Valsecchi, Susan Yelavich









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FOREWORD

A conversation with Marisa Galbiati & Ezio Manzini

Virginia Tassinari: “First of all, I want to say thank you to both Marisa and Ezio for accepting our invitation to have a dialogue for our book¹. I would like to start the conversation by asking what is your own, personal connection to this book and the initiative from which it originated?”

Marisa Galbiati: “I was invited to take part to the Philosophy Talks and to contribute to this book because I have personally dealt with audiovisual language and narration for a long time. When I was teaching at the Faculty of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano my colleagues used to ask me: “What does cinema have to do with architecture?” Then, when I moved to the School of Design they started to ask me: “What does cinema have to do with design?” Essentially, what we did is to learn techniques and strategies from cinema, and to apply them to different fields. The world of audiovisual is hard, because you need to know about techniques, aesthetics, strategies, and you also have to put the different elements in sync. I believe that one mostly has to practice it in order to fully understand its multi-dimensional nature. To use a metaphor, this process of getting to know the audiovisual tools was for us like learning to sing: once you have learned it, you can use it for singing a modern tune, but you can also sing a traditional Neapolitan folk

song or an opera lyric. Speaking of possible fields of application for audiovisual storytelling, at some point we have had the opportunity to share experiences with colleagues working in the field of design for social innovation and we understood that we could do a lot of interesting things together, as each one could bring his own knowledge, technicalities and culture.”

Ezio Manzini: “Marisa refers to storytelling as filmmaking, which is a specific discipline. I think that what has happened throughout the years is that we have understood that storytelling can also be considered a design tool for telling complex stories and situations, which otherwise it would be too difficult to represent.”

“My personal experience is actually symmetrical to that of Marisa. It is since many years that I have been dealing with design for social innovation. From within this context we have become aware that researchers and students were more and more expected to build narratives without yet having the right tools. They have learned to tell stories because they felt it was important for their practices. It slowly became clear that storytelling was not something one could improvise because, as Marisa said, there are already existing tools, expertise and stories which one can gain in order to make storytelling a fully-fledged design practice.

¹ This conversation was recorded on Friday 29th June 2015: Marisa Galbiati (Milan, Italy), Virginia Tassinari (Seraing, Belgium), Ezio Manzini (Milan, Italy)

Storytelling represents one of the different ways which one can develop design actions, especially when one collaborates or deals with different people. When storytelling is seen as a design tool, it provides the opportunity to tell stories of social innovation in an effective and clear way. It is a relevant issue for the DESIS Network and it has been largely discussed in the Storytelling series of the Philosophy Talks.”

“In my opinion, there are two aspects to focus on, two layers of the same matter. The first one is a comparison of experiences from which one can learn how to use storytelling in a better way. You can build on experiences of others because there are differences in the storytelling techniques used in the different experiences. The second aspect that is emerging, is the fact that telling stories is a powerful and sometimes dangerous weapon, as it introduces ethical matters connected to the topic of storytelling. As far as storytelling starts to be recognized in all respects as a design tool – especially for social innovation (and it really is a powerful tool if you can use it properly) – we started to understand that we also need to reflect on this tool. This book is an attempt to start this reflection.”

MG: ““I personally think that there’s still a lot of work to be done in this field, so that storytelling can become a tool that is able to move the innermost feelings of people and to elicit a change of perspectives in the world we live in.”

“I am familiar with the world of advertising and I can say that one of the most important issues there is that communication has to be strongly effective for eliciting change in people’s behaviours. It has to comply with all the requirements: finding the right insight, the target and the tone of voice need to be consistent with the proper strategy. In this case, communication becomes a very effective tool. For example, we applied the creative strategy’s model typical of commercials into the social communica-

tion field. Developing social campaigns means promoting social issues, ideas for changing habits and behaviours: for example, promoting sustainable mobility, organs donation or against food waste. In our practice we realized that one can use knowledge coming from other fields, such as elements of the communication strategy (how you can analyse the audience, which tone of voice you should use) and apply them to different subjects one is trying to promote. It slowly became evident for us that it is easier to work on a campaign for promoting tomato sauce than on one that encourages behaviour change, since people are quite resistant to changing their customs. If you are promoting safety on a construction yard or green preservation, you are essentially trying to talk directly to people and persuade them that their habits are damaging the environment and that it would be better if they would stop moving by car, wasting water, and so on. Changing habits is more difficult than creating the need for objects and products to be possessed. Yet, in this use of communication and storytelling for communicating social issues there is a longer lasting effect when compared to commercial products. To make people aware of environmental issues and to prompt virtuous behaviours which could bring common benefits to people and communities, takes a long time.”

“Because communication is commonly widespread nowadays, we are totally immersed in it. From within this bubble, it is really difficult to catch signals from the outside. We are often suffering from a communication bombing. What can you do in such a context for your voice to be heard? You have to find a way to be more interesting and less boring. I use to say to my students: “If I’m yawning only 15 seconds after the story has begun being told, this means that something is wrong with your way of communicating”. Social communication cannot be boring!”(...) “I have always being telling Ezio that the risk of telling the stories of social innovation is to be boring and grey! You will not convince me

to be more sustainable if you ask me to suffer. You have to show me that I can also get enjoyment from sustainable behaviours, and that there is no punishment for an unsustainable behaviour. If you share a sustainable approach with others, you can feel part of a community, and this can be rewarding.

If you take for instance the video of *Il Sabato della Bovisa*, one of the special initiatives linked to Coltivando², the community garden in our campus. The video communicates happiness: you see students along the streets of the neighbourhood, talking to people at the market or the children playing and gardening in the campus. It communicates fun. It is joyful and vibrant. This is an important issue: it's about aesthetics. Dealing with communication, you should not make people feel guilty, otherwise they stop listening to you. How to reach this kind of aesthetic is difficult, of course, because it is a matter of sensitivity. There's no way to engineer aesthetics. Sensitivity comes from education, and understanding beauty through arts, cinema, and theatre.

EM: "This is certainly the journey that the whole environmental and sustainability cultures – myself and the people I've worked with over the years – have been doing throughout the years. In the beginning the key focus was facing current issues such as recycling matters or complex socio-environmental ones (the last being a still very current one). The focus was still very much on problem solving. Now, after so many years, we all have to treasure Marisa's advice. Now we can all agree on the need of positive narrations. Most of the people dealing with design for sustainability and social innovation gained an awareness that our task today is not only to provide a specific technical solution to the issues. What we need is to face the fact that there is a lack of big narratives, which can sum up many little experiences which might be meaningful at the local level, yet they need to be amplified. We need stories that can provide a common sense

and envision a future possible civilization, powering new ideas of prosperity and welfare which do not come from polluting products and waste, but from new qualities."

"I personally think and hope that this book can also help to separate the different levels of the discussion about storytelling. Mankind needs to build up his own story. Nowadays thousands of different voices are providing together what we might in the future retrospectively read as the story of a new civilization. Within the development of these (luckily enough) uncontrolled stories, there lays the contribution that each one of us can provide. There is also another level of storytelling: namely that of telling a story that can contribute to develop a more general vision. In this case it we can recognize social innovation not only for its capacity for problem solving (as it initially used to be), but also because it is able to create social and relational qualities. We therefore have to use positive examples in order to show and make people appreciate the different attitudes emerging, where one can recognize for instance ideas of time, place, people and work alternative to the way in which modernity used to refer to these concepts."

"There is also another kind of storytelling: scenario building. There, storytelling is a tool for design conversations and you need to show different possible solutions and it is my intention to offer them in their diversity, proposing their different – maybe opposing – features. In co-design processes it is important to provide good scenarios that are capable of delivering ideas in an efficient way. In my opinion, this kind of storytelling is a matter of design sensitivity and awareness. In this case the key issue is to design a variety of different contents which can guarantee food for thought."

"With these different uses for storytelling, it would be useful to have a kind of map of the different situations. In my opinion we should now discuss

2 www.coltivando.polimi.it

where we are currently, where the technical and economical problems are, which kind of investments are needed and which communication channels should we use for our communication goals.”

MG: “I think that storytelling has always been the engine for change. For sure, some stories can open your mind and raise questions that you maybe never thought about. They can make you look at reality from a different point of view.”

“Ezio was talking about scenarios and storytelling as a tool for dialogue. (...) In my opinion these are to be considered working tools. They are not supposed to be beautiful or well-made scenarios. For example, the masters of French cinema used the camera as if it were a pencil to take notes. They went around the city and filmed, at random, without too much technicality. Instead of taking notes in a notebook, they used the camera. We often do the same. Our goal is not to get a high-quality artifact from an aesthetic point of view, but a working tool. We are not professional film-makers. A new sensitivity is expanding, which is also due to the diffusion of technologies and the ability to use them. Nowadays you can do everything you want just by using your personal devices and mobile phone. A consequence to this is that the aesthetic quality is getting more “dirty”. Nevertheless, sometimes such an artefact works better than professional artifacts, as it can be more effective and direct.”

“The real problem I think is how to organize and make all these contributions and different forms of storytelling work together. We need to ensure that all these contributions don’t remain as atoms, and that we are given the possibility to find them. There must be a way to build a link that weaves the pieces like an embroidery and makes them available. Many elements and tools are available nowadays, but we need a narrative of narratives: we need a way for including every experience into an accessible system. Which role does storytelling

have in this picture? Linking storytelling to design is a brilliant intuition, as storytelling can be used in this context as a tool for building dialogues between different disciplines.”

EM: “Images are more communicative than words. This is the reason why storytelling has become so relevant to design for social innovation, as an instrument of co-design, participation, and of binding people together. The visualization of given concepts, the fact that telling stories by means of a visualization is as much of a design tool as a sketch, a prototype or a map is. To do so, you do not need to be a movie director. One should learn these tools at school, as you also learn to sketch. Design students should learn the basics for making a film: not for commercial reason, but using films as design tools.”

Introduction

from the editors

by: Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam, Francesca Piredda and Virginia Tassinari

*Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.*

Shakespeare W., Tempest, I.2

The Background Story

Design for social innovation and sustainability proposes radical changes for the present time, having an impact not only in the short term but also possibly in the future. It inserts conflicts into our everyday lives by challenging well-established habits and ethics, visions and personal agendas.¹ Innovation processes related to matters of sustainability (social and environmental issues) deal with complex issues and multiple stakeholder systems. The actors involved often have different backgrounds and speak different languages. They refer to diverse visions and have a wide range of expectations.

As designers and design researchers working in the field of social innovation we often make use of storytelling to involve, engage and create fruitful dialogue. Stories can be considered as a means through which to share visions, desires and expectations of the actors involved.² Furthermore,

stories can also be used to document, envision scenarios and promote new ideas.³

The observation of practices of design for social innovation throughout the world in the different design schools belonging to the DESIS Network show that stories are used as design tools that contribute to the generation of new meanings and values for the context in which they are framed. Not only it is a design prerogative to generate new meanings and values, it is also a characteristic of stories themselves that have traditionally been considered as vehicles for values to be shared and new meanings to be created. In social innovation, stories can therefore be considered as a design tool with a specific role in generating new meanings and values.

Yet, the use of stories in social innovation carries its own risks, as the idea of storytelling has in the past been increasingly burdened with negative connotations⁴. Within the design community⁵, we often perceive a tension between the need to use stories

1 See the contribution by Marisa Galbiati in this book.

2 See the foreword by Ezio Manzini and Marisa Galbiati in this book.

3 See Piredda (2008; 2012) and Galbiati, Piredda, Mattana, Bertolotti (2010)

4 The idea of storytelling has been increasingly burdened with negative connotations, as it has been more and more associated with propagandistic uses.

5 The conversation about storytelling and social innovation outlined in this book began with a sense of urgency experienced over the past few years within the DESIS Network – a multinational, multicultural, diverse group of design professors and researchers sharing a common interest in social innovation and sustainable changes through design. Coming from a variety of perspectives and experiences, many of the Network labs were, and are currently, dealing with issues that are essentially matters of communication and, therefore, also related to storytelling (www.desis-network.org)

and the fear of being somehow manipulative when using them, despite one's intentions. Facing this dilemma – shared with many colleagues around the world – we decided to start a collective investigation with some of them into values and meanings produced by the uses of stories in practices of design for social innovation. This work records the first two years of discussions⁶.

A Process of Collective Reflection

As stories are more frequently used in processes of social innovation, it is becoming increasingly urgent to think about the implications of the stories we tell and the ways in which we tell them. Therefore, we started to collect and formulate some of the critical issues arising worldwide from the use of stories⁷. We decided to ask many scholars around the world to look at these issues through the lenses of these other disciplines, for instance through the philosophy of Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt. As editors we “collected” these different voices⁸ “weaving” them together in three main sections: the storyteller as story-listener; the storyteller as weaver of threads of thoughts and ideas discarded by the mainstream; and the political value of these actions.

6 This exercise of collective intelligence has been taking place within the DESIS Philosophy Talks / Storytelling and Design for Social Innovation, an ongoing series of discussions around the world hosted by academic institutions. The responses are inspired and triggered by the reflections generated during the series of DESIS Philosophy Talks. This book captures a moment in time of the ongoing discussion, in which the numerous contributors share their insights with a broader audience (www.desis-philosophytalks.org)

7 Within the DESIS Network, we did collect and formulate some of the critical issues arising worldwide from the use of stories, such as the question of how to learn to listen and to tell stories at the margins of mainstream society, and what are the possible implications of the stories we tell. These issues are of course not new, as they also occur in disciplines that have a longer tradition in dealing with stories, such as narratology and philosophy.

See also the premise in this book, where we talk about the initial request to create a toolkit for making good stories for designers dealing social innovation. Each social innovation project is situated in a particular socio-economic-cultural context. Furthermore, each one deals with people, their skills and relationships. Given the variety and diversity of the projects, the narrative choices are also infinite. There is no single recipe. Therefore it is not possible to create one given standard for the use of storytelling in design for social innovation that can be applied to each context.

8 These reflections have been developed by some of the many participants of the DESIS Philosophy Talks (www.desis-philosophytalks.org)

The first section of this book tackles the question of what it means to be a storyteller in social innovation practices. What makes a good storyteller? First of all it is necessary to be a good story-listener. Designers telling stories of social innovation can be seen as “pearl divers”⁹ – a metaphor borrowed from Arendt – because they collect what is overlooked in conventional ways of producing, consuming and living.

The second section delves deeper into what it actually means to be a storyteller. The stories told in projects of design for social innovation concern that which is at the margin, is not immediately evident and needs to be regarded with “attention”¹⁰. This is very close to what Walter Benjamin says about the storyteller – one who tells these stories of “fragments” that result from the disillusionment of mainstream narratives.

In the last section we look at the possible consequences of these stories, namely their political implications. Stories of social innovation are considered as a viable direction for all actors involved – not only citizens but also the designers – to (re) discover what it means to be active citizens and, by doing so, to discover what Arendt calls one's own (social) “happiness”¹¹, to (re)discover one's own role and responsibility into society.

Throughout these sections, we remain aware of the complexity involved in telling stories and the wisdom of the storytelling tradition, which is not afraid to embrace the unknown – the dark side – and to embrace conflict as an elemental part of its own existence.

* See page 232 for references.

9 Arendt, H., “Introduction to Benjamin”, in Benjamin, W. (1969)

10 Benjamin, W. (1969)

11 Arendt, H. (1958)

00 | Our story. From the beginning

by: *Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda and Virginia Tassinari*

Our understanding of design for social innovation through the lens of storytelling comes from insights and reflections gained in a variety of actions that the editors have engaged in together and separately over the years. The intellectual interest in the topics developed in this book is rooted on the one hand in the personal passion and practices each one of us has had the opportunity to develop so far, and on the other hand in the possibility of learning from each other thanks to the DESIS Network¹ as an international community of practice and as a platform for sharing knowledge where “elective affinities” are made possible and catalysed.

¹ DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability) is an association of de-sign labs (called DESIS labs), based in design schools and universities, actively involved in pro-moting and supporting sustainable change in society. www.desis-network.org

Being involved in the activities of DESIS Network, although in different contexts, we found ourselves aligned in observing a number of things happening within the Network itself in connection with narrative practices. For example, in many of the projects developed within the network, storytelling is used in an “intuitive” way, without outsourcing specific kind of competences from the disciplines that have traditionally dealt with the topic of storytelling, e.g. narratology and media studies. In fact, as Ezio Manzini highlighted in the interview introducing this book, many labs have been making use of storytelling in a very natural way. In many labs a spontaneous use of video emerged as a storytelling practice in both research and

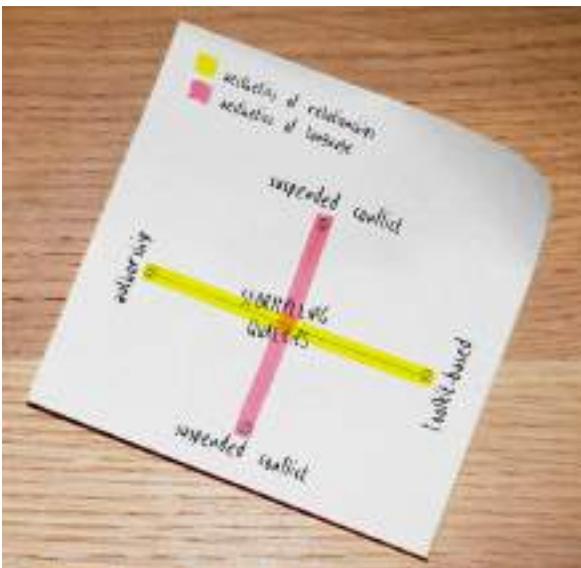


Stockholm, June 2015 - Developing ideas for the book

teaching. As we started to look at the artefacts produced, we continued to find recurrences: the narrative productions (video or other types of communication formats) were often characterized by an aesthetic quality in-consistent with the content they represented; completed and ongoing experiences were regularly not shared, so they were unknown outside the context of reference; a visual uniformity in the communication productions, that we could describe as ‘the Post-it aesthetic’;² and finally, these narratives seemed to be characterized by a naïve over-positivity and “happy ending”. In our opinion, this is because the use of storytelling techniques is often to eliminate any narrative conflict, which means removing “the dark side” of the matter. Consequently, these stories tend to seem overly-reductive and deny the complexity of the world. Between ourselves we joke about this possibility, calling them the ‘stories too good to be true’.³

2 The tools and technologies we use for developing our projects and design processes affect both the artefact's outcome and the process itself. This statement and the hypothesis from which it derives, echoes Edward Tufte's well-known essay “The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint”: “Alas, slideware often reduces the analytical quality of presentations. In particular, the popular PowerPoint templates (ready-made designs) usually weaken verbal and spatial reasoning, and almost always corrupt statistical analysis. What is the problem with PowerPoint? And how can we improve our presentations?” (Tufte, 2003).

3 See the dialogue between Marisa Galbiati and Ezio Manzini at the beginning of this book.



Storytelling qualities

Most of the insights mentioned above are matters of aesthetics and deal with the qualities of storytelling (as shown in the picture below). The meaning-making and engagement of the stakeholders at different levels of the production of the stories identify two different issues: a) the aesthetics of languages: the languages of storytelling can vary from a “conflict-based” kind of storytelling to a “suspended conflict” one, where the conflict is already solved, and b) the aesthetics of relationships: a kind of storytelling where the “authorship” is central to one where “tools” that initiate participation become key matters, and the main goal is working together within participatory and collaborative processes. We can recognize these two kinds of aesthetics when considering projects of design for social innovation, and it leads us to the following questions: What are we talking about and how? When we are telling stories of social innovation, are we telling the complexity, deep diving into the subject? Are we representing the conflict or are we completely missing it? Are we providing tools for co-creating and sharing stories or are we proposing our authorship as a contribution to the collective discourse?

DESIS labs around the world recommended a common reflection on these issues, introducing the need to take a critical look in order to acquire tools and skills enabling the use of storytelling in practices of social innovation. The initial requirement was essentially practical: to find design instruments for communication. This research question was addressed by the Imagis group⁴ who were asked to research whether it was possible to imagine a toolkit that could help people with no filmmaking experience to produce videos.⁵

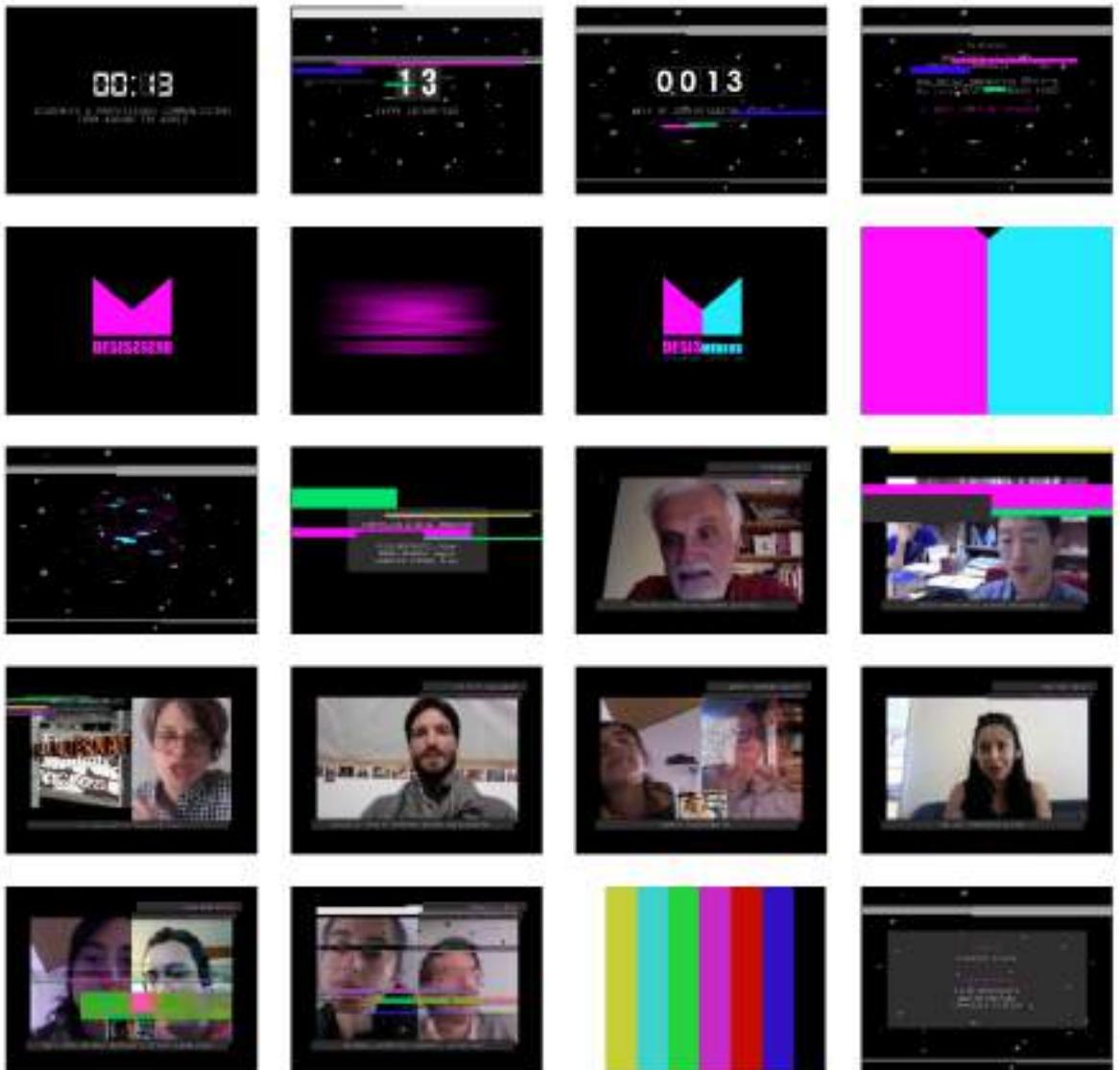
4 Imagis is a research group at the Design Department, Politecnico di Milano. Imagis is a member of the DESIS Network with a specific purpose: its research and teaching activities focus on communication design being rooted in investigating the potentialities of audiovisual storytelling, rhetoric and genres within design and co-design processes.

5 See page 13.

Within the group, we sensed that before providing a solution, it was necessary to investigate the problem further, and to figure out what DESIS labs are actually doing, as well as when and how stories are produced there. Can we say from a communication point of view that we are working effectively? Do the aesthetics of the stories we produce achieve our goals? Can we do better? How can we learn from those who have more specific skills and knowledge about narratives?

The stories we tell

When we started this inquiry, we found that on the DESIS Network website and the DESIS YouTube channel there was minimal mention of the association's activities, because many of the experiences were often kept within the research group and the community involved. Together with Andrea Mendoza - who for a long time has dealt with issues relating to video production with and within the Network - we decided to start a public call and invited some of the most active group members to



Stills from the *Desis in the Mirror* project

For many years our research group *Imagis* (*imagislab.it*) has been working with research topics related to communication for social innovation. Developing practice-based research we have questioned in particular the possibility of using audiovisual artefacts as tools for social dialogue. Being based in Milan, our group has worked locally for a long time in collaboration with companies, public institutions, associations and citizens. From 2009 to 2011 we ran a research project called **'Imagine Milan'**, in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan (Galbiati, Piredda, Mattana, Bertolotti, 2010). The aim was to increase the awareness of sustainable ways of living in the city of Milan, where the stakeholders were fragmented and had different points of view and interests. To better understand the problems and opportunities, the needs and expectations, we started observing and listening to users and communities in different areas of the city, using videos for documenting and collecting stories. We used short documentaries called *mini-DOCs* as a way of talking with the stakeholders and starting a conversation about problems and possible solutions. From that debate we began to imagine possible futures together, and as communication designers we proposed ways of representing them via *video-scenarios* (*envisioning*). Ideas and possible changes were also promoted by designing short advertising videos (*promoting*). Reflecting on these experiences and on the artefacts produced, we developed theoretical research about the role of audiovisual communication within the design process: analyzing the aesthetics of *video-scenarios*, clustering various forms of audiovisual formats for *envisioning scenarios* and the role of that specific genre within the design process we proposed the hypothesis of the "audiovisual design thinking" as a framework of reference (Piredda, 2012).

The idea of *shaping imagination* (Ciancia, Piredda, Venditti, 2014) working on genres as documentation, scenarios and promotion was then expanded further in the ongoing project **Plug Social TV**, developing

an original transmedia storytelling approach based on design practice (Ciancia, 2016) in order to engage communities in a participative process. Audiovisual is a language, a sense-making and reflective practice but video per se is not enough. We then experimented with *Social TV* as a platform to foster feedback processes between stakeholders, helping people to become free not only to arrange their daily life with innovative sustainable solutions, but also to nurture their projects step by step by sharing solutions and also meanings. Our hypothesis was that such a platform could give them voice, enable to share values and promote the evolution of ongoing initiatives.

We focused on the neighbourhood of Bovisa (Milan, Italy) in order to build strong relationships over the years. The narrative elements uncovered and collected from the local community (either dominant or emerging) are re-elaborated in order to build fictional audiovisual artefacts whose plots are based on reality. These fictional products develop different story lines that are part of a transmedia structure. Some of them develop stories supporting fieldwork within a fully participatory process, others build up a totally fictional world from some elements of reality and social issues, with a lack of recognizable pattern. Both can facilitate interactions, enhance reflexivity and generate feedback loops moving forward in iterative cycles of *filming-reviewing* (Anzoise, Piredda, Venditti, 2014). Therefore, the role of communication design in building and fostering capabilities that support the understanding and construction of narrative communities is crucial.

These case studies are mainly concerned with the idea of "making things visible and tangible", "reconstructing local identities" (Manzini, 2015). Furthermore, we are testing ways to engage non-experts in participatory video and storytelling processes, developing specific tools for collecting and re-framing stories, and producing micro-narratives and storytelling formats. (Piredda, Ciancia, Venditti, 2015).

be involved in an internal self-reflective investigation that we called DESIS in the Mirror⁶. Our motivation was the conviction that it was important to activate a virtual dialogue between those DESIS members occasionally involved in video productions and professional filmmakers and artists dealing with social innovation from slightly different perspectives. The dialogue between filmmakers and non-filmmakers aimed to understand where things varied, where the common points were, and what designers can learn from filmmakers, as well as from the many possible languages and aesthetics of storytelling.⁷

DESI in the Mirror has been researching the use of storytelling in social innovation by interviewing thirteen colleagues working in DESIS labs around the world about audio-visual production and distribution (Bertolotti, Mendoza, Piredda, 2013; Piredda, Bertolotti, D'Urzo, 2014). Consequently, the data emerging can be considered only as partial. However, despite the limited number of testimonies a rich variety of motivations for using narratives in design for social innovation were revealed. What emerged from this research is that the those interviewed⁸ have employed videos in different ways and for different aims: for listening, observing, and documenting; as a tool for co-design, sharing for instance a project with a community; to display ideas and projects or scenarios; to enable people to build their own stories; raising awareness on important issues, pushing them into a broader social-political debate; organizing festivals to share the ideas experienced by a limited number of people with a wider audience.

6 <http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it>.

7 We recorded online video interviews, designed a format and a website (<http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it>). We have presented the project to the designer and filmmaker communities in different conferences and published the initial results (Bertolotti, Mendoza and Piredda, 2013; Piredda, Bertolotti and D'Urzo, 2014).

8 From the DESIS community the interviewees were: Chakrapipat Asswaboonyalert, Ivan Bursztyn, Joon Sang Baek, Andrés Burbano Valdes, Miaosen Gong, Francois Jegou, Ezio Manzini, Mugendi M'Ritha, Lara Penin, Felix Tristan Hallwachs, Florent Lazare, Paulina Salas, Sara Zavarise were interviewed as filmmakers and artists involved in the production of films related to social innovation and sustainability issues.

Key findings

One of the key aspects emerging from Desis in the Mirror is that designers, not necessarily experts in communication and audiovisual productions, often work with visual and audiovisual languages and stories. Designers do not reject using storytelling because they fear they do not have adequate experience or skills.

What emerged from our research is that, as far as videos are complex artefacts, producing audiovisual narratives gives people the chance to meet other people with different competences (screenwriting, filming, cinematography, directing, editing, technical work, etc.) and to be engaged with a community of practice.

Furthermore, it also emerged that the way we create stories as artefacts of communication is linked to ethical constraints. This means it is our responsibility as designers to affect the sustainability of a production and imagine that the we not only talk about the quality of the stories of social innovation but also about the way we work. In fact, material conditions have a significant impact on the lives of the people involved in the production of stories, particularly in the case of an audiovisual project, where production time might be long and challenging in terms of resources. There is an unlimited variety of modalities of stories to be told, depending on the different contexts and actors involved. Expertise, time, financial and human resources and socio-political contexts differ in every project. Moreover, within the context of design for social innovation there are complex combinations of people, objects and environments so that the projects we refer to are, and have to be, multi-directional and non-predictable. This complexity and diversity need to be respected.

Therefore, from the beginning of our adventure, we didn't want to encourage the idea of providing fixed scripts or recipes that one can follow while

they work towards a specific outcome. Particularly dealing with such a complex matter as narrative it was necessary to realize that manifold tools, tutorials and digital platforms are widely available on the Internet, which could be used or ignored accordingly.

Storytelling as design tool

From artistic research and artefacts to the visualizations that generally provide tools and solutions for specific projects, diverse and hybrid cases explore storytelling techniques and narrative forms rooted in different epistemologies. Each story we tell or listen to (the stories of sustainable solutions) is part of a story world (the world of social innovation) and contributes to the construction of a complex 'mythology' (Jenkins, 2009) (the culture of design for social innovation).

One of the goals of designers working in the field of social innovation is to facilitate processes that will allow people to co-create innovative solutions for their own environment.

Exchanging skills, knowledge and experience is not that simple: every use of a methodology (as storytelling techniques, video documentation, scenario building etc.) within design projects involves decision making within the specific context that it is designed for, the stakeholders that are involved, the budget of the project, and so on. Designers use the tools available at that moment - ones from different domains - or integrate other disciplines and competences into the project. In this process, designers can be considered as one of many stakeholders, as we provide our creativity and critical points of view to contribute to the collaborative dialogue as one of the peers, one



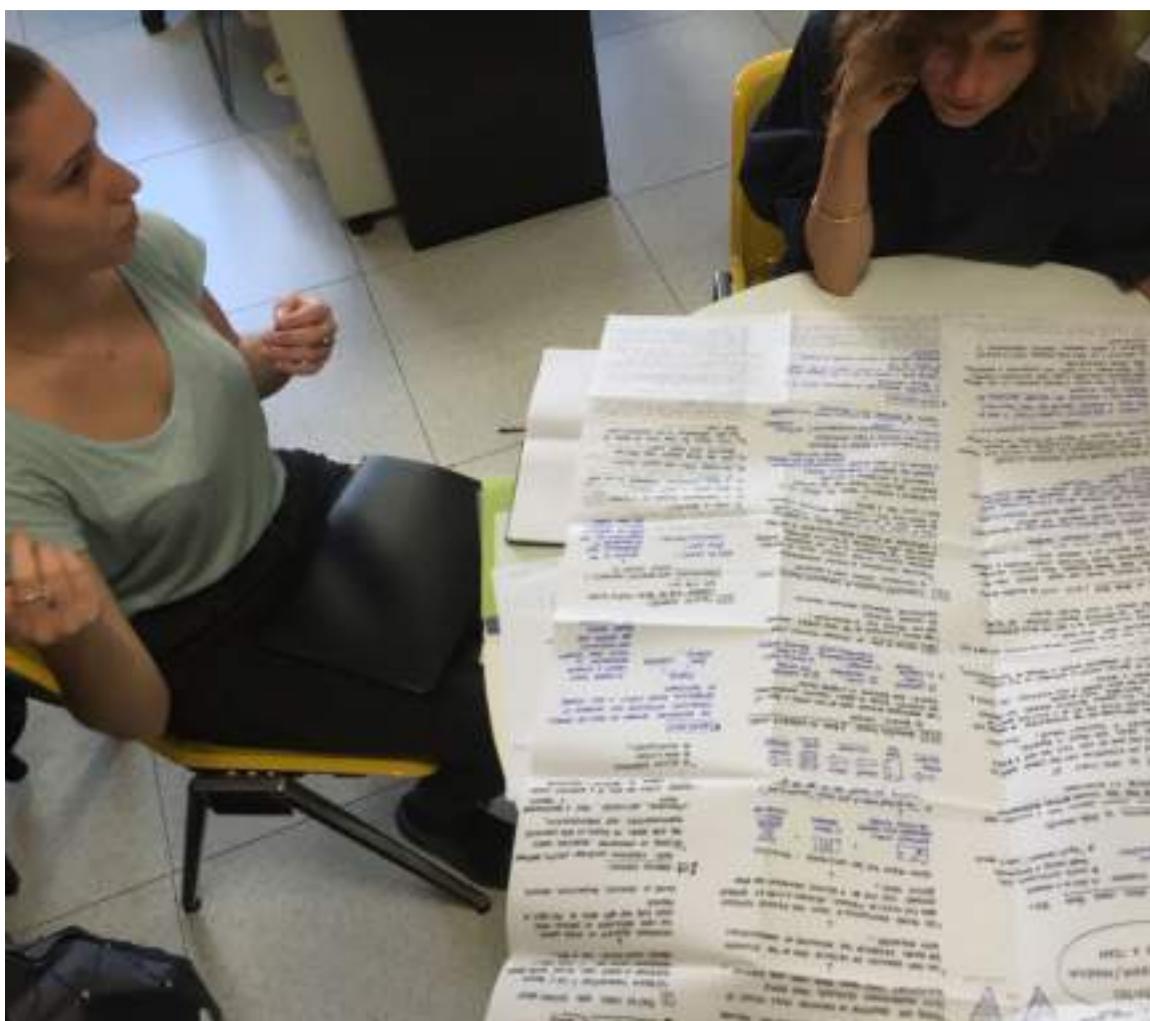
Eindhoven, October 2014 - Virginia Tassinari, Heather Daam and Chiara Francione

of the many experts and stakeholders invited to participate. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that nobody has the role of the narrator: stories have to be told by someone according to her or his own point of view, but they can also tell different points of view or be choral narratives, according to specific choices that each narrator can take. Designers dealing with stories in processes of social innovation need to make choices and decide which stories to tell and how they ought to be told. Consequently, as storytelling can be considered as a design tool, it can also contribute to the emergence of certain values and meanings.

Storytelling can facilitate certain ways of telling, enacting and performing and, most of all, it can also be designed by professionals. By researching the cases and reflections collected in DESIS in the Mirror, we realized that one of the shared needs registered by the researchers working in this field was to start a serious reflection on storytelling as a design tool, and the values and meanings generated by the possible different uses of storytelling in practices of design for social innovation.

Therefore, we started a dialogue with the initiative of the DESIS Philosophy Talks⁹, in order to

⁹ www.desis-philosophytalks.org



Milan, June 2015 - Donatella Mancini and Virginia Tassinari working on Donatella's Master's thesis project

address these issues from a multidisciplinary perspective. This book records this experimentation, which took two years with many different conversations around the world. Modes of collective reflection have been continuously reformulated and re-shaped, and formats (video-statements, workshops about fragments, co-creation of a manifesto etc.) have been tested out in collaboration with other colleagues and Master's students working on their theses.¹⁰

* See page 232 for references.

¹⁰ For instance Donatella Mancini and Chiara Francione from Politecnico di Milano.



A wooden clothespin is positioned at the top right corner of a white sheet of paper. The paper is held against a background of soil and rocks. The text '01 |' is printed in the upper left area of the paper.

01 |

STORY-LISTENING

01 | story-listening

by: Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam, Francesca Piredda
and Virginia Tassinari

*“Tis a particular pleasure to me here to read
the voyages to the Levant, which are generally so far
removed from truth, and so full of absurdities,
I am very well diverted with them.
They never fail giving you an account of the women,
whom, ’tis certain, they never saw, and talking
very wisely of the genius of the men, into whose
company they are never admitted; and very often
describe mosques, which they dare not even peep into.”*
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu¹

“Attention is the natural prayer of the soul.”
Nicolas Malebranche,
quoted by Walter Benjamin (1969)

The Pearl Diver

The act of listening² to a story is quintessential to the act of telling a story. In *The Storyteller*,³ the German philosopher Walter Benjamin says that each time someone tells a story, he has already received

it from the hands of somebody else. The storyteller is thus, first and foremost, a story-listener. He is someone who has the ability to look at things other people do not pay attention to, because they regard them as too small or insignificant: the fragments of the mainstream narrative.

Benjamin says that when the 20th Century’s mainstream narratives started to crack, they revealed fragments that became visible to those who have developed the sensitivity to look at these margins. The archetype of the story-listener is the flâneur (Benjamin, 1999): someone who wanders in the city, being fascinated by what others do not see, and pays “attention”⁴ to it. According to Benjamin – as with the French poet Baudelaire – the storyteller and the flâneur often coincide; the storyteller is an enthusiast who, like the flâneur in the Parisian Passages (Benjamin, 1999), is attracted by a passing story, and is able to recognize its disruptive potential and to transmit it by telling its story. These stories, therefore, retain a critical potential towards the mainstream narratives, and possibly create the preconditions for new kinds of transformative actions.

1 From The letters of Lady Wortley Montagu, Edited by Mrs Hale Boston: Roberts Brothers 1869

2 Trying to understand what might be the prerequisites for telling a meaningful story, we can imagine that one of them is listening. This also emerges from the study of cases such as those from the DESIS Network, where we see the role of listening to stories from real life is central. (See DESIS in the Mirror: <http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it>) Designers have a long tradition of employing methods for studying reality, borrowing them from social sciences, including qualitative techniques for observing, and from informal artistic routes. To read examples of experiences of designers using ethnography, see the paper in this book written by Valsecchi and Tassi. We also can refer to the presentation of Matos at the Philosophy Talk in Dublin (November 2013). Other examples of experiences employing artistic perspectives are described in a paper written for this book by Rossi and Schwalm. During the Philosophy Talks in Milan (June 2015) we also presented the video-statement from Krier on exploration and listening.

3 Benjamin, W. 'The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Benjamin W. (2001)

4 The storyteller/flâneur can 'save' from oblivion events that might look insignificant. This 'attention' enables the storyteller to see reality from perspectives alternative to the mainstream and to respect the complexity that is often hidden by reductionist points of view. Benjamin says that the storyteller recognizes there a wisdom, in which he sincerely believes. By telling the stories of these fragments, the storyteller might enable what is potentially there, but has not yet been acknowledged, to be translated into action. Consequently, stories might have a transformative power. Benjamin, W. (1969). Illuminations. New York: Schocken Books.

Another German philosopher – Hannah Arendt – believed that her friend and mentor Benjamin was the archetypal storyteller because he could listen to stories coming from the margins of mainstream society and pass them on by means of his writings and radio programs. She called him a “pearl diver”⁵. For her the storyteller is one who dives in the “ocean” of reality and find “pearls” of wisdom. These can only be found inside ugly, insignificant “shells”, requiring a particularly sensitive eye to recognize and value them. The act of collecting these “pearls” and stringing them together is for her the real meaning of storytelling.

If we apply this metaphor to the context of social innovation, designers can dive into contemporary society and see what has passed unseen. When listening to and telling stories of these fragments designers could, therefore, be considered “pearl divers”. By bringing these “pearls” to the surface and revealing their potentialities, they co-create the preconditions for alternatives to mainstream behaviours to become more effective or for new initiatives to possibly emerge. When we try to “**listen**” to reality, we might see elements of everyday life – commonly referred to as “grassroots social innovation” – that are not currently valued by our neo-liberal contemporary societies with their focus on economic progress. Goods generated by grassroots social innovation are not only material; they can also be relational⁶, which often risk passing unseen by inattentive eyes, but which can enrich the lives of individuals.

In order to be “pearl divers” we constantly need to work at developing the sensitivity needed to pay the right “**attention**” to these alternative behaviours; to the small, bottom-up movements taking place in society where participation, sharing and activism are deeply intertwined. By doing so, we might contribute to the acceleration of a more democratic and participatory construction of the public realm⁷.

5 Arendt, H. “Introduction to Benjamin”, in Benjamin W. (1969)

6 Manzini, E. DESIS Philosophy Talk “The arts of living, together”, ENSAD, Paris, April 2015.

7 See the radio talk at the Design Academy Eindhoven – The Netherlands

To sum up, the act of listening is fundamental to storytelling. Only by listening can one respect the complexity of reality and navigate among the multiplicity of possible visions and ideas. Listening can be seen as a vital practice that also has to do with sensitivity, reflection and the capability to be open to intuition and inner life⁸.

This is particularly true when one refers to stories of social innovation. How to listen is something that needs to be considered and designed, and that requires choices, due to its many forms and approaches. It has also to do with the ability to be open to reality and to be prepared to improvise⁹. The act of listening allows us to move from an abstract towards a concrete, experienced-based knowledge of reality, which tries to understand and interpret what is going on¹⁰. These reflections raise two key questions: can our activities of storytelling in design for social innovation be seen through the lenses of these understandings of “story-listening”/storytelling? If so, what can we do in order to become better “story-listeners”/storytellers, and how can we further develop the “attention” needed to become better “story-listeners”/storytellers?

* See page 232 for references.

(October 2014), where Alastair Fuad-Luke stressed that designers have to be, first of all, citizens. <https://soundcloud.com/design-academy-eindhoven/emma-conversations-saturday-storytelling-philosophy-talk> Fuad-Luke referred to the fact that expressions such as ‘us’ and ‘the others’, and ‘designers enabling others to do something’, are often used. Yet, this language has something of a colonialist sense. We need to find other words, other ways to see, think and write.

8 In this book Roberta Tassi and Francesca Valsecchi suggest that design could practice listening as a property of giving and of creativity: an active and living activity for making better projects.

9 See the interview with Andrés Burbano Valdes for the the DESIS in the Mirror project regarding documentary films: “You must have a fine intuition, because reality changes. And that’s the most important point. During documentary, the interesting thing of documentation is that you are leading with reality, and reality changes and it’s not asking you permission to change, but it works independently. And the intuition of the documentary film-maker or the person doing the documentation is very important because it’s a problem of negotiation between the plot you have, the idea you have and how reality evolves. That good eye and good ear to capture that is the most important quality of a good documentarist.” - <http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it>

10 Davide Pinardi said in his video-statement for our first Philosophy Talk dedicated to the relationship between storytelling and social innovation: “In my opinion a storyteller doesn’t need as much to be able to tell stories – but rather the human condition and therefore worlds, conflicts, problems, people, dilemmas, contradictions, emotions ... In other words: telling life. But before telling, I have to be able to listen. I have to be able to see. The best stories are hidden in the eyes of others.”

A Monologue for Dialogue: Miniature Portrait of Storytelling in Social Design

Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola

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ABSTRACT

"A Monologue..." is a lightly edited, added on and referenced transcript of a video recorded ten-minute speech submitted for the DESIS Philosophy Talk series #2 on Storytelling and Social innovation in 2013-14. The speech was recorded in the author's home, Helsinki, Finland, 7 November 2013. It deals with the nature, purpose and form of storytelling and drama in New Media, social change and innovation, and visits narrative paradigm definers and shifters in the Western culture from Aristotle and Aquinas to Joyce, Brecht, Beckett and Le Guin. Key questions are the participatory agency in storytelling and the ethics of storytelling aesthetics. Images are consciously selected to reflect the transience of observation and commentary.

TAGS

Storytelling, Drama, New Media, Design, Aesthetics, Ethics

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Hello, DESIS Philosophy Talkers!

I hope there is sufficient light in my own home on this dark November day to make this video. This is the take five, I believe. So...

“...your deeds can outlive you, and sometimes influence people even after you yourself are forgotten – but, in the end, I suppose even deeds must surely die some day.” (Daisy’s Amazing Discoveries, 1996)

“Have you ever thought that you couldn’t relate with something if you were absolutely different from it?” (Shift, 2001)

“It would be cruel to demand a perfect composure of the heart. What are we but bits of meat moving in time and space?” (Accidental Lovers, 2006-7)

The quoted narrative experimental work I’ve produced in 1996-2006 has largely been motivated by existentialist drama (e.g. Camus, 1943; Sartre,

1944; Harold and Maude, 1971) and deals with the significance of choice, chance and destiny in human existence. In interactive media, narrative content database elements and the rules of their structural organization, in relationship to participant interaction, can be considered as destined elements that may be enhanced by chance operations of storytelling system, including participant within it. All the elements and operations become activated by the choices of interactive participant. As an existentialist act, the choice element in interactive storytelling and drama requires a discussion on the ethics of the storytelling aesthetics.

Walter Benjamin (1986) defines storytelling as one of the oldest forms of communication. It does not convey information as such, but provides it with a storyteller’s point-of-view, so that information becomes an experience –and the storyteller’s handprint a part of the story like that of a potter’s on a pot.

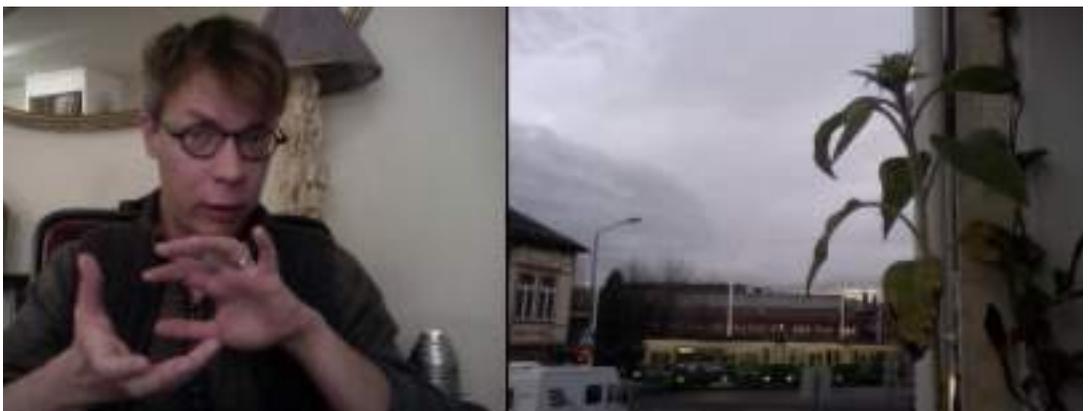


Figure 1. 00:07:19 time frame of the online video (640x426) of the speech and the corner of Siuntionkatu and Aleksis Kiven katu, Helsinki (view from the author’s balcony), at the time of the recording (17:11-17:21, 7 Nov 2013): “...designer becomes a framework creator for this choral, communal experience of making the story unfold.”

In the Aristotelian (Aristotele, 1999; Laurel, 1991) understanding of the poetics of tragedy, the purpose of the structured points-of-view is to produce catharsis, a pleasurable release of emotion, which Aristotle believes to be pity: we are feeling for characters and the dramatic presentation of their points-of-view. Considering the desired emotional outcome, Brecht (Heinonen, 2003) would certainly disagree: the release of emotion should not take place. If people are released of it, the didactic purpose of the story is wasted. They should be estranged during the storytelling experience and have the emotion after in order to be motivated to change the world accordingly, informed of the nature of things, as conveyed by the points-of-view in epic drama.

Thus the purposes of storytelling may vary, for instance, from the antiquity's release of emotion to the story being informative and providing us with points-of-view that make us feel those feelings that are needed to make change in society. We can move on to the purpose of storytelling in providing us with the sense of absurdity of all existence.

The sense of absurd allows us the gift of laughter, coming together within our shared circumstance – destined or accidental, as you will: “The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout – Haw! – so. It is the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs – silence please – at that which is unhappy.” (Beckett, 1953) The laugh of laughs may provide us with the purest point-of-view to storytelling itself. Let me ruminate.

The moment we introduce feelings in storytelling – whether pity or laughter or desire to learn about the world – we have to start to deal with the ethics of the storytelling aesthetics. In the words of his alter

ego Stephen Dedalus, James Joyce (1916) presents my own favourite take on the issue in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. There he suggests that storytelling – which is nowadays typically, but erroneously e.g. in advertising business, thought merely as rhetoric means of pursuing people to think or do something – as a vehicle of producing desire, or loathing, produces mere kinetic emotions: story-listener is manipulated to want, or to stay away from something (up to the level of letting others obliterate the undesirable and loathsome something or -ones, as history unfortunately shows us).

From Dedalus' point-of-view, the kinetic emotions result from a kind of second order art of storytelling, improper practice, that is uninterested of the ethics of its aesthetics and does not reach towards its own full potential and spectrum. In other words, kinetic emotions conceive from poor storytelling that practically reduces itself to pornography and propaganda. “The esthetic emotion... is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.

–You say that art must not excite desire, said Lynch. I told you that one day I wrote my name in pencil on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles in the Museum. Was that not desire?”

No doubt, Lynch, but let Praxiteles and The Modern Prometheus be aware of what they decide to design: “...with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.” (Shelley, 2008)

As an ethical storytelling aesthetic, Dedalus proposes that it should reach towards static emotion and Aquinas' *claritas*: “radiance” (Joyce, 1916), clear, sharp, fair, and thus true and beautiful observation of subject phenomena, including their intricate, complex and arresting layers in storytelling. In that kind of an emotion aroused we do not learn things from one point-of-view – whether certain

things are good or bad, or true or untrue – but we are rather introduced to choral points-of-view. We understand the introduced phenomena better, through storytelling, and are able to make judgments by ourselves, leading life that has been helped to see itself (in more radiant light, if you will) as a part of the great cycle we all participate.

If we take this interpretation of Dedalus’ point-of-view seriously in the ethics of the aesthetics of storytelling, we can unite stories’ capability to both awake feelings and, at the same time, inform us on the complexity of phenomena, and – based on these two – arrive to our own, personally arresting conclusions in our own thinking and action in the world. To go further, the static emotions awoken by proper storytelling that arrests our imagination with both the senses and the intellect, we arrive to forms that storytelling takes.

Since we investigate storytelling form now in participatory media, it’s good to remind ourselves that while a story is told in a novel or television program, drama is always acted out (e.g. in theatre, like a ritual or mystery in shared space, where both actors and audience unfold and partake the story in the same exciting atmosphere). It naturally follows that interactive storytelling and drama, e.g. story-based computer games, ought to be (inter)acted out by their participants/users/players within the

story system, producing “another life” for them, “a shift from one reality to another” (Tuomola, 1999). “The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (Joyce, 1916). The storytelling designer becomes a framework creator for this choral, communal experience of making the story unfold.

As the story in interactive drama is told by the choices of its participant, the ethics of design naturally mostly concern the consequences of participant action that makes the story unfold. The ethics are present, except in story logics, also in the whole system logic and behaviour that defines the rules of participation – to be brutally honest: the participants are our design objects. In such storytelling systems, designer’s roles as the participants’ storyteller and the vision-keeping storyteller are intricately woven together. Ursula Le Guin (1989), like Benjamin, insists on the design of the experience in our endeavour: “The writer cannot do it alone. The unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp. The reader, reading it, makes it alive: a live thing, a story.”

Figure 2. The Flammarion Engraving Model (image by Katrin Olina) of the key concepts discussed: outer ring deals with user/Participant, inner ring with her presentation in a storytelling system. STORYTELL-



Figure 2. The Flammarion Engraving Model (image by Katrin Olina)

ING SYSTEMS DESIGN takes place via Culture dependent MEDIA, techniques and technologies we have available for us in trying to learn about the Nature of things and to give shape to our experiences between largely unknown factors within and out of us (naturally our MEDIA/tech is also a result of Nature, of what we are biologically able to perceive and convey). Claritas/radiance, on the edge of the inner unknown, can really only be circulated about by giving it a whole form (INTEGRITAS) and rhythm/harmony (Consonantia) e.g. via arts and storytelling (Joyce, 1916). Storytelling systems designer provides Participant with agency/Character, possible actions and chance/predetermined consequences for them; ideally, Participant's interactions, and what she thinks of wanting to do within the system, provide her with appropriate enactments/DRAMA (Laurel, 1991). Only six major Participant EMOTIONs are available to us and follow from the chosen GENREs. Of these, terror is not discussed within the transcript: "Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind

in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause." (Joyce, 1916)

Let me conclude with Le Guin's Earth-Sea (2012) story-world, where magic can be read as a metaphor for storytelling: there then the highest and most powerful form of magic is to learn to know the true name, the utmost descriptive word, of any existing thing. True naming is the greatest storytelling fantasy dream, "which is not to suggest, as is too often done, that [historical] truth is never to be attained, in any of its aspects. With this kind of truth, as with all others, the problem is the same: one errs more, or less." (Yourcenar, 1963)

Thank you very much for your attention. I hope this monologue has been somewhat useful, sensible and intelligible, and have a wonderful rest of the dialogue! Through critical investigation of storytelling as a tool for design and social innovation – and as one of the oldest forms of communication in its own right – we can at least attempt accuracy, if not the truth in full.

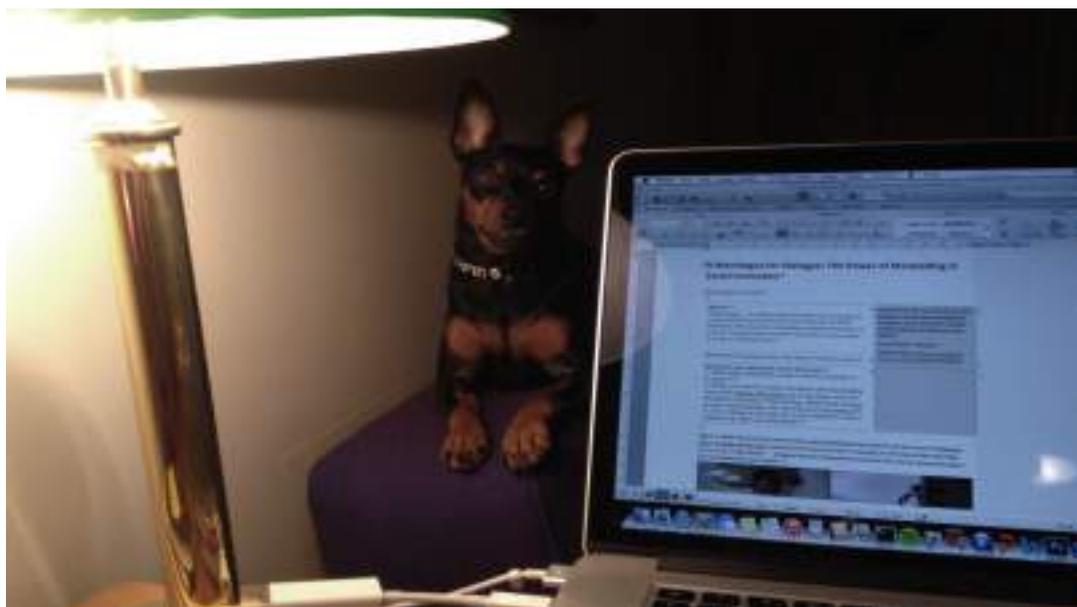


Figure 3. A canine point-of-view (character: Sulo) while the transcript was being partially written out on 19 Jan 2015 at 16:31. E.g. Commedia dell'Arte as a storytelling system "had to find a universal language familiar to people already from their birth and even from the animal origins of human culture." (Tuomola, 1999)

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Can a designer be seen as a story-listener? Can a designer be seen as a storyteller?

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Can a designer be seen as a story-listener?

Can a designer be seen as a storyteller?

Which are my answers?

A double yes.

Simply a double yes.

In my opinion, if a designer is not able to listen stories, and is not able to tell stories, he's not a designer. I think his true core business is to listen and to tell stories: he should not design "things", he must first design narratives. Very real narratives. Just as every person who rewrites the past, describes the present, imagines the future...

So: simply a double yes.

Without narratives a designer is not a designer but a clerk. The clerks are very good persons (if their accounts are correct...). They are quite important in the society, of course. But a designer is not a clerk. He's not better, not worse than a clerk. Simply he's not a clerk.

A designer, as every creative person, as every person who has to make a project, should have visions. He needs to see, in his mind, what doesn't still exist now but he hopes will exist in the future. He has to convince first of all himself – and then the others – that his vision can descend from the blue sky to the Earth and become physical, material. In order to do that, he needs to tell a story that makes usable and sharable his purely mental vision: a story to himself and to the others, just as a novelist or a

film director who needs to materialize the inventions of their fancy otherwise nobody can read or see it. When we have visions, we all are inventing. And when we succeed by the stories in sharing with others our inventions, our visions, well, then we are in the field of reality. The human reality is stuff organized by visions shared by stories.

So, to tell or not to tell (a story)? That's not the question.

The question is: what is a story?

The story is not (or is not only) the journey of an hero. It's not a succession of events in which a protagonist is attacked by a hostile force, he reacts and, after a short or a long battle, he wins. This kind of stories are the Hollywood ones, always the same story, and they succeeded to realize on it many good movies (and much more horrible ones). But pay attention, they have millions of dollars and new special effects (and quite all the time they copy Shakespeare!).

But the real life is different. In the real life a story is the tale of a conflict in a universe, a description of a clash (small or big) between two poles in its evolution. And the more this conflict is close to us, the more it's symbolic of general problems, the more the story will be important (and fascinating) for us.

The work of a designer is to tell the story of a conflict by an object. Just as a photographer, he should be able to stop the time in a material frame but, in the same time, to remind the past and suggest

the future of the scene he is taking. So, he should stop the time in the present, but also before and after, helped by the imagination of the people who watch the picture. The material product of the design is the material solution of the conflict he was able to tell and to make understandable. If he doesn't tell the conflict, his solution is meaningless. An object of design should be a springboard for new raisings.

If you want to be able to tell narratives, you need to be able to listen for narratives. The stories are sons and fruits of the times. They are born in a certain age and they will die in a different age. Only when, because of a combination of elements, they are perfectly able to represent an eternal "structure of sense", they will be able to jump into the myth: the Greek epic, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Tolstoi, Dostojevskji etc. But they remain however connected to their times.

A tale by Borges tells about a man that wants to rewrite the Don Chisciotte in a way that is identical to the original one. So he succeeds in a masterpiece with no sense: the importance of Don Chisciotte is not in the text, but within the text, in its own world. Writing today the Divina Commedia is boring and with no meaning. There is no use and no dignity in writing narratives of the past (but, helas, how many people do it...) So the designer should be able to tell the innovation (technological, aesthetical, ergonomic) of his narrative. A narrative of his time.

Without listening to the stories of your time you don't understand your time. A designer should plunge in his time: only in this way he will be able to transform the things he makes in object full of meaning by the magic wand of his narrative.

About the Author

Davide Pinardi has written novels, essays on history and narratology, and books for children. Translated in various countries, he is author of screenplays for film and television formats for Italian and foreign TV. He conducted live broadcasts for RAI - the italian national broadcast television.

Among his novels, *La storia segreta del señor Correal* (Rizzoli 2000, Lefelin 2004 – Paris) *L'Armée de Sainte-Hélène* (Calmann-Lévy 2000 – Paris), *Il Valdese* (Tranchida 2004 4a ed.), *Il ritorno di Vasco e altri racconti dal carcere* (Marcos y Marcos 1994 – Signorelli 1998), *Tutti i luoghi del mondo* (Tropea 1996), *Viaggio a Capri – I dieci giorni che sconvolsero Lenin* (Liber Internazionale 1995), *A Sud della Giustizia* (Interno Giallo 1991), *L'Isola nel cielo* (Tranchida, 1989). And his essays *Narrativa d'Impresa*, (Angeli 2013), *Narrare, dall'Odissea al mondo Ikea* (Paginauno 2010), *Il mondo narrativo* (Lindau 2008 2a ed. con P. De Angelis), *Il partigiano e l'aviatore* (Odradek 2005), *La Giubba del Re – Intervista sulla corruzione* (Laterza 2004 2a ed., con P. Davigo), *La letteratura Italiana tra '800 e '900* (RCS Libri 1999, con G. Gallo).

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Davide Pinaroli in his video-statement about "What is Storytelling" for the DESIS Philosophy Talks in Dublin in November 2013

The listening capability: Three insights around and about a design way to storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This essay suggests the listening capability as a possible specificity of story-telling by design. It is a conversation between theory and practice through the stories we have collected by doing design research in several transcultural environments. We believe that a process of cultural translation is what designers are challenged to do, when being storytellers, or when researching through stories as method; and we would like to discuss as those cultural translations can only be inspired when the act of listening is the ground of the stories. We usually associate listening to the act of receiving, but we suggest that design could practice the listening as a property of giving, such as a property of creativity. Forms and outcomes of a creativity based on receptiveness are more likely beneficial to a storytelling practice that respects and seeks for diversity as an asset for the sustainability among cultures, being therefore a tool for exploration more than expression.

TAGS

Storytelling, Story-listening, Ethnography, Identities, Cultures, Translations

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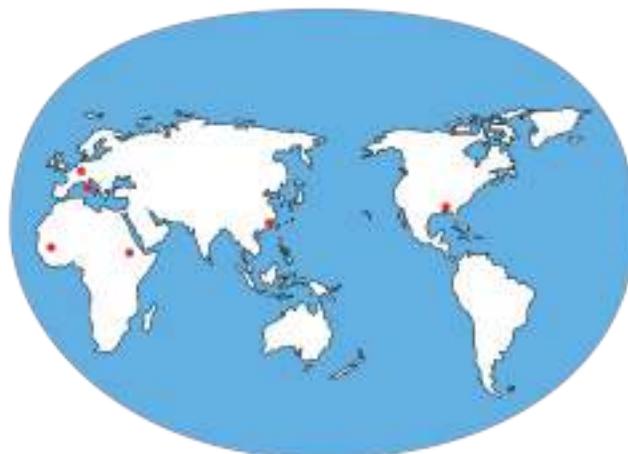
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The use of the word storytelling has become so widespread, as it is indeed a heterogeneous practice across diverse disciplines and industries. As practitioners, and design researchers, storytelling represents to us a primary and often unstated method, tacitly implied in all our activities; whilst as friends and peers, we have been growing and sharing, over time, experiences and failures regarding its usage and evaluation. This is how this conversation between theory and practice had started, spontaneously gathering data from the field, notes and visual notebooks that we have been collecting, humbly inquiring and experimenting on the professional need to continuously refine a transcultural practice in design and creativity.

The key take away from this conversation is a reflection on the power and the need of listening as a primary strength of the design approach to storytelling, and we will envision the story-

listener capability as a fundamental component of storytelling for, and by, the reflective practice. As designers, we are called to focus and extract information from the public and civic context, and elaborate them into insights and research purposes that will inform design projects. Storytelling is only one of the many ways in which this process can be exploited by design languages, one of the many tools in the research toolbox, and it is grandly challenged when it faces to serve people and cultures. In fact, the particular relationship we have, as designers, with stories, emerges when we experiment at the edge of design languages, when we have to deal with processes that do not evolve linearly, characterised by controversies and complexity in the articulation of content and meaning, as it happens when dealing with cultures. Which information shall we compare and consider? How can we catch psychological dynamics? Which is the visual shape of a conversation?



Img 01: overview of the locations where the stories mentioned in this chapter have been experienced

Our reflections would like to say something about how those stories are built; how plots, characters, and narrations will be orchestrated; how and which culture of reference would be displayed by the stories themselves. These reflections are grounded in the design research practice, to which we assign, as communication designers, the double role of the interaction playground of our design (or meta-design) as well as the chance of a delicate intervention into the field, into the real context of communication. If stories are composed by characters, dialogues and context of actions, we are saying something about how those elements are designed and imagined from the creation point of view: how the creative imagination needs to be balanced with sensitivity and receptiveness. We have been learning from social science and cultural studies that participation is key in the observation process; whereas the property of reflexivity of the creative subject and the sensitivity of the user-centered approach need to be integrated and balanced in every application of design research.

To the design interest, culture is ultimately a communication process, wherefore we do recognize that transculturality is revealed in communication situations across very different social settings. Cultures represent complex communication situations because they are active outside spoken languages and words, but embedded in environments, artefacts, and processes of usage, and they represent where to put into action, and cooperation, the skills of reflexivity and sensitivity, as exotopic or empathic creative drivers. We are suggesting that the listening capability is the balance among those forces, and assuming that, as every creative capability, it can be exercised and trained through practice. The listening capability empowers the reflective skills by increasing the awareness of our own impact and the clarity of our role, by making us able to eventually control it, reduce it, lose it; it will also polish and refine our sensitivity, by informing the process of empathy with a more respectful cultural

depth. The listening capability endorses communication as a process grounded in building relationships more than filling up contents (even if both can be linked to the practice of exchange); this way the meanings are variable because tied with mutual, progressive and environment-based understanding. Stories that emerge from such conversations are not meant to represent the reduction from complexity to simplicity. They are instead enriched by the empathic tension of sensitivity and the exotopic tension of reflexivity, by the dialogue between the culture we are studying and the own culture we actively become aware of.

At the moment of field research, we become instruments of the observation process itself, as we need to choose and design our research methods and tools. Research tools - including the process and the artefacts - are the operational means to approach communication interventions. They are instruments of the act of storytelling; they allow us to collect data for the stories, and so influence the grammar of how the stories will be generated.

Design research is meant to open forms of understanding upon people, their relationships, and the environment significance; therefore, the stories derived from research need to be intellectually and emotionally respectful of the culture encountered: they will aim to represent it holistically, they will be able to acknowledge the different roles that as designers we give to description and interpretation. Ethnography is not limited to represent those forms and moments of social interaction and cultural encounter that can be observed, but it is requested to understand, interpret and communicate what those forms represent to the main characters, from the point of view of the phenomenology and experience of cultural meanings and norms.

We have been experiencing this challenge in many different situations of design and research: designers need a plurality of research methods,

and they are requested to compose toolkits that could support any possible observation strategy in the best way. From our perspective of design research, we experienced listening, meaning being actively receptive, as the primary action of effective storytelling, with a critical impact on any of the strategies we put in place. Through the stories that follow we are therefore offering a framework for design storytelling in which creative competences are related to the capacity of creating translations, and conveying cultural instances embedded into practice and usage more than definitions.

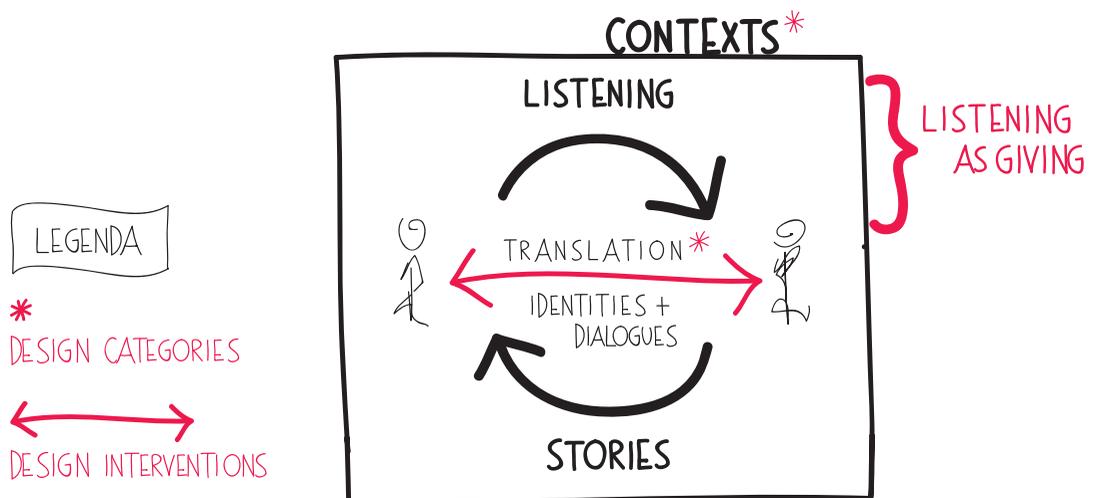
Identities

As designers, we use *empathy* as a method to gain understanding of our interlocutor, values, thoughts, behaviours, and their significant footprints we could afterwards infuse in the design practice. We reconstruct the identities of people by assuming to “get in touch”, to observe them, to immerse with them, and finally to understand them.

As the individual is the foundation of the stories (told and listened), gaining *empathy* and dealing with identities is a key moment in the transla-

tion process, either with spoken and un-coded languages. Knowing in-depth who the interlocutors are, before appointing them to stories, is a mandatory step we have to go through; at the same time, the process of understanding is critical. The word *empathy* itself is one of the most used (and abused) concepts in ethnographic research and user-centered design theories: empathy is often described as a soft skill that all designers have as they tend, by creative nature and/or professional culture, to put the person at the centre of their creative thinking. But empathy requires a much more intense and intimate engagement whose accomplishment requires the re-negotiation of the self identity as well.

Empathy intended as experiencing what people experience from their perspective is tough. Many individuals - and designers - are not ready for that jump, because their comfort zone is perceived as such a more convenient place to be (and it may also seem to be a more “creative space”): being ready to challenge personal beliefs and values could be hard and tedious. That is a creativity that fulfills the creator. It’s a story that the author likes, while the aim is to talk about creation and



Img 02: diagram of design storytelling

stories that are beneficial to who we listen to at first. Empathy is not just a matter of listening and understanding, there is a whole process that the empathetic subject needs to go through first, to create the conditions in which listening and understanding could take place. We like to define that process as a “self-tuning” journey: the individual looks towards the inside to dig out existing perspectives, while explores the outside to recognize unknown existing perspectives. It’s a process of discovery, analysis, and finally adaptation. Self-tuning becomes the way to enable listening and fully express personal empathy, forgetting about prior assumptions and leaving space to the interpretation of models - like gestures, expressiveness and reactions - that vary according to the context. Self-tuning goes to the point of embracing a different way, because listening is the fundamental act of reconstructing the characters’ identities, and ultimately affects the listener identity as well: aiming to make identities speak - before the way we know, understand and interpret them - is what empathy helps us doing.

Through the following stories we will display the two unfold meanings of listening, as predisposition to receive something, as well as sensitivity to a more acute perception; and by those two meanings we aim to show how the active listening influences the construction of the identities in both the subject and the object of the observation. These definitions namely recall the intention to a) become foreigners to ourselves, when the designers redefine their own identity (tools, practices, assets) to address specific circumstances, and the capacity of b) capturing tacit knowledge, when the designers define the identity of the interlocutors to listen and translate what they implicitly communicate.

STORY 1 – CHINA

Farmers, sustainable agriculture

Self-reflective analytical attitude is the necessary ground for empathy.

This is one of the very early story collected during the field research in the Chinese countryside, and it’s the story of a lesson learnt through failure. It’s meaningful to start from here, not only because it’s a story from many years ago, thus still valid in my practice; I have been used it extensively (albeit expressed in a different language) during the design research classes, as a good example of the power of the design and usage of prototypes, but in this situation it works better to show how the deconstruction of the identities we belong to is the only way to be able to contribute and to be positive in the understanding of the identities we have in front of us.

So it was spring, it was the operational phase of a very long research project in rural area, and we were in need to explore, beyond our local research partners, more participative ways of engagement of larger groups; our general goal was to build closer connections in between farmers and citizens, and in doing so, to leverage on trading benefits and knowledge awareness and respect.

Back in 2010 in Europe (and mainly Italy, where a few of the team members were from), solidarity purchase groups (“gruppi di acquisto”) and farmers’ markets were by then established practices, solid in the operations and effective in the sustainable impact, and many different approaches were being experimented in regarding urban awareness to agriculture and agri-consumption. Inspired by this wave of success, and by the enthusiasm of being often protagonists of these actions, we all thought that having a farmers market was a great – plus simple – idea, and we quickly decided to bring that successful experience also to our field in China. Perhaps unwittingly, still we had put before our identity to our local interlocutors, and as a matter of fact, we just didn’t consider that the

farmers would be possibly not interested in doing a market; we didn't include this as an option, whereas it was indeed the option: they consider the market already as a deal and a business of someone else (meaning: cooperatives, government, or centralized companies), therefore not only the organization of an unconventional activity represented to them less time to be spent on their own activities – somehow a “waste of productive time” to their eyes –, but also they reckon somehow that it is not respectful to take on someone else duties, a concept that is very hard to envision from the European mindset, that tends to be more self-determined. At that stage, we tried to convince them that anyhow it was a great idea to give a try, that was cool enough to give a try. Still, they “didn't get it”.



How you can do a farmers market when farmers do not want to come? If still you're convinced that is a wit idea, you can bring the market to them. We therefore bought beans, soy, crops from them, and we had them packaged and outfitted. We included the names of the farmers, we designed label and packaging, trying to let the products talk about the people behind. Then we did the market ourselves, and we invited them to join on their free time, aiming to have them realize how their produce and regular goods could have new experience and life in a different context, could become products for larger market, for outside markets. With today's eyes, this perspective of “emancipation” we offered them was way too naive. In this and many other occasions of the early times of field research in China, I experienced the failure of “good

idea”, those cases in which something we have in mind as a successful and established practice from the past, in fact it is of no help – if not misleading – in the new context we are; it's difficult to keep in control the strong drive of design as an action that has, or even need, to produce a change, and to balance this drive with the fact that this change should be a tension towards the better: but “better” is a fluid notion, is a meaning we often assign implicitly, that is not necessarily a common notion, and we should instead search this definition firstly in the context in front of us, more than in our previous experience.

I believe that in this story we had been through an issue of languages, of limited languages; we assumed that our languages was more prominent, widely recognized, or diffused, but in practice seemed to be very obscure and confusing. This is a tricky property of “good ideas”: we said, “no need to explain the concept of the market, they'll understand by doing it instead”, but this didn't help to clarify the meaning, because the overall language was wrong. This remind me over the time that stories in the wrong language can still be very good stories, thus not being anymore able to engage, inspire, or empower again.

STORY 2 – UGANDA AND SENEGAL

Health workers, medical care

The relationship between forms and meanings overcomes the verbal and semantic aspect of words, and needs to be explored from a larger perspective of communication where symbolic meanings, prossemic elements, visual patterns and unspoken languages are considered, and eventually included, in the creative process.

As ethnographic researcher I have often reflected on the importance of unspoken languages and prossemic patterns. It recently happened after an extensive period of research that brought me to Uganda and Senegal.

In both countries, I was travelling across rural villages to investigate the life, needs and challenges of community health workers. If you have never heard about them, CHWs are village inhabitants who volunteer to be the last mile of the healthcare system in remote areas; they operate with the support of the local government and NGOs that provide basic training and supplies of medications. Their mandate is to diagnose and treat diseases like malaria, pneumonia and diarrhea - which are the main cause of death in rural areas for children under 5 years old.

In the attempt of establishing a contact with those people and understanding their behaviors, we tried to spend as much time as we could in the villages, following health workers throughout their day, especially during the visits to the families and children in the community. But observing was not enough, we needed to ask questions, hear answers, create a dialogue.

It was surprising to discover that not having a common language was not a big issue as I thought. Our field-guide was there all the time and could intervene and translate what we were not able to say or catch, plus we had a set of crafted visual stimuli that could facilitate the conversations. Beyond verbal and visual languages, what generated troubles were elements like my physical standing, my facial expression, my tone of voice, my gestures.

In Uganda, when my voice was low and my questions slow (which can happen experiencing situations of complete impotence as the ones I lived there), I was just collecting lower and slower answers, losing completely the flow of the conversation, generating a mixed feeling of shyness and discomfort.

We obtained a much different effect those times when I was able to manage personal feelings and become bold and strong about my questions, speaking louder, and imposing my presence to the individual or group of interlocutors. I saw them slowly getting more

interested and more vocal about their opinions; I saw them appreciating my passion for their cause and becoming more willing to collaborate, share, talk more and more.

It's not secondary to say how that was difficult for me at the beginning, given my personal attitude of being a much more neutral voice and presence inside conversations when my intention is mainly listening. In that situation I had to behave differently, by working on my modes and gestures to trigger the desired reactions and answers.

I'm glad Uganda was the training ground before approaching the field-research in Senegal, where an even bolder attitude was needed to handle every possible conversations, from agreeing on a schedule for the day with a car driver up to building a dialogue with community health workers and other individuals - males and females - in the villages.

Thinking of it now, two years later, seated in my apartment in Milan, I almost don't recognize myself in the modes of expression that I needed to adopt there for a while. At the same time, I recognize how that experience had a considerable impact on my personality, mostly influencing my capability of raising the voice to be heard when I feel ignored. It's a subtle but intense sense of awareness, constantly reminding myself how much empathy needs to be interpreted as an inner exploration with explicit consequences on our identity, beyond just a pure discovery of external factors.





Dialogues

The dialogue seen as the continuous exchange between two reasoning identities, individuals or groups, is essential to drive progressive knowing, and incremental understanding. Achieving in-depth conversation is difficult, in particular when the content has a link to personal and cultural norms. We often regret for the failure of a conversation when we cannot achieve the answers we were looking for, whilst we may only have failed on the listening capability during the dialogue. If we can't listen, if we don't listen, conversations become fragile and the possibility of openness and discovery of new knowledge automatically decreases. Reaching enough depth is of course critical, being a litmus test of the efficacy and impact of design research.

Dialogues based on listening are those that facilitate the contribution of the others, meaning that they are used to let people speak, more than to let them reply to our research concerns. Dialogue means facilitating the others to intervene in the conversation that they want to have; the designer

subjectivity just comes in a second time, to translate those stories across the multiple languages that are requested. Dialogue by listening is critical to the design discipline in co-design and collaborative settings, when indeed the practice is conversation-based and often multi-language, and so the design action is requested to create and apply a variety of tools and coding systems that can shape the dialogue.

Visualisation is often recalled as a useful technique to facilitate conversations, enabling more in-depth dialogues by using visual tools as platforms to enable communication interests, to give a voice, and therefore guarantee a listening capability.

From this perspective, visual tools shouldn't be considered just a way for the designer to set the right ground for the conversation-making questions understood; visual tools become the way through which the interlocutors can speak, and so being listened, reaching a level of depth in the conversation that it's much harder to achieve with a pure verbal exchange.

Sensitivity within the conversation could raise even more the need to rely on visual communication: the more a topic is considered personal and intimate, the more saying by showing, drawing, representing becomes easier than talking.

Looking at representation as a dialogue-enabler, two approaches could be investigated going from visual predefined stimuli to physical co-creation exercises: a) talk visually means creating and providing visual tiles that the interlocutor could use to communicate with the designers, which is a first step towards a more interactive activity that we can define as b) building together, which leverages co-creation as a process towards sense-making.

STORY 3 – EUROPE AND USA

Understanding people with diabetes

A visual game to investigate emotional stages throughout the diabetes journey of different types of chronic patients in Europe and North America.

Previous research sessions with diabetes patients revealed how difficult it could be to really understand in depth their experience by conducting one-to-one interviews: their answers often tend to be aligned and ascribable to well-defined categories of motivation. Every professional dealing with diabetes knows the distinction between high-motivated patients – who stay focused on the treatment, precisely following all the medical prescriptions – and low-motivated patients – who struggle managing the disease and have a more unstable therapy adherence. When we had the opportunity to leave for another research trip across United States and Europe, I started to look for a way to go beyond what we already knew.

We created a game to be used at the beginning of every in-home interview. The first request for the research participant – right after the usual introductions – was to detail all the medical steps of the disease evolution since its diagnosis, following a chronological order. While the person was speaking, we were drawing the steps around a linear timeline, visually representing the patient history on a horizontal axis. That exercise appeared easy and comfortable for our interlocutors: chronic patients know very well their medical story, and are used to repeat it all the time to healthcare specialists. It's a matter of facts, a sequence of objective data.

Once the timeline was completed, we asked the patient to describe each of those moments through a specific emotional status, picking from a set of emotional cards showing a variety of feelings. After a first moment of hesitation, our interlocutor usually started to leaf through the cards on the table, stopping in front of some of them, placing others on the timeline. In silence, without comments, just mov-

ing the cards around and building the emotional sequence linked to their journey. It was easy and intense at the same time.

None of the diabetes patients we talked to needed to vocally admit to have experienced depression, frustration, concern, anger, relief, ... but all those feelings were suddenly there, mapped to specific points on their personal journey.

We can mention two important outcomes from that experiment.

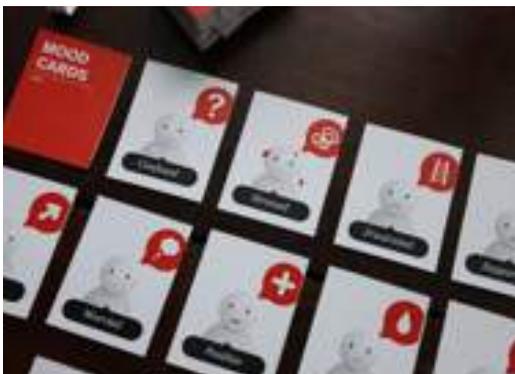
First of all, the impact that the exercise had on the following part of the conversation, which was aimed at investigating deeper each moment of the day-by-day management of the disease. The dialogue became much more intimate, natural and honest, like if we had already established enough confidence not to worry about sharing further details. Some of the patients talked freely for the next two hours, some others wanted to thank us at the end to have guided them towards such an open reflection on their situation.

The second key take away is what we actually discovered through the emotional journey exercise. When we started comparing all those worksheets collected across the two countries, we could immediately notice a significant pattern: the moment of frustration was located in the same position on all the timelines.

It doesn't matter how motivated a patient is, how fast the disease progresses, how invasive the treatment chosen, the kind of social and medical supports available; regardless all those elements, the first therapy assessment is always incredibly frustrating. In that specific moment patients have to learn everything about diabetes management and start changing their habits, while on the other side physicians need to identify the right therapy and dosage with progressive iterations. It becomes frustrating because even if the patients do everything they are asked to, they

continue to feel not in control, and do not see any improvement till the therapy is finally assessed.

What we did afterwards was translating that important insight into a design opportunity, envisioning a system that could accelerate the initial learning process on both sides, helping the patients making sense of their data and the physician assessing the treatment faster.



STORY 4 – UGANDA AND SENEGAL

Health workers, medical care

The practice of co-creation as a process of listening and learning, discovering those nuances of the stories that evolve and change while going from imagination to reality.

I have already mentioned my first research experience in Sub-saharian Africa in one of the stories about identity (story 2), but I would like to go back to that experience one more time to tackle a different perspective.

The project I was working on - named Backpack Plus - was part of a longer collaboration between frog and the UNICEF Innovation Office. Backpack Plus had the specific objective of designing an effective system that could empower Community Health Workers at a global scale, as data demonstrated how their activity could significantly reduce child mortality in developing countries if the supporting system (NGOs, governments, healthcare infrastructures) were able to provide better instruments. The field research was aimed at investigating the challenges of Community Health Workers during their day-by-day activities to ultimately define guidelines and areas of interventions, including a better toolkit to improve the patient visits.

Coming down to that specific physical component of the project, the toolkit: we started from a hypothetical mental model of how it could be organized in order to better guide the activity of the community health worker, but it was impossible to validate a design direction without the real contact with the users. We also wanted to avoid what happened in other similar initiatives: NGOs that managed to equip the community health workers with beautiful high-tech backpacks, so beautiful that – once distributed – the health workers preferred to keep them safe in the house while continued to carry medicines around in plastic bags. We could have approached all the toolkit aspects just through the conversations or by drawing conclusions from our

observation, but we would have not been so sure about the way we were translating the health workers' needs and thoughts into the physical toolkit. Shaping it directly during our research sessions helped us overcome any communication barriers and let their story come up in a much more natural and precise way.

From village to village we were bringing with us raw materials like fabric, tape, ribbons and drug packagings, diagnostic tools, mock-ups of printed leaflets like instructions and register books. After a quick exploration of various models of bags and containers, we were asking the community health workers to go hands-on, working the raw materials together to roughly prototype the ideal toolkit. At the beginning of each session it was mostly about myself giving a tangible shape to the participants' thoughts, and slowly get them involved in the making process, till the final creation of the mock-up.

Through the making, their mental model clearly emerged as different from our initial assumption, preferring an internal organization of the toolkit that is workflow-based instead of disease-based: all the diagnostic tools contained inside one compartment (open and easily accessible) and all the drugs separated in a different compartment (closed and not visible).

This is just one example among many other unaware design choices they made during the prototyping sessions: only by analysing the creation process and its results, we could let their story deeply inspire us.



Contexts

Design actions are contextual by definition, and even more is the research. The importance of the “field”, the “context”, is so large in design that it both represents the starting point of the whole creative process, as well as its ending point, where the impact of the design is going to be validated.

The context, that is the space of immersion of the research and the user domain, is where cultural translations happen: it is the stage of the translation where identity and dialogue are challenged, where they need to work fine, but likely may not. Design research typically sets the context as the main variable, and understanding the surrounding environment (as places and spaces) is the critical element that forces the designer not just to spend time in the context of interest, but to make it real, embracing the life in that space, considering people-as-people before the research they may be involved in, stepping in first person in the contradic-



tions and nuances that occur in the reality. Cultural contexts challenge the process of translation with new usages for norms, with un-coded languages that rational analysis may not recognize, with the redefinition of prossemic rules and the reshaping of the comfort zone. By applying the methods of listening, contextual immersion develops two features: a) it is primarily receptive, the space is the who to listen to, where the rules, norms, meanings and barriers are reshaped and we need to find ourselves, and b) it is particularly self-reflective, as we are indeed stranger in the journey of finding a way out.

Listening to the context demands the researcher for a physical immersion, not only a cognitive immersion, forasmuch cognition out of perception is not possible.

STORY 5 – ATLANTA

Citizens, lifestyle habits

Understanding chronic diseases in the Western countries through contextual immersion leads to a bigger reflection on values that shouldn't be taken for granted.

When we started to explore the world of diabetes and similar chronic diseases, the city of Atlanta came up as a perfect location for the research, since we were looking at a geographical area with specific characteristics in terms of poverty, incidence of diabetes, density of population, urban extension.

The first reaction when you land in such a megalopolis – especially if you are a European who is used to travel in the United States - is a perception of familiarity: you can easily orient yourself around and recognize expected behaviors, shapes, aesthetics. This is absolutely reassuring and pleasant to see in a place that is welcoming you for a brief period of time. The next day, waking up, you start thinking of the reason that brought you there, the center of your investigation; you look outside from the window and see nice gardens, American flags and empty streets, jump

on your car and drive towards the first appointment for half-an-hour, seeing nothing but highways defining in the same way the paths of other hundreds and hundreds of cars. If you are hungry and look for a place to eat, you can choose among a variety of fast foods popping up at every corner, so that if you miss the first Waffle House, you are sure to meet another one after a little while, and then another one, and then another one. We have been in Atlanta for ten days, and for ten days we lived as the average citizen, without forcing ourselves to find “better” alternatives, capturing and recording all the single aspects of our routine. Never walking always driving, eating large and fat dishes at every meal, living in complete isolation in the middle of a crowded megalopolis.

The observations coming from the immersion, mixed with the outcomes of the in-depth interviews we were conducting, raised overwhelming and provocative doubts. How could the destiny of somebody who live in such a context be different from the one of the patients we met? How could the society have created such a system of rules and habits that is driving a population to illness? Do we really want to consider that context as normal, standard, usual, and sometimes even advanced?

Field-research is not just about spending time with the people we are interested into – like patients and physicians in that case; it's a much more immersive experience in which the researchers are fully receptive, capturing all the information in the environment, trying to live themselves experiences that are related to the investigation purpose by applying critical lenses.

Experimenting this immersive approach in a context that you consider familiar may lead to surprising conclusions, transforming a world established around well-known references into a tough and foreigner environment where all the references go unexpectedly lost, revealing new contradictory angles to pay attention to, and expanding the boundaries of your listening capability.



iple. Language is not an asset itself, rather, the moving from a proficient vocabulary to an effective exchange and communication it often involves much larger efforts, and those can also be requested by unpredictable conditions in the environment. This has been particularly clear to me when doing research in situations where more than three languages need to be handled, being constantly in a not-native language environment, and thus realizing that there is a stage in which even the local language can't be used efficiently anymore.

With languages, it often happens that we may know how to translate concepts, but we also may not have a clue about the contextual meaning of that language, being therefore hampered to use it. I have collected plenty of stories as examples of the minus and limits of the languages we do speak without environmental and context evaluation. Imagine that, during an interview or a chat, I am talking in Chinese with two people, and one of them replies to my solicitation rotating the head and looking at me like I was upside-down, meaning there is no clue in his understanding, and the other one, simply understands and "translates", repeating exactly what I said to the first fellow. It may be because they do not expect a foreigner talking in Chinese, or because the pronunciation is terrible, or they don't hear well, but all these conditions are contextual, still actually determining at the larger extent the possibility of the message to go through.

Having the chance to work in the same team and framework project for very long time, I nevertheless realized that it's not just a limit of being "foreigners", and that the environment where you are, or the way that you do, influence the understanding of the message more than words anyway. In Chinese countryside, we surprisingly discovered that we couldn't rely that much on Chinese-native as assets for the interviews - because the most of them are from other provinces and therefore can't understand the dialect from the island. Moreover, we discovered during our researches that the degree of education literacy is vary and follows very complex patterns in

STORY 6 - CHINA

Farmers, dialects

"Do you speak mandarin, or do you eat mandarins?"

We are suggesting in many ways that, as per the aim of an effective and meaningful field research, both toolkits and protocols need to be revised, adjusted, re-interpreted, and re-designed, even in the case of established procedures. The languages that we speak are core component of the toolkit, following therefore the same variation prin-

within the rural society where the mother tongue is not a primary communication tool; it is possible to find a very educated and literate old farmer, as well as to acknowledge widely that people cannot type in pinyin. Facing such a variety of situation, the idea itself of a “common language” loses all the power. In those situation in which the language wasn't smooth, using sketches, probes, and diagrams helped the team, and also positively reduced the barriers with the foreign partners, confirming our intuition that “we are all foreigners in a way”. One of the action of the project was to convert a piece of unused land into a garden, offering a space for leisure to the farmers, and a space for experimentation to the community coming from the city. We have been stuck many times on impossible translation in between Chinese, English and Italian; we were drawn by the tentative to translate everything – we had a three-language database for crops tools and agriculture terms –, following the drive to understand as much as we could, ultimately to control the process as much as we could – this memory sounds now a little hilarious in my mind. Along the process, we experienced many moments in which the failure of the translation in fact opened up a deeper listening capability toward the environment, that was for many reason the real empathy strategy discovered for that situation: we have been finally able to create our reputability with the local communities because we start to interact with the environment, to spend time in their public space, to show ourselves as a local in behavior and not by the language we spoke with them. After many years I still swing in between two very controversial feelings: frustrated because I know I do speak the language in a not-adequate way, and on the other side the limitation of using a common language, namely English, because it finally simplifies the conversation structure and contents, more than really offer a playground for exchange. in this confusion among the right way, the immersive and un-rational exploration of the environment helped us to move forward more creatively in many situations. In the practice, much more than common word, are the common behaviors

that made the difference, and let us know finally to be able to create conversation rooted in the environment, and for this reason also more participated by the locals.



STORY 7 - ITALY

The researcher, gaming experience

When the immersion goes so deep that the researchers start exploring their own context of life with a new perspective, performing actions and behaviors that go beyond what they would normally do, with a pure investigation purpose.

Sometimes work brings you challenges that make you feel the good impact of your design actions. Sometimes work may bring you challenges that cross the border of your personal ethics and beliefs, challenges you don't feel comfortable dealing with. This story comes from the second set.

In the course of a research about popular gaming we investigated the habits around lotteries by running contextual observation and interviews inside cafès, watching people doing their bets, looking at the results, losing and betting again.

I have always lived in Italy, for almost ten years of my life in Milan; in that moment I realized how blind you can be when you ignore (in the etymological meaning of "non seeing" by not getting in contact with) a part of the context that surrounds you, a world that exists but you have nothing to do with.

The observation took place in several spots in the city, from bars situated in highly crowded locations to tiny cafès where all the customers knew each other. We saw people of any kind entering the door of those places, ordering an espresso, filling the lottery card, paying and leaving, luckily with a certain hope of changing their life. Despite our personal opinions, we decided to try, and play for the entire week of research, with the goal of watching the experience more closely, analyzing our own thoughts and reactions during that period of time. It took a while to take the decision, winning our reluctant attitude and completely blending our personality in the mix of players that we were glancing at.

It was fun to decide our numbers the first time we played. After a few days it was already a routine. At the fourth day we checked (as usual) the results before playing again and we had the most pleasant surprise: we won! By doing three at Superenalotto (the main lottery game in Italy) we just earned fifteen euros, nothing enormous, but indeed gratifying.



At least we understood that in mapping out the needs, desires and criticalities of the gaming experience, we were completely missing an essential moment, which comes after reviewing the results and before getting your prize: a phase that we could name celebration.

Greetings

Why is this relevant? Considering the listening capability a unique feature of storytelling leads to a definition of creativity that is receptive instead of expansive. As stories in design are needed to convey messages learnt, creativity has to express di-

versity by responsibly representing in the actions of design, the meanings that are offered time to time.

Design Anthropology argues that by taking into account how others see and experience the world differently, by “marking the boundaries between respectful knowing and making”, we can design products and services that work with people and nature rather than disrupt them. We believe that listening is a non-disruptive way to create and use stories whose vision and meanings can be learnt besides being imagined, by redefining our identities, establishing new conversational relations and deeply experiencing any context.

As all the conversations, this one also has come to an end. We'll remember the sound of the time zones.

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Games telling stories of and for social innovation

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ABSTRACT

Games for Social Change are about opportunities and choices. They are about meaningful storytelling and significative interactions. More than that, they are experiences of specific perspectives. As such, they embed, convey and transfer meanings to suggest critical reflection and change.

In particular, some of them, which I consider remarkably interesting, involve us into experiences of embodiment and empathy: presenting us original and fresh points of view, they have the ability to move us and affect our mindsets. This intervention explores such games as communication systems telling stories with civic or/and political intents. It considers involvement and participation two fundamental features of games, and also constitutive aspects of the processes of individual as well as communitarian social change.

TAGS

Games, Social Change, Game Design, Fictional World, Communication, Persuasion, Social Drama, Representation

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Split in several groups, young players are fast moving through a school, back and forth.

They are seeking something.

They are speaking and arguing some points.

They are discussing about someone who has to be rescued. The point is: who?

They have to decide, but they don't know how to choose. They don't know who to choose.

The Earth is dying and they are in charge of its future.

The survival of the humanity is in their hands. They have to select who among a bunch of candidates should be boarded on a shuttle and sent to another planet on behalf of the human kind.

To settle on a plan of action they can just rely on the description these candidates gave on their social network profiles.

What is the best decision to make? Who should they trust the most?

Suddenly they hear that someone else is coming. It's another group.

Almost breathless and attentive of the surroundings, they look at each other. A decision is made. Then they run away, as fast as they can. They need six more passengers.

This is a short description of the gameplay of *Mission: Trust*,¹ a game for social change (G4SC henceforth)² about social network, trust and digital awareness.

The aim of this game, as its category of belonging clearly explains, is to provoke a social change. The kind of change it aims to bring to bear is very simple and direct: to move us to critically reflect on our digital life, mainly on our behaviours on social networking services. Since their very birth, social networking web-sites and their use have increased steadily and often exponentially (if we think to Facebook, for example). What is meaningful and sometime also a matter of real concern is the fact that we frequently build several relationships and share our lives on such social services, trusting people and believing in the reliability of someone we don't personally know, but with whom we may daily communicate using the Internet. *Mission: Trust* investigates this peculiar circumstance, mainly targeting teenagers and digital natives because, on account of their affinity with the medium, they are in need of an education to properly and consciously use social networking services, to become able to recognise their potentialities as well as their more or less hidden risks. In relation to the

¹ The game has been designed by Nicole Lobia in 2014 (Lobia, 2014), as the outcome of her MSc Thesis in Communication Design. The game and the research on its background were entirely supervised by Maresa Bertolo and me.

² G4SC can be considered a subcategory of a bigger family of games known as Persuasive Games (PG). PG are games designed to effect the player's beliefs, ideas and preconception, intentions, motivations, or behaviours, influencing the way she thinks and acts, both within the game and in the real world. When PGs intend to create a social change, addressing a communitarian sensitive issue, they take the name of games for social change (G4SCs, as said)



Figure 1. On the left: Social network profiles on cards. On the right: the five typologies of profiles, their location on the map of the school. Original pictures © Lobia 2014

target and the large extent of use of these services, the cruciality of stimulating reflection is evident.

To address this challenge, pointing at creating awareness on this important but often underestimated issue, *Mission: Trust* creates an apocalyptic fictional world that requires us to be mentally rather than physically involved in a race against time. The fictional world plays a crucial role, since “Playing a game means interacting with and within a representational universe, a space of possibility with narrative dimensions” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 378). The game narrative consists of an alternative reality where humans’ only chance to survive is a seven-seats space-shuttle which is going to leave for another planet. In a nutshell, the point consists into deciding the seven candidates who are going to board and represent the human kind, acknowledging that this choice relies just on very little information: we have at our disposal nothing but a sort of Facebook+Twitter personal profile for each of the candidates. Considering the information written and the messages posted (fig. 1) we have to choose who is worthy to be chosen and who is not. The team with the best equipage in terms of trust wins. That’s it.

This narrative largely takes the cue from an existing literature, an experiment conducted by Sclavi (2003) and titled *The Earth is Dying*. The game shares with Sclavi’s enquiry the plot and in a sense the objective of soliciting a reflection on bias and preconceptions. However, although the latter

purpose is very central in Sclavi (stereotypes and clichés), *Mission: Trust* goes further. Its narrative pushes us for critically thinking on how tricky and risky the trust argument can be, especially online.

In this sense *Mission: Trust* can be seen as an interesting example of multi-layered storytelling because:

1. the game designer builds a meta-story (the game) about
2. several fictional stories (the total amount of posts composing the online profiles of each candidate),
3. and each player is further contributing by interpreting posts and creating meanings out of them (going through all the posts is the only way to get familiar with each candidate, to comprehend if he/she is trustworthy and deserves to board).

As the point 3 clearly shows, this game precisely deals with the online potential processes of information manipulation, change and transformation.

The candidates profiles are indeed a well-designed bunch of set phrases and pseudo-popular-expressions built to force us to interpret them according to our former knowledge, ideas, preconceptions. As a matter of fact, we don’t actually have enough data to make up such a decision: what we are really

asked to do by reading those profiles is to imagine their story, give them a meaning. This wants to make us reflect on something we are used to do: what we naturally do is to complete each of these profiles on the basis of our previous experience, of the patterns of behaviour we recognise in those people. We are asked to interpret and understand the person behind each profile. As a matter of fact, this is nothing but than the exaggerated and intensified process we always do on the social networking website, when we connect with someone do not personally know; when according to the instinctive analysis we perform, we decide if someone is worth our trust or not.

*“Within narrative we order and reorder
the givens of experience.
We give experience a form and a meaning”*
Miller, 1990

Before opening the reasoning on how games tell stories, it is necessary to disclose the diatribe about Ludologists and Narratologists that endured for almost a decade. It is not the fulcrum of this discourse, but a short recall of the two different ways in which the game community correlates games and narrative is a first, necessary step to better address how games represent. In the game academic community it is spread the tendency to consider (video)games as extensions of narrative. In contrast to this narratologist perspective, the term ludologist is used to refer to someone who is against such common assumption. Aarseth (1997) in particular questioned the fact that claiming that there is no difference between games and narratives is equal to ignore essential qualities of both categories. The nodal point raised by the ludologists and expanded in Frasca (2003, p. 221) is that games and narratives provide different tools for conveying their opinions and feelings, and the storytelling model is inaccurate considering the medium, limiting its understanding as well as the game designer's ability to create even more compelling

games. Games and video games extend indeed the concept of representation, being based on different mechanics and on an alternative semiotic structure known as simulation. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that games and G4SC in particular tell stories, even through simulation.

Acknowledging and concurring with such a perspective, *Mission: Trust* stresses the interplay between narrative/simulation and experience, and takes advantage of the very diffused human attitude of both filling narratives with our own subjective and experiential knowledge, and thinking through schemas and former ideas. This attitude is matter-of-factly used as a starting point to unveil some potentially dangerous digital habits. The genesis of this game was exactly the impossibility to know if the profile of someone we don't really know, but with whom we chat online, is "true, honest and reliable"; if it actually reflects its creator. The message the game gives is "you cannot know". That's why it is in a sense programmed to make players fail.

The social and civic consequence that emerges from the game experience is to have some of these mindset potentially revised, or at least pondered over. The social innovation is then about rising awareness and educating by subtly moving players to look at the social networking websites and their inhabitants from a different perspective. In so doing, the game suggests a civic reflection on widespread uses and habits (e.g. sharing private information or personal pictures).

1. Involving narrative, different perspective and active roles

It is quite evident that covering formal definitions is not the point of this contribution;³ rather, under-

³ To deepen the knowledge on the game topic see: Huizinga (1938/1949), Caillois (1957/1961), Suits (1978/2005), Crawford (1984), Salen & Zimmerman (2004). About critical play and persuasive games see: Flanagan (2009) and Bogost (2011).

standing why and how G4SCs are telling stories of social innovation does, expanding the reasoning introduced so far. Playing a game is about exploring the world the game designer, as an interpreter, mediator and storyteller, chooses to represent. It is about performing and sharing a specific perspective. In so doing, it is about looking at this world from the game designer's point of view, interacting with and within the representational universe she created. It is about taking meaningful actions within this space of possibility; it is about living experiences moving through the game involving narrative dimension.

I strongly believe that playing certain G4SCs makes it possible to look at the reality with a perspective that is open, different and potentially very impactful.

But what happens when we play such games? As players we immerse into fictional worlds wherein we live experiences that can be so meaningful and significant to raise our awareness and sometime persuade us to reconsider and modify some of our prior preconceptions and preexistent attitudes. In short, to «change the world», hopefully and optimistically for the better, «leading to potentially long-term social change» (Bogost, 2007, p. IX).

At this point, I need to answer to the so far tacit question “what G4SCs have to do with social change?”, and state that this intervention deals with social innovation because of the societal intent and outcome of those artefacts that to a different extent address actual issues on an individual and communitarian scale, fostering positive change.

At different and varied levels of abstraction, politics, morality and ethics can be questioned, turning players' attention on sensitive arguments, unpleasant topics to open the discussion on present wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1974; Sicart, 2010). Essentially every social issue can be turned into a G4SC that narrates a story and opens it up to

interaction, participation and transformation. Moving beyond the mere entertainment, (although fun and entertainment are two main features and objectives), a G4SC can assume the role and function of a social metacomment (Geertz, 1973), namely a narration that a group tells to itself about itself. And implicit or explicit, direct or mediated, literal or metaphorical, aware or not, the play(er) experience is an overview on a specific social context and one of its social drama – to use the denomination introduced by Turner (1957); as such it can contribute to retroactively affect the structure that underpins the social drama itself.

It goes almost without saying that these games can go through a very large number of topics – from war and cultural discrimination to the taboo of sex education – addressing each time specific target groups and contexts, and giving players the chance to have an experiential understanding of real issues taking part to powerful and moving interactive narrative aimed to result into more social/civic desirable behaviours and attitudes. Such a potential as agent of change has become more and more acknowledged and explored, for example in the field of social processes aligned to activism, journalism, public pedagogy, interpersonal communication and community development.

Albeit these games traditionally have a digital nature – computer games, apps and videogames' digital nature contributes to increase their versatility and allows them to reach a broad, varied audience – our group focuses on situated non-digital and hybrid games to increase the effectiveness of immersion. *Mission: Trust* is indeed a contextualised urban (and potentially hybrid) game set in a real environment. This decision depends on the assumption that an experience requiring physical immersion in an environment proves to be particularly involving (Bertolo & Mariani, 2014). In my opinion the fact of (1) taking physically part to a narrative, (2) concretely experiencing its ludic fic-

tional world and (3) sharing this experience with other players defines a very effective way to move players to switch their point of view and consider a fresh and different perspective: the one that the game designer chose to share as a storyteller. Naturally, this condition implies that the player trusts the game designer, believing in the game narrative world.

What is remarkable is that G4SCs as the one described are actual systems of enquire that push players to experience embodiment and often identification. Players are asked to act accordingly to someone else perspective in order to get familiar with a different point of view, playing an active role in the story: they are engaged in exploring a fictional world that is a space of possibility overlapped to the real world; they influence the story by taking meaningful choices (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) and they experience in-game real, perceivable consequences. This condition makes the overall experience even most intense, impactful and significant.

2. Games influencing players: between ritual performances and liminal spaces

If the question is simple How do such games influence players?, the answer is much more complex.

It indeed shortly and quickly synthesises the topic of this discussion, because it implies to understand to what extent such games are able to affect players. As such it requires to (briefly) cover several theoretical interdisciplinary concepts.

According to what was first described by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1938/1949), then deepened with an anthropological point of view by the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1909/2011) and subsequently by the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1957; 1982; 1985; 1986), the game – and the play activity in

general – accompanies the birth and growth of the society itself, performing and representing its values and beliefs.⁴ Rites and rituals have always been very close in their nature and structure to games and also to theatre, being forms of performance. They frequently symbolise and narrate communitarian social drama and wicked problems shaping them into ludic representations; in so doing they involve their audience (citizens) to have meaningful interactions with the symbolical and culturally significative fictional world performed. Hence, both the game as a ritual and the majority of the contemporary G4SCs act as a mirror of the external socio-cultural context⁵ with a paradigmatic function, to use Geertz's words (1973, p. 93). As 'model of' they narrate and represent a situation/context; otherwise, as 'model for' they act as a positive force to anticipate/adjust societal changes.

2.1 The game as a representation of social dramas

Players who take part to the G4SCs designed in our research group are asked to participate to and interact with an act of play that is a collective activity of comprehension, and also adaptation and modification. Interactivity and engagement become constituents of a narrative aimed at moving perspectives, or at least at disclosing the existence and nature of specific issues. These games are designed to make players participate to a contemporary version of the original ludic rituals as communitarian way to represent, reduce and perform ongoing social dramas (Turner, 1957).

The case study presented is hence more than a game: it is a performance with the traits of a challenging exploration of societal constraints; it is a rite of passage that moves players to experience original perspectives. But it is just an example

4 Games are cultural forms deeply rooted in time: «Like making music, telling stories, and creating images, playing games is part of what it means to be human» (Zimmerman, in Steffen & Deterding, 2015, p. 19).

5 As the Dutch historian Huizinga (1938/1949) argued, the game is a representative system that reflects the context and the culture it was born in, showing a subtle but deep connection with the real world out of the game itself.

of a bigger amount of G4SCs aiming at expressing and disclosing certain cultural issues to the community,⁶ getting adjusted to changes such as:

- societal transformation (e.g. societal hierarchy, immigration, ageing, increasing technological presence, food needs and energy sustainability),
- personal dissensions (e.g. existing patterns of relationships due for example to lack of knowledge and mutual incomprehension), and
- factional conflicts (e.g. minority groups).

This list – that is not meant to be exhaustive – gives the idea of the civic and politic power of these games as social aggregators and facilitators.

Notwithstanding, I need to open the discussion about a less obvious and plain to see aspect: persuasion is a core part of games. The persuasive potential of games lies in its very design process, but it becomes effective in the act of playing (Khaled in Ruggiero, 2014, p. XVI). Everything into a game – the game systems, its rules, narrative and mechanics – induces the player to act in a certain way: just by claiming its goal(s) and showing a specific fictional world, the game engages and involves us, and in the meanwhile it also triggers, influences and “pushes” us for acting accordingly to the designer’s aim and perspective (Mariani, 2016).

This aspect is precisely what makes the game such a powerful communication system, especially when it aspires to suggest a civic and societal reflection. At the same time, this feature requires the game designer as a storyteller to consider the ethical consequence of her game (Sicart, 2011).

6 Further examples are described in “Meaningful play: learning, best practices, reflections through games”, Bertolo & Mariani in Mitgutsch et al. (2013, pp. 222-234). The full text is downloadable at: http://www.newacademicpress.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/wp-id-Leseprobe_Context_matters.pdf

2.2 Fictional worlds as liminal spaces of transformation

The reasoning so far covers the point Why do G4SCs influence players?, but it lets the original How? question still open. To answer, it has to be considered the place wherein the game takes place, the set of defined spatial (physical and/or imaginative) and temporal boundaries, in other worlds its *magic circle*⁷ that makes clear (1) when the game begins and ends, and most of all (2) the awareness that “this is a game” (Bateson, 1956; 1972).

G4SCs are narrative systems in which we (as players!) engage in an artificial conflict, physically/symbolically accessing a safe space where we temporarily distance from the everyday life.⁸ To play we enter and participate the story someone else is telling and performing (usually the game designer). Matter-of-factly, to access this fictional narrative world where we can interact and make experiences, where we can acquire new knowledge, meanings and perspectives, a process of *immersion*⁹ is required. And we unconsciously accept it, every time we play. This process consists into keeping a foot in both camps, enjoying the edge: it doesn’t mean that we deny the reality, we are just into a paradoxical situation wherein both the “real reality” and “fictional one” coexist in a dynamic balance, and we switch between them.

In anthropology, this very state of ambiguity is known as *liminality* (from the Latin *līmen*, “threshold”). This peculiar as well as significative

7 The concept of magic circle was first introduced by Huizinga (1938/1949), but it has been recovered and enhanced by Salen and Zimmerman in Rules of Play (2004). A further reflection on the topic has been proposed ten years later by Zimmerman (2012); it is available at: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/135063/jerked_around_by_the_magic_circle.php

8 This first part of this definition is largely based on Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p. 81) definition of game; the second part is then inspired by Crawford’s (1984) list of four primary qualities defining the game category. These qualities are: representation, interaction, conflict, and safety.

9 This reasoning is valid for games, books, films, performances, and art in general. The research on immersion in games sees contribution from a number of scholars and disciplines: Jenkins, 2004; Murray, 1997; Ryan, 2001; McMahan, 2003; Ermi & Mäyrä, 2005; Linderoth, 2012; Gorfinkel, in Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 453; Thon, 2008; Wolf, 2001.

condition occurs when someone “stands at the threshold” between a previous status and a new/different one. Van Gennep coined the term *liminality*¹⁰ in his work *Rites de Passage* (1909) connecting the act of going to the limen and coming back to a transformation activity: moving through the limen is a rite de passage towards a new status. Being on the threshold actually helps to assume new perspectives. Hence, G4SCs as expression/representations of social drama pose significant circumstances of liminal transition and transformation, especially when they include a significant level of integration of the surrounding world, and they embed and initiate critical reflections on issues that are in the meanwhile political, ethical, sometime moral, and social. The game is to a large extent connected to this very – sometime unconscious – awareness of being in a fictional world within the ordinary one that is dedicated to a ludic performance as an act apart. In the light of that, it has the ability to free our faculty to imagine, think out of our usual schemata, experiment different points of view, to comprehend other positions. This duality becomes even more evident when we are requested embodiment and identification: the very coexistence of the two statuses of “being here” and “there” – that at a first glance appears as inconsistent and antithetical – makes the game such a powerful communication system, especially considering G4SCs as interactive stories of and for social innovation able to move the player and turn her into an agent of change.

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Ilaria Mariani holds a Ph.D in Design from Politecnico di Milano. She designs, investigates and lectures in games for social change as systems for communication and social innovation. Her research – theoretical and practical – mainly addresses the meaningful negative experiences certain games create to activate reflection and change. Covering the fields of studies of Communication, Design and Game Studies (+ Game Design), and to a diverse extent Sociology and Anthropology, she researches on games and play(er) experiences both as forms of enquiry as exploration, and as a process of self- and meta-interrogation. To comprehend, assess and master the impact on players and the effectiveness of the transfer of meanings, she develops and employs interdisciplinary practices and tools (quantitative + qualitative).

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¹⁰ Van Gennep explored and developed the concept in the very context of rituals occurring in small-scale societies. Various categories of rites are distinguished in his first investigation, enhancing the connection among rite/performance, change, sociality and time.

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From (single) storyteller to (Multiple) stories-enabler

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ABSTRACT

Defining the role of the designer (for social innovation) as a storyteller is a very attractive position nowadays, in a time when design is driving away from purely material or aesthetic concerns to a more socially engaged and relational practice. But this position may have some direct implications on how he or she deals with other narratives other than his or her own. Should the designer hold the power to decide which narratives or stories are told and how are they represented? Drawing on a lecture by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, recent video footage of news channel analysing recent Paris attack and the ideas of 'design of the south' of Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero (inspired, in turn, by Boaventura de Sousa's epistemologies of the south), I argue on the importance of critically evaluating the role of designer as storyteller, and consider instead a role of stories (in plural) enabler.

TAGS

Stories Enabling, Design of the South, Multiple Narratives, Epistemologies of the South

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Chimamanda Adichie is a young Nigerian writer who has been at the lead of a new generation of writers drawing interest on African literature. On 2009, she was invited to speak at the TED Global event. In her talk, entitled *The Danger of the Single Story*, she explains how she came to realize the danger of showing and knowing only one story – one perspective – on a place, people or situation. She went to study in the US, and since her arrival she was confronted with stereotypes about Africa (like if it was easy to generalize about a continent that can fit Italy 100 times!). When settling in the college campus, her roommate inquired her where had she learnt English so well (English is an official language in Nigeria) and asked her to show her some of her 'tribal' music (leaving her on shock with her Mariah Carey mix-tape). She was far from offended by these requests or inquiries, as she actually realized that she had also been a 'victimizer of the single-story'. As a middle-class Nigerian, her family had 'help' working in their house, normally coming from rather poor contexts and backgrounds (situation repeated throughout developing countries worldwide, perpetuating some kind of internal (self) colonialism). She had a single story from them: they were poor; she did not see the other stories of them – like the fact that they were skilled craftsmen. After seeing herself in the role of the 'victim of the single-story' in the US, she understood that "stories have been used to dispossess or to malign but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity".¹

1 ADICHIE, Chimamanda. *The Danger of the Single Story*. Talk at TED Global, 2009. http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=nl#t-792661

In more recent events, after the attack on Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, the US broadcaster CNN dedicated many programs to analyse (or pretending to do so) the course of the events. In their news broadcast of the evening of the 12th of January (CNN Tonight), the anchors show a clip from comedian Bill Maher's show, who criticized liberals (democrats) for not denouncing more openly 'Muslim countries' for their abuse of women rights and promoting violence within their people. After playing the clip, the anchors interviewed live the Iranian-American writer and scholar Reza Aslan to react on these statements. The headline and main question of this interview (visible in the low part of the screen) was does Islam promote violence? Mr. Aslan was rightly annoyed by the question, arguing the over-generalizations the reporters were making by using terms like 'Muslim countries' or 'Islamists' to speak about 1.57 billion people spread in more than 57 countries (of Muslim majority)². An expert as he is, he explained some nuances between different Muslim countries, even proving how in countries like Indonesia women had equal rights as men, and has even had more female heads of state than the US; or proving that female genital mutilation is not a problem of 'Muslim countries', but of specific African countries (like Eritrea or Ethiopia, two Christian countries). What he was doing during this interview was giving a different perspective, therefore fighting against the single-story-narrative. And here lies the key issue with stereotypes: as put by Chimamanda Adichie, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are

2 CNN Tonight. Broadcast 12th of January 2015. <http://youtu.be/PzusSqcotDw>

not true, but that they are incomplete. They make 'one story' become the only story"³.

All this takes me to storytelling in design (for social innovation?). As designers and researchers socially and politically engaged, working in challenging communities and contexts, we carry great responsibility. By giving certain people a voice (and therefore excluding others), by making some communities visible (and neglecting others) and by aesthetically representing others (from 'our perspective'), we can very easily fall into the vice of the 'single story'. We do it within the confines of our discipline (by stating 'what design is' or 'should be') but, furthermore, we enact it on others by imposing our story. A similar situation occurs with aid-workers who, in their best, heart-felted intentions, impose their single stories and stereotypes (Africa is poor, Muslims are dangerous, Latin America is violent, etc.) to bring their single story of 'development'. This resonates with the ideas from the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa, who advocates for the epistemologies of the south (calling for the diversification of knowledge), in contrast with the single-sided story common in Eurocentric thinking tradition.⁴

Perhaps the role of the designer should not be that of a storyteller –for it is a role with high risks of falling into the 'single story'–but more in the realm of a multiple stories enabler. This 'new role' would imply that he is not the author of the stories, but he acts as a mediator that allows different stories to emerge and enter in dialogue and discussion with each other. Such is the argument that Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero brings forth in his paper "The south of design and design of the south"⁵, in which

he says that 'design of the south' seeks "possibilities for designing artefacts and nurture the material and immaterial culture with emancipatory knowledge, in order to validate the right of every person to be an expert on its own experience (design with others), involving multitude of knowings (knowledge, in plural), instead of privileging hegemonic postures of experts in designing for others".

We ought to understand that design (and its stories) is never neutral, and is therefore always dealing with power relations (manifested through inclusion, visibility, representation, etc.). Giving the designer full responsibility of this mediation might sound pretentious, but being aware of your own position is a good start for avoiding to colonize other's thinking and their stories, thus allowing for multiple stories to emerge.

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Pablo Calderón Salazar studied Industrial Design (bachelor level) at the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University of Bogotá, Colombia (2008) and Social Design (Master in Design) at the Design Academy of Eindhoven, The Netherlands (June 2013). He started in March 2014 a Ph.D in the Arts with the LUCA School of Arts / KU Leuven (Belgium), in the wider context of the project TRADERS (Training Art and Design Researchers for Participation in Public Space).

The essence of his practice lies in collaboration with local partners in the different contexts where his projects take place, using dialogue as his main tool. Giving great attention to the political, economical, social and cultural conditions under which his projects take place, he produces texts, installations, graphics, videos, interventions and objects that provoke reflection around relevant issues in society, simultaneously hinting at alternatives.

3 Íbid (ADICHE).

4 DE SOUSA, Boaventura. *Las epistemologías del Sur. Introduction to Epistemologías del Sur (Perspectivas)*. Madrid: Ediciones AKAL, 2014. http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/media/INTRODUCCION_BSS.pdf

5 GUTIÉRREZ, Alfredo. *El sur del diseño y el diseño del sur*. Presented in the International colloquium *Epistemologies of the South*, Coimbra, 2014. http://www.academia.edu/8750553/EL_SUR_DEL_DISE%C3%91O_Y_EL_DISE%C3%91O_DEL_SUR_Espa%C3%B1ol_2014_

Storytelling or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Conflict

(Any resemblance to Kubrick's film is
purely intentional)

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ABSTRACT

Lately, storytelling has been the centre of a renewed interest. Apparently narration rightfully joined most of the cultural and scientific fields in our age, as to call it the "narrative era", but outside a strictly narrative sector, the theme of storytelling is still surrounded by many doubts and questions still waiting for answers. These puzzlements, which sometimes become prejudices, often come from a partial knowledge of the deep structures of tales. Narration can not be reduced to a sequence of writing techniques, for it is a much wider subject: a cognitive model capable of organizing human thought, and able to pass on knowledge.

TAGS

Communication Design, Storytelling, Scenario, Narrative Thinking

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If we were asked to list a number of professional activities related in some way to the storytelling, definitely our first thought will be addressed to the categories intimately linked to the dimension of the story: writers, screenwriters, playwrights, actors and directors. Then, almost certainly, we will pass in review advertising copywriters, salesmen, journalists, till to include the various spin doctors and communication consultants at the service of private companies, political parties and political and administrative organizations. In all probably only later we would start to understand the importance of the role that narrative plays not only in many other working areas, but also in our daily existence. What would be, in fact, a medical examination without the anamnesis? Without the medical history - in a more or less dramatic way - of the disease and its symptoms made in person by the patient? Or think of psychoanalysis, the unveiling of the unconscious secrets also obtained through the interpretation of the more personal and intimate narratives that the patient develops during the therapeutic sessions. Moving from the psychoanalyst's couch to the law court, the speech does not change much. Even during a trial we are facing the comparison - when it is not a real clash - between distinct narratives. Different viewpoints that seek to reconstruct the same event through a series of stories that only the law judgement will recognize or not as likely and plausible.

Stories accompany us throughout our existence and now we live in what communication theorists have baptized the "narrative era", in which the achievement of the "narrative turn" seems to in-

terpret and transform every object and every action into a narrative act.

Beyond the rhetorical emphasis that often takes this kind of statements, we are actually seeing a re-evaluation of the narrative dimension in a debate involving many professional circles as much in scientific and academic fields. It is right, in this sense, that also the design world examines itself about the weight and the role that narrative has and can have within this discipline. Personally I believe that the task ahead is not so much to ask if a designer has to be also a storyteller or a storylistener. In my opinion the answer is already implicitly contained in the question and can only be positive: yes, a good designer must be able to deal with the practical and cultural dimensions of story and narration. The real task, if anything, is to convey to designers which are the reasons that underlie this statement - which basically can also be trivially easy - trying to overcome the prejudices that still surround storytelling, but at the same time avoiding the easy enthusiasm that might reduce this argument to a passing fad. In my personal experience I have observed as among designers are often used, - even with a certain, justified, confidence - typically narrative concepts as hero, script, plot and so on, but otherwise no mention about topics as much important as time, conflict or verisimilitude. The feeling is that of storytelling they have been adopted only some elements and then passed directly to the technical issues, without having time to dwell on the complex, but also fascinating and rich, nature of narrative. Perhaps it is from here we must start.

The first, major bias that scientific research shows towards narrative is to be a matter of entertainment, far from it. From the ancient oral myths to the present day storytelling has always fulfilled the fundamental function of giving life to those process of symbolization and categorization which allow us to encode and set order within the complex and chaotic experience of reality. In this sense the art of storytelling even before being an entertainment activity - a simple, technical ability to create more or less credible and exciting stories - is an elaborate system of thought organization and knowledge transmission; a key tool for the building of individually and collective identity.

According to psychologist Jerome Seymour Bruner - who has devoted much of his work to this issue - narrative is not a simply cognitive tool, but it is something even deeper: one of the two dominant form of human thought. In conformity with this distinction, intelligence is based on two reciprocal and complementary kind of thought, the scientific-paradigmatic and the narrative one, which correspond to two different communication systems, but also proper and exclusive validation criteria, as well as different procedures of verification and control.

This is a crucial point in understanding the nature of narrative. Its existence is independent from the universal laws established by science and so we can not judge a story with the traditional tools of scientific and mathematics analysis. This aspect often generates distrust and in certain disciplinary contexts it is accepted with a sort of diffidence.

Opposed to scientific logic, narrative blends seamlessly real and imaginary elements in order to create a possible fictional universe. It is possible to describe in a precise and truthful way a real city like Prague through the adventure of a fictional character like the "good soldier Švejk", as happens in Hašek's novels. In this case try to apply the typical validation procedures of science (such

as Propp's counterfeit test) would not make much sense. Stories, unlike scientific argumentation, are not obliged to demonstrate their speculations. Its credibility is acquired by the verisimilitude principle, or the ability to create a fiction able to generate in the audience the illusion of reality towards a narrative world and the events that might happen in a given time. The concept of verisimilitude does not establish a set of general rules valid for all kind of stories, but offers a number of general principles - such as causality and non-contradiction - that must be consistent within the narrative world built by a particular story tale.

Narrative is not a regulatory and prescribing apparatus which tends to build a higher abstract order, but it is instead a dialectical system based on the human intentionality. The engine of this dialectic lies in the notion of conflict, the fundamental element able to imparting dynamism to the narrative, to generate the imbalance and the rule violations required to trigger a story. Without the conflict a narration is reduced to a simple statement, a mere recording of facts. If the concept of conflict is widely accepted and shared within the insider circle, much more difficult is to export it in context where narrative does not occupy a central role. In effect, the world conflict evokes immediately warlike, violent and in any case negative images. Something that needs to be resolved with the victory of someone and the ultimate defeat of someone else. But in the narrative world the world conflict has not necessarily to do with war or with highly tragic or bloody facts. In narrative terms conflict is the representation of the comparison between the parties, the subject of reflection on the choices responsibility, actual and possible, within a given context for the attainment of a definite purpose.

In this sense conflict should become part of the design practice. The should be interpreted as an obstacle interposed in achieving a goal, the fight in favour of an ideal, big or small, the effort required

to overcome a state of crisis. The narrative conflict reflects the continuing social, cultural and spiritual frictions present in every society. Perhaps, is for this reason that the imaginary worlds of science fictions seem to us more vital and more realistic than many future scenarios made by designers? The question can be provocative, but in the fact, while many design scenarios are well made and have a narrative plot, in most cases they lack of two key elements: the conflict, precisely, and the psychological and social characterization of character. In this way - just to mention a case - scenarios related to the domotics offer us an interesting example. In many cases they represent an innovative image of the future house, full of technologically advanced devices, while the woman figure who lives there is most often represented, paradoxically, in an anachronistic manner. So what we see struggling with smart refrigerators, automatic ovens and remote-controlled washing machines, is once again the image of a century ago housewife, whose life is devoted only to cooking, to washing, to ironing, waiting looking forward to the return home of her husband. Telling the future means imagine it in a critical perspective, with all its uncertainties and its struggles (the darkside, as taught in science-fiction). The future is not just a nice, static and reassuring picture of what we want to be - "the future will be better, but we will be the same as always" - but it is also a representation of the obstacles that we have to face in order to build a better future.

In its dialectic, narrative - according to another brilliant Bruner's idea - you do not need much to solve problems, how to find them. Stories do not provide us the solutions, but show us the possible keys for a resolution.

Let me conclude with a small provocation, stating that the designers did not actually need to ask whether they may or may not be storytellers, in fact they already are. Stressing the concept, the designer activity is not so far from that of a writer

or a movie director. Like in a story - if we want to bring the idea to the extreme bounds - artifacts and services are placed in a system (the narrative world) more or less next (the tense, or a prolepsis if referred to our time) to interact with people (the characters) in order to solve a problem (the solution of the conflict). I think that the contribution of innovation that storytelling could give to the design is not only to provide more practical tools, but also to propose new points of view through which observing its work, try to placing the project into the frame created by the narrative worlds. Under another perspective, it also means knowing how to turn itself into a storylistener able to find in the narrative structures and the stories a source of inspiration to understanding the evolution of a society with its needs and its desires.

About the Author

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Storytelling & Worldmaking: The World-building Activity as a Design Practice

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ABSTRACT

Living in a highly mediated world, we are witnessing the rise of new consumption behaviour and the spread of multichannel narrative forms. A scenario in which audiences enter vicariously imaginary worlds, exploring the fictional spaces conveyed through multiple channels. Starting with the recognition of the difference between story and storyworld, this article aims to describe the world-building activity, the process of creating imaginary worlds, as a design practice.

TAGS

Transmedia, Storyworld, World-Building, Design Practice

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1. Towards a Narrative Mediascape

In the current mediascape (Appadurai, 1991), changes in business and social environments have led people towards a complex landscape where the relationship between mainstream media (top-down) and participatory culture (bottom-up) have completely changed, undermining the notions of authority and authorship (Burnett, 2011). Due to the rising number of multimodal devices and the higher number of messages being conveyed across several channels, we are witnessing the rise of new consumption behaviour and the spread of multi-channel narrative forms. This, in turn, has allowed for the development of a spontaneous practice of engagement through the collaborative creation and the collective consumption of narrative worlds because people are used to crossing the boundaries of single-line stories (Murray, 1997) by vicariously entering the imaginary worlds.

The development of compelling storyworlds, which can be fully explored just through multiple media windows, lead to multichannel works, such as transmedia phenomena. The term 'transmedia' was used for the first time in reference to the franchise entertainment super-system that works 'to position consumers as powerful players while disavowing commercial manipulation' (Kinder, 1991, pp. 119–120). Jenkins (2003) went further, coining the term 'transmedia storytelling', later defining it as 'stories that unfold across multiple media platforms' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 293) that are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories' (Jenkins, 2007).

According to all the definitions coming from academics and practitioners, it is possible to say that transmedia systems are phenomena concerned with the building of a story universe through different channels and the collective consumption of narrative worlds. This means that 'storytelling has become the art of world-building' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 114), as story architects create compelling environments that are conveyed across several media.

2. From Storytelling to Worldmaking

Since the dawn of mankind, stories have allowed people to shape and share their experiences by structuring the surrounding reality. This power has increased through the ages as a result of developments in technology and in media habits, giving strength to the storytelling practice itself.

Living in a highly mediated world means that most of the audience's experiences are conveyed through media. This is why, now more than ever, we are surrounded by compelling imaginary worlds in which the audiences enter vicariously, spending a certain amount of time in the speculation and exploration of the narrative space. As a result of these developments, designers can be cast as mediators, playing a dual role in the contemporary mediascape: as story listeners, they collect stories from the audience and their repertoires and, as storytellers, they organise these stories into experiences. Furthermore, the designer will become a real agent of change if he or she goes beyond the storytelling activity by starting to act as a worldmaker in his or her design practice. Hence, it becomes necessary to

recognise that there are differences between story and storyworld. This is especially important because, in terms of the richness of audience engagement, the experience of a storyworld is different from the experience of a story, even though narrative worlds are usually experienced through stories set within them: 'it is the world [...] that supports all the narratives set in and that is constantly present during the audience's experience' (Wolf, 2012, p. 17). However, story and storyworld must work together in order to enrich each other and to create a compelling narrative space (Ryan, 2004; 2001; Ryan & Thon, 2014; Wolf, 2012).

Stories are self-enclosed arrangements of causal events that come to an end in a certain period of time. Storyworlds, instead, are mental constructions shared between recipients and authors in which new storylines can sprout up. They are dynamic models that evolve over time and whose believability is based on three properties: invention, completeness and consistency (Wolf, 2012). The first, invention, is related to the degree of change of the constructed world (secondary world) compared to our own world (primary world): 'invention, then, is what makes a secondary world "secondary"' (Wolf, 2012, p. 38). Changes can be related not only to the nominal and the cultural realm, in which authors can give new names to things or invent new artefacts, objects, technologies and cultures; but also to the natural and the ontological realm, in which new flora and fauna appear in worlds led by new physical laws. The second one, completeness, refers to the degree of development and feasibility that a world reaches through details and additional information. If a world is sufficiently complete, audiences will continue to find answers to their questions and the narrative space itself will be believable. Finally, the feeling of completeness is connected to the consistency, that is, the degree to which a storyworld is arranged by interrelated and not-contradictory elements.

3. Implication for Design Practice: The Designer as Worldmaker

In the design field, both storytelling practice and world-building activity can be seen as a way to enrich design practice, giving the designer tools for the expression of ideas (storytelling) that can be set within a huge storyworld (worldmaking) in which the audience can immerse themselves and participate in the meaning-making process. The world-building activity is an innate creative practice that serves an evolutionary aim (Holland, 2009). This practice usually occurs as a background activity, allowing stories to unlock people's potential, but sometimes it can take the lead in the design of audience experiences. In these situations, '[w]orld-building results in the subcreation of new things and the changing of assumptions regarding existing and familiar things that are usually taken for granted' (Wolf, 2012, p. 32).

Thus, the world-building activity sets out to be a strategy that includes tactics of consumption that are led by people (De Certeau, 1984). On the one hand, there are designers who create storyworlds for envisioning possible worlds, using tools from the storytelling practice. On the other hand, there are people acting within the constructed worlds defined by strategies by using tactics for the development of a new 'glimpse' of a situation and the changing of taken for granted assumptions. Accordingly, the world-building activity as a design practice can lead to the creation of narrative spaces that are able to unlock the potential of people and contexts.

About the Author

Mariana Ciancia holds a Ph.D in Design from Politecnico di Milano and she is currently research fellow at Design Department, School of Design (Politecnico di Milano, Italy). Her research activity deals with new media and participatory culture, with the aim of understanding how multichannel phenomena (crossmedia and transmedia) are changing the processes of production, distribution and consumption of narrative environments. Publications include articles and book chapters on transmedia phenomena, narrative formats, and audiovisual artefacts.

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Notes on storytelling as design

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The design practice abounds with stories – fictional and nonfictional stories, exciting and revealing stories as well as stories that console or confront us. Some of these stories are carefully hidden, in objects for instance. Others are out there, in plain sight, for instance in animated films or public performances. Designers and design researchers use storytelling for a variety of purposes. They use narratives to gain insight, to entertain, to educate, to commemorate, to explore new, yet to be discovered ways of being in the world as well as rediscover lost traditions and recall forgotten memories.

Storytelling gives designers considerable freedom to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a wide variety of possible world views, human relationships as well as the relations between people and their physical and material environment. This freedom, however, comes with limits. For instance, narratively expressing one's own views is quite different from conveying other people's lives and perspectives. A story can be a means to explore the realm of 'the other' – other experiences, feelings, attitudes – but telling someone else's story asks for more than just narrative techniques. There are ethical issues involved, issues related to representation and agency. If designers choose to explore and further develop storytelling as part of their professional repertoire, they need to reflect not only on aspects such as structure, style and aesthetics, but on these moral aspects as well.

To help designers and design researchers reflect on such matters, here are some thoughts. As sto-

rytelling is already a current practice in the design field – the story is already unfolding – these thoughts are presented in the form of a silent film's title cards. With the projector rattling in the background and with the action showing on the screen, the intertitles comment and reflect on what is taking place. They address the question of what storytelling could mean for the design and design research practice, and they also provide insight into what storytelling requires.

Happy viewing.

1

Storytelling can be a valuable part of a designer's and design researcher's repertoire.

2

Storytelling can be very enjoyable. Stories can be entertaining. They can be beautiful, they can make us change perspectives, they can make us understand – which is different than mere knowing. Stories can move us.

3

This is why storytelling can be a subtle yet powerful design and design research approach to understanding situations that need attention, involving stakeholders that were, perhaps, previously not involved, and exploring possibilities for change.

4

I encourage designers and design researchers to study and further develop the art of storytelling.

5

However, storytelling is *not* only an art.

6

Storytelling is not an art in the sense that it is not about autonomy. It is about the opposite: connecting with the world, the 'other', the 'unself' in Design Academy Eindhoven's vocabulary.

7

Storytelling *is* an art in the sense that it is a craft. This craft involves mastering techniques, experience, care – that is, paying attention to details – and serving a purpose. Storytelling in design is not a matter of *l'art pour l'art*. It asks for an outgoing, outward-looking, engaging craftsmanship: of one interested in and capable of reaching out to another.

8

So, telling a story *is* an art in certain respects. But it is also *more* than that. Storytelling is also an act.

9

This act is not an act of simply describing what is out there or repeating what one has seen or heard. There is no neutral ground. There is no objectivity, no unembodied position. Remember that even journalists in their search of the so-called truth construct their stories. They are not only masters in constructing stories, but also in hiding their constructions. Do not be fooled. Pay attention.

10

Designers, I argue, *should* construct their stories. Designers should construct their stories very carefully. They should pay attention to their stories' seductive qualities as well as their engaging capacities. Designers should, therefore, study not only what is needed for their stories to make us marvel, but also what is needed for them to make us wonder, to make us understand, and what is needed for them to move us. Do not hide your stories' constructions, but discuss those that work best.

11

Constructing stories means making choices about matters such as point of view, tone of voice, narrative structure, and the relation between narrator and protagonists. Choices about such matters can be made implicitly or explicitly. I encourage designers to do the latter. Do not be afraid to use your intuition, please do, but also do not hesitate to reflect on the choices you make. Reflect on your choices inside your studio and reflect on them in public.

12

Every choice has consequences, for the story as well as the storyteller. Be aware that different genres and narrative structures all have their specific powers and pitfalls. The eyewitness account and the fairytale, for instance, differ quite a lot in terms of readers' and listeners' expectations. Of course, the storyteller can play with genre conventions, and I encourage designers to explore the possibilities this offers, but remember that an audience can be fooled only so often.

13

Making choices means that the act of storytelling is always an act of intervening, translating, performing, et cetera. Storytelling in that sense is designing: telling stories in design *as* design.

14

If storytelling is designing, then stories, like designs, have consequences: social, economic, spatial, environmental, moral, and political consequences. What, for instance, is placed in the foreground and what in the background? Who is in and who is out? Who benefits? Who bears the costs? Does the storyteller give certain people a voice, or are people enabled to speak for themselves? Move with care here. Who is in control? Who decides? For whom? Storytelling can be great fun, but it is not a game. It involves taking responsibility.

15

To conclude, I encourage designers and design researchers to tell stories. Exploring and further developing the act, art and craft of storytelling can make it a valuable design and design research skill. Choose your stories with great care. Pay attention to beauty, to power issues, to possibilities for change. In short, be a designer.

About the Author

Dr David Hamers is a spatial researcher. He was trained as a cultural theorist and economist, and in 2003, he obtained his doctorate at Maastricht University's department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with research into representations of the American suburb. Since then, Hamers has been working as a researcher in the field of urbanisation. He is a senior researcher for Urban Areas at PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency in The Hague, the Netherlands. His publications mainly deal with the development, design, and use of space within and around the city. In addition to his work as a researcher, he works with spatial designers and artists. Since 2009 he has been a reader (professor) in Places and Traces at Design Academy Eindhoven.



David shares the second point of his manifesto during his video-statement for DESIS Philosophy Talks Milan in May, 2014



video-statement 01 | Italy calling Ireland



Video-statement from Davide Pinardi for the DESIS Philosophy Talk taking place during the Cumulus Conference 2013 at National College of Art and Design, Dublin

To view the full videos:

http://youtu.be/_NbhaA9bcL4

<http://youtu.be/5GVmT5pLLLQ>

In my opinion, storyteller doesn't need as much to be able to tell stories, but rather human condition and therefore worlds, conflicts, problems, people, dilemmas, contradictions, emotions, in other words, telling life. But before telling, I have to be able to listen, I have to be able to see. The best stories are hidden in the eyes of others.

Video-statement 02 | Finland calling Ireland

Video-statement from Mika Tuomola for the DESIS Philosophy Talk taking place during the Cumulus Conference 2013 at National College of Art and Design, Dublin

To view the full videos:

<http://youtu.be/ONTdOFsw0gg>

<http://youtu.be/-PM9G5NpzAk>

<http://youtu.be/tz2dZU078zc>

We can already see that the purposes of storytelling can vary from the antiquity of the release of the emotion, that actually story being informative and providing us a point of view that makes us feel those feeling that are needed to make change in the society.





video-statement 03 | Holland calling Italy



Video-statement from David Hamers for the
DESIS Philosophy Talk at School of Design -
Politecnico di Milano (Milan, May 2014)

To view the full video:

<https://youtu.be/-8lBwgctWBg>

*I do have 15 points
for you! [...] I wrote a
manifesto, a manifesto
that addresses what
storytelling can mean
for designers, and if
used by designers
what storytelling
requires. And I would
like to share this
manifesto for you.*





02 |
TELLING THE
STORIES OF
THE MARGINS

02 | Telling the stories of the margins

by: Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam, Francesca Piredda
and Virginia Tassinari

"We had already set everything, when a terrible wind came and messed up all of these pieces of iron. The workers immediately said: 'don't worry, we can place everything back as before'. But I understood that the mountain had spoken. I said: please, leave everything as you found it. And what remained was the image of a chaos."

- Maria Lai ¹

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban— is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

- Walter Benjamin ²

Stories of the margins

In his essay on the Storyteller³ Walter Benjamin speaks of mainstream narratives that are mystifying as they give the illusion of offering the only possible interpretation of reality, about which everybody agrees⁴. He says that when these

mainstream narratives are challenged, they actually leave the possibility of seeing what has not been considered in their telling of reality. According to him the storyteller is able to recognize those "leftovers", fragments resulting from the crisis characterizing modernity, in which traditional ways of looking at reality are put into doubt. He is attracted by them because he acknowledges potentialities in them that pass unseen but which could represent a completely different way of interpreting reality.

If we look at contemporary design practices through these lenses, we designers are basically acting as "storytellers" when we "collect" and tell the stories of fragments resulting from the crisis that we are witnessing of contemporary mainstream ideas of production, consumption, and living. These fragments are alternative behaviours powered by values such as trust, reciprocity, and collaboration. These behaviours, escaping the predominant logic of "the winner takes all", have passed unseen in today's society, because they are not considered to be worth looking at. They might have unexpressed potentialities for a positive change that can be activated under certain circumstances. By telling the stories of these behaviours, their unexpressed potentialities might finally come to the surface⁵.

1 Maria Lai - From the film 'Inventata da un dio distratto', by Nico Tarsia & Marilisa Piga (2001) - <http://www.sardegna.digitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=2436&id=188859> [Accessed: May 2016].

2 Benjamin, W. (2001).

3 Ibidem.

4 See Salmon (2007) and De Angelis & Pinardi, D. (2006).

5 As designers, we can visualize potentialities and give them the possibility to be translated into practice, pointing to innovative sustainable alternatives and possibly creating the preconditions for them to happen. When envisioning alternative ways of living based on these "fragments", stories can envisage scenarios where unexpressed

The designer as poet

According to Benjamin's scholar Giorgio Agamben, bringing what is potential into action is what Aristotle calls poiesis, from which the idea of "poetry" is derived (Agamben, 1970). Looking at this definition, telling stories of social innovation can be considered "poetic" action, as it enables potentialities to be translated into action by means of their recognition. By recognizing the fragments and bringing their potentialities to the surface, storytelling can help to envision alternatives and consequently to open up new fields of action inspired by values alternative to those underlying our contemporary society. When we listen to and tell stories of social innovation, creating the preconditions for potentialities to be brought into action, we therefore act as poets.

As design tries to bring into action what is potentially present in our society, it can be considered as a reconfiguration of reality. There is no nostalgia in this, but rather a willingness to listen to what is under-expressed or unexpressed, and to value it fully⁶. By telling their stories, we may be able to reconfigure reality and make evident the potentialities conveyed by these "fragments". Our stories may be able to unlock the imagination, to offer alternatives and to make them viable.

The risk of mystification and the constructedness of stories

In recent years, the word 'storytelling' has been used more and more frequently. We have wit-

potentialities could be fully developed; one can see which new meanings and values they could bring to society. Both fictional and non-fictional stories have the ability to create meanings and to convey sets of alternative values that can lead to innovative sustainable choices. These stories can be considered as a tool for reflection; yet, this reflection also informs the possibility for new actions to take place: what is now only possible can be brought into action. Examples of these meanings are given in our contemporary context, for instance by the sustainable qualities formulated by Ezio Manzini, such as the qualities of slow time, good work, deep relationships, and complexity, which are antithetical to what we can consider the mainstream qualities, such as fastness, efficiency in mass production, etc. - Manzini E. & Tassinari V. (2013)

6 See Walter Mattana in this book. If stories have been always part of human history, they have been always used also for matters related to power and control.

nessed the appearance of a set of quasi-engineering techniques using the art of narration in fields such as branding, politics, and marketing. This interest is related to the idea that stories can be powerful and can be used to convey ideas and images in an effective way. Yet, the use of storytelling for social innovation demands a different way of using stories, as the values and meanings they convey are supposed to be different.

If one looks at narratology⁷, one of the essential characteristics of a story is that it is based on a fiduciary pact between the storyteller and the story-listener⁸. The story's genre is like a statement: it declares the rules of the game so that the audience can frame the narrative universe and build its own expectations of the story.

We tend to believe in a story when it responds to a narrative logic and narrative rules. Yet, a story that works well is not necessary true. This seems trivial; however, one tends to forget this while telling or listening to stories, because stories that work well have the ability to enchant us and make us follow the narrative flow. This is what often happens in the "propagandistic" use of stories in politics as well as in branding and marketing. But what happens when we work in the realm of design for social innovation? In such projects one of the common general aims is to create awareness. Can stories eventually help us increase awareness and self-reflection rather than weaken them? What can help us avoid the risk of being propagandistic and mystifying when telling stories?

7 Narrativity has been explored by many authors and scholars with different approaches. Since the 1980s, narratology has included multidisciplinary perspectives (for example, semiology and psychology), broadening the scope of the discipline towards other forms of narratives, not only literature (Ryan, van Alphen, 1993). Chatman (1978) refers to the contribution of Roland Barthes and focuses on narrative structures; Campbell (2008) refers to Jung's psychoanalysis in order to explore the role of the hero within myths. See also the contributions by Walter Mattana and Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola, in this book.

8 Chatman (1973) writes about the narrative "contract" between the "narrator" and the "narratee".

According to Benjamin⁹, there are two elements one should take into account when telling stories. The first that can help the storyteller avoid being mystifying is to sincerely believe in the stories he tells. He might be wrong, but he believes in them. He does not want to trick people. He believes there is wisdom in the stories to be passed along. He does not want to convince people but to give them the opportunity to have access to this wisdom that was told him by somebody else. In his understanding, this is a key element for making a good story and a good storyteller.

This resonates with using stories to shape a better society by means of collaborative practices of design for social innovation – if and when we really believe in the wisdom of the stories we tell. Even when our stories are fictional, they are yet inspired by values and meanings - a “wisdom” - emerging from a given real context.

Considered from this point of view, our stories could – if and when they follow the ethics of the “good” storyteller described by Benjamin – help to create criticism, and therefore be different from the mainstream narratives that can often be “mystifying” in their reading of reality. Yet, there is always a risk. One can believe in the story he tells but yet be mistaken about the wisdom of the story he wants to pass on. Good intentions are not enough.

Benjamin recognizes that there is always a level of constructedness in stories: the storyteller is not a transparent medium through which stories are told. In a sense, he cannot help being present in the story, and, despite his intentions, somehow influencing the story, giving one possible version of the story amongst many others¹⁰.

The storyteller inevitably leaves his “fingerprints” on the stories he tells: he is part of the story, and inevitably “changes” the story. Benjamin says that while the storyteller tells the story he has been listening to, he puts his fingerprints on it, just as a vase-maker shaping his own vase (Benjamin, 2001). The story is alive, and changes while being passed from hand to hand. The “fingerprints” of the many storytellers telling the story keep the story alive.

This means that there is ultimately a level of manipulation in stories that cannot be avoided. This manipulation is not in itself negative, it is the condition of telling stories: it is more about getting one’s hands dirty¹¹, putting one’s own fingerprints - sensitivity, taste, opinions - in the story we tell¹². We should not be afraid of this, but be aware and use it in the best possible way, showing that there are many possible stories, and not “one”, mainstream story that covers everything. There is our presence as designers - storytellers - in the stories we tell. This contributes to the richness of our stories, showing their fallibility. By being aware of the constructedness of our stories, we can prevent them from becoming mainstream narratives, and therefore confusing the complexity of reality, which does not allow “one” reading that works for everyone and for every situation.

As designers we need to recognize that we also cast our fingerprints on the story we tell, as Benjamin’s vase-maker. Our subjective point of view - with our hopes, dreams, misinterpretations, mistakes, projections - is always present. There are as many stories of social innovation as people telling them. Each time the story is told in a different way, according to who tells it, and may therefore vary. There is no one way to tell a story; there are just different poetics, sensitivities, languages, and priorities to communicate.

9 Benjamin, W. 'The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Benjamin W. (2001).

10 Paul Wells (2011) talks about the idea of 'constructedness' related to animation in his paper for the journal A3P.

11 In Italian there is the expression “mettere le mani in pasta”, that could be literally translated in ‘working with the hands in the dough’

12 See also in this book Pablo Calderon’s contribution.

These considerations raise many questions. Do we always avoid being propagandistic when telling stories of social innovation? Are we really telling stories, keeping in mind that we are part of the stories we tell? Are we showing that our stories are fallible, and are just our ways of telling them among many others? Isn't there also a 'dark side' in stories of social innovation that extends beyond good intentions? How can we ensure that we are not - involuntarily - betraying our own aims when telling stories of social innovation? For instance, what happens if the aesthetic and narrative qualities are not appropriate to the subject matter? What is the role of aesthetic choice when we tell stories of social innovation and sustainability? What happens if we want to give voice to stories from the margins of mainstream ways of producing, consuming and living, but we adopt mainstream aesthetics? If we are working with a sensitive and ethical issue, how can we be sure to respect our aims and give it the right voice? Do we sometimes force "happy ends" or shortcuts onto our stories by not taking into consideration how stories will develop in reality?

* See page 232 for references.

Performing Arts as Storytelling, a Way of Acting and Telling in order to Understand the World In-between Good and Evil

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling is a particular kind of action because it is made up of words. So it seems to bring together the different principles of doing and knowing. I try to approach storytelling to other performing arts, in particular theater, because I think it is a peculiarity of performing arts to hold together mind and body, praxis and theories, and to overcome old categories and fictional opposition between them.

Theater is a meeting between actor and spectator with a language made up of signs and symbols, performed by a body-mind. In this sense performing arts are sweeping and advanced fields in which theoretical and philosophical theories can become wider.

The roots of theater are the same as those of religion and rituals. Theater was born as a way to represent the conflict between opposite forces and opposite gods, Apollo and Dionysus, as Nietzsche taught. The birth of theater was involved in the relationship between good and evil, as a way to understand and represent them, in order to tell and to act, this kind of cosmic conflict with performances. In this sense I think theater could preserve an ancient, but still actual, way of social innovation.

Theater and its forms, tragedy and comedy, and its deep research in active culture, could help storytellers to deeply penetrate the negative aspects of a social concern, in order to represent it, act it and lay the foundation to draw forth the best part of it.

TAGS

Theater, Storytelling, Performing Arts

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1. Introduction

Storytelling is mainly an action. And a particular kind of action because it is made up of words. So it seems to bring together the different principles of doing and knowing. I try to approach storytelling to other performing arts, in particular theater, because I think it is a peculiarity of performing arts to hold together mind and body, praxis and theories, and to overcome old categories and fictional opposition between them. Ancient wisdom, not limited to Greek ideas, did not separate telling and making, thinking and doing, understanding and performing; they were constantly tied together in theater and poetry. Theater, as a performing art, marks the differences between ordinary and extraordinary time and space (Barba, 2004) because it gives a rhythm to experiences and tends to separate this space from all the others. In theater it is necessary to concentrate the experience in a brief timeframe, the time of the performance, and the space of actions in the space of a stage.

Theater is a meeting between actor and spectator (Grotowski, 1968) with a language made up of signs and symbols, performed by a body-mind. It is known, according to cognitive science theories, that body, mind, emotion, cognition, soul and spirit are dynamically interrelated and connected. Thus, it is impossible to split only one of these categories and use it, as it is distinct in theoretical understanding (Maturana & Varela, 1984; Varela, 1991). In this sense performing arts are sweeping and advanced fields in which theoretical and philosophical theories can become wider. Researchers in

studying storytelling can learn from authors who master theater research and avant-garde theater, in order to better understand the deep connections between actions and words.

The roots of theater are the same as those of religion and rituals. Theater was born as a way to represent the conflict between opposite forces and opposite gods, Apollo and Dionysus, as Nietzsche taught (1994). The birth of theater was involved in the relationship between good and evil, as a way to understand and represent them, in order to tell and to act, this kind of cosmic conflict with performances.

In this sense I think theater could preserve an ancient, but still actual, way of social innovation.

2. Performing Arts as Storytelling

2.1 Theater

Theater is an encounter between actor and the audience (Grotowski, 1968), "it cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, live communion" (p. 19).

Theater is an encounter of bodies, minds, imaginations, memories, emotions, all of them mixed together, and all of these aspects are deeply interrelated. An actor has to learn to master all of these faculties and to use them dynamically. Theater researcher of the last century with Stanislavskij, Dullin and Mejerchol'd understood that an actor must constantly practice a process of self-education in order to control these faculties, a process called

actor training. This training is inspired by every kind of renovation and enhancement process, as in Eastern Ways (Dō), as in Eastern martial arts, because these are ways of transformation, of transfiguration, of infinite improvement of the human being. For this reason an actor has to educate himself, before being able to transmit meaning, before even thinking of educating others. "Even though we cannot educate the audience - not systematically, at least - we can educate the actor" (Grotowski, 1968, p. 33).

Grotowski speaks about a holy actor, not because of his connection with religion, but refers to an attitude of self-sacrifice: "The essential thing in this case is to be able to eliminate any disturbing elements in order to be able to overstep every conceivable limit." (p. 35). This meaning of holy is related to mastering oneself, more than a way of salvation or redemption. This is described as a negative way, a "via negativa - not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks. [...] The requisite state of mind is a passive readiness to realize an active role, a state in which one does not want to do that, but rather resigns from not doing it" (p. 17).

In Western traditions only performing arts have preserved this kind of heritage, enshrining this particular idea of mankind, made up of body, emotion, cognition, imagination, and memory that have to be mastered in order to renew and transfigure oneself, to give completely of oneself, as a gift to the spectator.

If theater is an encounter, the relationship between actor and spectator is revealed in a contact that gives a transformative boost to both of them. However, this sharing process is not one of content sharing. Contents are only a medium between subjects involved. Relationship is a live process that concerns dynamics, actions, emotions, images, and not only information and words. But only words, written words, are fixable. Only a text can store the meanings, even if it does, perform, in a reductive way.

In order to amplify this forced reduction different arts use symbolic language to enrich the words using words to create images instead of concepts. Only symbolic language, poetic language can shape complex meanings. It is important to focus on sharing meanings in this symbolic way to avoid sharing of feelings (like in soap operas or mass contents or mass arts), and to avoid sharing reductive concepts. In theater one can share meaning using words and actions that are combined to represent symbolic meaning, in a performance.

2.2 Education

Education analogously is an encounter of human beings, not a content sharing process; otherwise you can talk about the information process and not the educational one. Education is not a matter of content because contents are in books, in web sites, in objects. Education is the act of extracting (Latin *ex ducere*) a person from his particular way of life, with a view of carrying life outside, to changing prospects and aims.

Everybody has an expressive layer and a pre-expressive layer of expression (Barba, 2004). The pre-expressive level is the actor presence before sharing a content, before a word or sign is expressed. To control this elementary layer an actor must work hard, practicing and training every day to control every aspect of expression. It is an aim also for educators because they teach while they live with their behavior and their signs more than with their explicit speeches. Thus, an educator has to educate himself before trying to educate others.

A teacher should not transfer a content (for that, a newspaper is enough), but should create an encounter in a particular zone, in a potential, liminal (Turner, 1982), transitional (Winnicott, 1971) area in which people can share symbolic powerful meaning; this area is more similar to art than other fields.

Theater is a special place for the education of human beings, in which the attention of this potential, transitional, liminal area is preserved, since it is close to the ritual form of experience because of its roots close to the sacred part of experience. We have to remember that theater's birth is related to sacred dance and rituals for Dionysian festivities. And theater provides an ideal place to understand a kind of education that is not limited to the mind, or limited to rationality, but is widespread in the whole person.

When someone tries to teach something, to give information, to decant a content, this is not education, nor art, nor storytelling. Otherwise, when a teacher, an actor, a storyteller tries to express a meaning with symbolic language (performance, music, poetry, images, movies and so on), he makes change possible because he touches the whole pupil. Meaning is not a thing; it is the process to reproduce visible things in order to make it comprehensible, as in a famous quote by Chagall, "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible".

2.3 Imagination and Cruelty

Imagination is the organ of the capacity of understanding; it is a connective faculty that keeps together body and mind, desires and memories, emotions and cognitions, soul, spirit and matter. But it is not a spontaneous form of creativity: without the training process, without mastering oneself, imagination is only fantasy, whim, fancy. Only with self-education and self-training an artist, an educator, a storyteller can master imagination in order to express meaning and produce effects in the real life of others; only in this way can sparks of transformation be produced.

Words like holy, or gift do not indicate a religious practice, but a practical way to connect spirituality and materiality, to talk about empirically of invisible and intangibles, things such as changing, transformation, transfiguration. These are invisible forces, but they produce real effects in real life.

"The true purpose of the theatre is to create Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspects, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves" (Artaud, 1998, p. 230-31).

Performing arts have opened the gate to an important kind of research, in which matter is not a reductive prospect or a nihilistic perspective, on the contrary a perspective in which it is possible to find an animated new kind of materialism or a material kind of spirituality. But is necessary for us to learn the language of poets, performers and artists because they are capable of also handling the dark side of experience in order to understand it and make it more comprehensible.

Imagination is a faculty that holds together the contradictory aspects of experience because it uses symbolic language, the language of connections (from the Greek verb *syn ballo συν βαλλω* that means keep together), the language that preserves the ambivalence and richness of words. Thus, it is the best way to face the negative side of reality. Storytelling is an ancient practice, born to dare evil with poetry. The audience, listening to the tales of heroes can understand that evil is a natural part of life and can accept its presence. This is the first step to deal with it and not be dominated and defeated by it.

Nowadays it is possible to learn this ancient wisdom from theater because thanks to radical authors like Artaud, we can radically think art as a resource for the transformation of the present reality.

"In the same way, theatre is a disease because it is a final balance that cannot be obtained without destruction. It urges the mind on to delirium which intensifies its energy. And finally from a human viewpoint we can see that the effect of the theatre is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and

divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness and even two-facedness. It shakes off stifling material dullness which even overcomes the senses' clearest testimony, and collectively reveals their dark powers and hidden strength to men, urging them to take a nobler, more heroic stand in the face of destiny than they would have assumed without it" (Artaud, 1998, p. 150).

3. Conclusion

Too frequently social innovation projects, good social innovation projects, are at risk of failure only because they do not also consider the negative aspects of experience in depth. They are at risk of failure because they focus on the positive aspects that are necessary, bringing innovation, improvement and new ways of doing things.

Theater and its forms, tragedy and comedy, and its deep research in active culture, could help storytellers to deeply penetrate the negative aspects of a social concern, in order to represent it, act it and lay the foundation to draw forth the best part of it.

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THE “TELLING”: on the politics of framings and orientations in the idea of designing as storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Is telling stories still possible today? This is the fundamental yet complex question of this essay. To find the answer to this question, one must explore the ways in which the possibilities of storytelling are made and unmade. I argue that the making and unmaking of telling stories by design frame and de-frame, as well as orient and disorient the possibilities of being in the world. This indeed can be understood as a form of politics enacted by design as storytelling practice; a material force that shapes social forms.

Storytelling of design is always about the articulation and manipulation of the material world and what it opens and closes towards. Stories brought into the world by design connect one point to another while disconnecting other points in the same environment.

Thus, to think of designing as storytelling has political implications not only for design, but also for a world that design simultaneously constructs and destructs. Designers should constantly ask themselves, what and whose politics are enacted by designing as storytelling? This is not about reflection, but rather recognising the politics of framings and orientations and acting upon that recognition. Design – as a discourse, but also as a practice – must come to an understanding of the practices of orientations and framings more carefully. This is necessary if design seeks to enact certain politics, move in specific directions and make certain worlds possible.

TAGS

Experience, Stories, Histories, Framings, Manipulation, Articulation

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I **Is telling stories still possible today?** In his essay *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*, Walter Benjamin (1969) provides a good starting point for addressing this question and reminds us that any discussion of stories and the telling of them surely must be involved in the question of experience:

[E]xperience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low, that our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. (Benjamin, 1969[1931], p. 83)

If the First World War and the ways in which it conditioned our possible ways of inhabiting and accessing the world have destroyed the possibilities of being experienced as such, then how can stories

as mediators of experiences be relevant at all? Or ironically, does the growing commercial and academic desire for storytelling come from the actual inability of something to be experienced – of the impossibility of experience?

More importantly, how can one even speak of design and designing as a form of storytelling while design historically has contributed to the destruction of experiences through designing experiences in other ways? This is quite a paradox, but a paradox worth thinking about.

According to Benjamin, the poverty of experience is evident in the inability of human beings to tell stories properly. This is not a cause and effect chain, but rather a continuity introduced to our abilities of inhabiting the world. This means that such inability and impossibility are not reducible to any particular historical moment of destruction or catastrophe such as the First World War but actual everyday life (Agamben, 2007). Benjamin understands storytelling as a way of articulating experiences from the private sphere to the public sphere. Experiences which today, due to the temporal and spatial forces of capitalism, are flattened and emptied out of their specific particularities and consequently unable to shape the public sphere. Given the contemporary situation, storytelling for Benjamin lacks proper forms in order to mobilise experiences from one mouth to another, from one environment to another, and from one space and time to another. Such absence has led to a condition in which making the public sphere through experiences has become impossible.

If storytelling is about articulating experiences in other contexts and other environments, then the ways in which we work our way towards the possibilities of telling stories across time and space are at stake. Therefore, the telling is about an attempt to measure the move-abilities of stories from one site to another and from one experience to other experiences. This provides us with one way of understanding the task of telling stories through the idea of moving. To move is to orient things towards a direction; thus, moving is always a process in which time and space coincide. However, the history of moving bodies, things and narratives is not only a history of mobility, but also a history of fixed, immobile and demarcated bodies, as well as things. If the ways in which stories are told can be understood as forms of practising mobilities from one point to another, then they are practices of mobilising other stories too.

By approaching Benjamin's concern through the lens of move-abilities, it now becomes clear that the impossibility of telling the stories he refers to is not an absolute impossibility. Rather, it is about the impossibilities that certain stories impose on other possible forms of telling and other possible narratives. They do so through the specific movements they make in one direction and not another. Thus, one should think in the affirmative sense that telling stories is still possible today.

II

But this hope should always carry, in itself, a pessimistic view against a simplistic and naïve analogy of telling stories as making things in design. To think of telling stories as mere acts of making as often argued in "designing as storytelling" dismisses the historicity of stories. To think of stories as historical means that stories are told and made due to certain histories, while at the same time, they make and produce certain histories. Therefore, it is important to always think of sto-

rytelling as a form of translation. Translation is always a situated practice in which the one who does the translation cannot disappear from the context and cannot take a "passive" role. She or he is always already a body that both directs and misdirects the moment and the situation of things, bodies and narratives in the act of translation. The translator(s) and their positions remind us that stories are made partly in the processes and in the moving. Here, the relation between stories, their move-abilities and the experiences they construct become more explicit: the ways in which stories move shape a regime of possibilities of experience. It is in their movement that they make some stories more audible than others, and they make some narratives more visible than others. They frame a story through de-framing other stories. In her discussion of frames, Judith Butler (2010) points to the political condition of framing: to question a frame, she writes, is not just about asking what a frame shows, but how it shows what it shows. The 'how' not only organizes the image, the story and the history, but also works to organize our sensitivity and thinking through defining and confining our field of perception (p. 71). To think of how stories constantly frame and de-frame the world and its possibilities of experience is also to think of the telling of stories not as a form of creation – which is a pretentious or rather religious way of being in the world – but as various forms of manipulating and conditioning things, bodies and narratives towards one direction and not others. When we come to understand that telling stories always becomes possible already through acts of translation which mobilise some stories through immobilising others, which frame certain histories while de-framing others, then we might carefully approach the problematic analogy of designing as storytelling. Translating, framing and the historicity of stories are three important conditions for understanding and discussing the idea of designing as storytelling.

III

Telling is always a form of articulation, and telling in design is a form of manipulation of materiality. The storytelling of design is not at all the storytelling of literary forms. Once we think of storytelling not in relation to literature, which designers are not particularly good at learning from, we may come to understand that reading design simply as a storytelling practice is quite problematic. Besides de-historicising, as just discussed, designing as storytelling dismisses the materiality of design and designing. To think of design as a material force that shapes social forms (Dilnot, 1982; Weizman, 2007) makes it clear that discussing design without considering the question of material, form and the power of manipulation that it offers would lead us only to the unproductive and metaphoric treatment of designed things as stories, designers as storytellers, and the practice of design as storytelling. Design cannot skip the question of material. The romantic analogy of design as storytelling is problematic because it tends to de-materialise design as a practice as well as dematerialising its effects and affections on a local and global scale. An example might make my argument a bit more clear.

Let's take barbed wire and consider the actual product as a story told by its designer(s). Barbed wire was designed and made to manipulate the free movement of cows in Texas, thus fixing them in a demarcated place. Consequently, this created the possibility for the mass production of meat, but the story does not end there. Because our thing – our story – is embedded in history, it continued its rationality in other environments and has been assembled with other actors. Barbed wire was made out of iron, and the American West in the nineteenth century provided the ideal economic space for opening a lucrative market for mass-produced barbed wire. With piles of barbed wire in stock, new framings came into play which made new stories which then, in turn, made new histories. Our story,

or “barbed wire” as it was called, moved from farms to the Boer War and from there to Auschwitz. While our story became extremely mobile thanks to the iron industry and the boom that capitalism was making worldwide by that time, it immobilized other stories of its time. It immobilized other storytellers: cows, indigenous people, Jews, Roma and other detainees of the Nazi regime¹. But barbed wire did not stop there and then; it is still on the move and makes stories which are no longer in history books but on the Morocco-Melilla border as well as on many other borders around the world which filter and regulate the movement of certain bodies and things. One should remember, this happens at a time when the celebration of borderless and wall-less Europe has become the only accessible history.

When designers and design researchers talk about designed things merely as stories they ignore in practice what design does with our and “others” possible ways of being in and experiencing the world. Furthermore, they dismiss the capacity of design and its ontological differences to literary forms. Due to its ontological condition, design involves practices of manipulating material relations in society as well as articulating social relations². If telling stories in and by design is about making material intervention – on whatever level and with whatever means in the shared environment which is inhabited by heterogeneous actors locally and globally – then designing cannot be a mere act of creating stories. Designing is also an act of preventing other stories from happening and moving, and it is in this sense I argue that design is not about creation, but manipulation. Thus, the telling in design is not creation as it is in literature, but manipulation, as it conditions the material world and social space.

1 My reading of the case of barbed wire is based on the work of Reviel Netz (2004).

2 Previously, I have explored and discussed design and designing as a series of acting that manipulates the world and more clearly as a form of material articulation that shapes the political and the artificial simultaneously: See Keshavarz, M. “Design-Politics Nexus: Material Articulations and Modes of Acting”, Proceeding of the Fifth Nordes Conference: Design Ecologies, Stockholm, 2015.

To think of designed things and design actions as articulations and manipulations happening in the material world tells us that design should be considered as a decision and direction embodied in all things that humans bring into being. Design is conditioned by its orientations, directions and capacities, while at the same time, conditioning human beings, things and the world. Design articulates possible conditions through materialities while it disarticulates other possibilities.

So far I have discussed the question of this essay in an affirmative way, arguing for the possibilities of telling stories through recognising a politics of framing: I argued that one should focus on the task of telling as a temporally and spatially embedded practice in history. In doing so, one also should remember that the task of telling in the context of design is not about creation, but manipulation. Because it is an act of manipulation, the particular framing one uses in which certain stories move while others become immobilized determines the politics of telling stories and the politics of designing possibilities. Consequently, it determines the possible politics enacted by design as a material as well as a social practice of storytelling.

As a final remark, let's redirect our attempt to answer the posed question of this essay in a negative way and speculate about whether telling stories is even possible anymore.

IV

If it has become impossible to tell stories, then what we are left with are possibilities of re-making and re-configuring the parts to be re-articulated. Telling stories then is about rearticulating what has been told already, of reorienting the already existing narratives to other directions than the ones always already taken. This is perhaps what design can do as a socio-material force in a de-constructed world produced by the same force. But

once again, before being quick in "doing" and in inventing new roles carrying the prefix "re-" such as "re-maker" or "re-narrator", designers should take a pause. Sara Ahmed (2010) formulates this type of intellectual pause:

What we "do do" affects what we "can do." This is not to argue that "doing" simply restricts capacities. In contrast, what we "do do" opens up and expands some capacities, although an "expansion" in certain directions might in turn restrict what we can do in others. (p. 252)

A set of questions arises – questions that determine the politics one would enact in telling stories and the ways in which a framing at work will bring certain relations and orientations into histories:

When we talk about storytelling, whose stories are we talking about? What stories, from what situations and narrated towards what conditions? Why are some stories more capable of being circulated compared to others? What makes a story more audible compared to others? What forces and relations shape not only the places and localities where stories are made, but also the spaces and spheres that these stories are circulated through? What "force relations"³ does the storytelling frame by de-framing other ones? Consequently, what stories, which storytellers, and what forms of storytelling are we making when we argue for the idea of designing as storytelling in this or that particular site and through this or that particular artefact? Which environments do we give shape to when these instances of making stories and of making histories connect time and space while disconnecting others?

One cannot argue for designing as storytelling while ignoring these necessary and urgent ques-

³ Force Relations is a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault's (1984) analysis of power: "Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization". (pp. 92-93)

tions and conditions. Engagement with such questions is necessary for any affirmation of relevancy or necessity of storytelling; storytelling as both a concept and as the actual practice of making or working a situation. Nonetheless, the engagement with storytelling as a concept and as a practice, as well as an actual and material mode of acting and enacting, has political implications for design, not simply to make design political, but to affirm the politics which design enacts by engaging in storytelling.

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The Literature of Political Things and Places: Storytelling and Reading with Design in Mind

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that literature is a fertile source of insight for design research and scholarship – in particular, those stories that explore the mutuality of the sentient and insentient, a mutuality pointing to a new kind of politics that respects the reciprocity of relations between humans and their environment. Authors such as Charles D'Ambrosio, Orhan Pamuk, Darryl Pinckney, and W.G. Sebald are discussed for the ways in which they reposition objects of design (informal and formal) as characters. Chairs, carpets, buildings, manuscripts, and sundry other objects act as protagonists and antagonists that exceed their intimate relations to individuals and become actors in the larger theater of human affairs. By situating things in the webs of human actions and beliefs, these works of literature have the capacity provoke the re-cognition of the activity and outcomes of designing in shaping the social and political.

TAGS

Aesthetics, Design Capacities, Literature, Mediation, Politics

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In this paper, I argue that literature is a fertile source of insight for design research and scholarship – in particular, those stories that explore the mutuality of the sentient and insentient, a mutuality pointing to a new kind of politics¹. By revealing the qualities and affects of objects and places², by repositioning them as characters – protagonists and antagonists, these kinds of stories have the capacity provoke the *re-cognition* of the activity and outcomes of designing in shaping the social and political. But it is a capacity that needs to be unlocked. The process of mining literature for such knowledge would just be a sort of intellectual gymnastics were it not committed to what literary critic George Steiner calls “the politics of the primary.”³ This is a politics that demands a willingness to meet ourselves and authors in their work, and in doing so, conduct a more fully human exchange.

In *Real Presences*, Steiner calls for a performative criticism. He argues that in re-enacting and thus reinterpreting a work (i.e., Homer’s *Odyssey* as re-vised by Dante, Joyce, and others), we ingest that work instead of merely consuming it.⁴ Furthermore, this particular process of translation entails an ethics of critique, one that calls for “answering” the work at hand responsibly. Steiner would have us actively acknowledge the voice (be it embodied in a text, an object, a piece of music, and so on) that

is speaking to us, and not cast it aside for a secondary or tertiary form of criticism of the self-same work. He calls for the same respect for works of art that we accord persons when we answer (rather than ignore) their spoken questions. Literature is one mode of answering, and the literature that I am concerned with is that which responds to the qualities and capacities of design.

To cite just a few examples:

- In *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust isolates an aesthetic experience afforded by a new technology. In this case, it is the telephone, which in the 1920s, requires a pilgrimage to the post office and the invention of a new vocabulary. When the “virgins of the wires” break his connection with his beloved grandmother, the phone becomes an instrument of separation, evoking a painful reminder of her eventual death. But when the technology succeeds, life is not just restored it is changed. His senses operate differently and his behavior changes accordingly. The isolation of sound from image, of voice from face, causes him to speak more sweetly: “what I held in this little bell by ear was our mutual affection...”⁵ In these passages, Proust offers a recognition of the unanticipated social and sensory affects of technology—pressing concerns for designers today.
- Wisława Szymborska’s poem “The End and the Beginning” calls on broken sofa springs and

1 Here I mean a politics in which human actors are held accountable—this despite the new-found liveliness in things inherent in ‘thing theory’ and related concepts.

2 For the sake of brevity, I will use the words “objects” and “places” to encompass all design practices and/or outcomes.

3 Steiner, George. *Real Presences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 6.

4 *Ibid.*, 9.

5 Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past*, Book II, [1924] New York: Random House, 1981, 136.

window glass shards to evoke the carelessness with which we discard the consequences of one war for another. When Syzmborska writes that “someone has to tidy up... after “[a]ll the cameras have gone,”⁶ she genders the work of repair done by men and women alike. Might not housekeeping be reconsidered as a kind of designing?

- *The Cave* by José Saramago responds to one of those questions. Namely, how do we come to ‘know’ matter in the first place? Saramago answers this way: “Anything in the brain-in-our-head that appears to have an instinctive, magical, or supernatural quality—whatever that may mean—is taught to it by the small brains in our fingers. In order for the brain to know what a stone is, the fingers first have to touch it.”⁷

Each of these works reveals a dimension of (and possibility for) design. For the purposes of this forum, however, what follows will concentrate more specifically on writings that reveal how design (again, in the largest sense of the word) is imbricated in issues of culture, identity, race, and by extension, socio-political systems.

Orhan Pamuk, Charles D’Ambrosio, and Darryl Pinckney are writers whose books are unlikely to be found in a library or bookstore shelved under “design.”⁸ This is because design is still generally misunderstood as being separate from notions of shaping our being or projecting how we might be in the future — capacities that are, in fact, understood to be within the ambit of literature. Eloquent arguments from design theorists (Buchanan, Dilnot, Fry, Margolin, Manzini, Papanek, et. al.) have countered this instrumental view of design

for decades. Literature, however, has the distinct potential of bringing those arguments to even wider audiences, not to mention the possibility for engaging designers in a different way. Literature doesn’t instruct. It theorizes and speculates by stealth, under the cover of story. Things, themselves, are literally given voice by Orhan Pamuk; and D’Ambrosio and Pinckney are no strangers to the anthropomorphic.

These authors use things to speak to particular social conditions in particular places, and, through them, identify shared human desires, anxieties, and behaviors. They rise above parochialisms by activating the tension between the particular and the general, and depending on one’s theoretical proclivities, between signifier and signified, between the thing and the object. Their work offers arguments that point to various ways of becoming more fully human, paralleling the ways in which design works (or can work) as a catalyst for agency. Finite resolutions are eschewed in favor of provocative questions.

Case in point: In his novel *My Name is Red* (1998), Orhan Pamuk uses the tropes of investigation and interrogation as structure and strategy, as both means and end. Ostensibly a detective story about the murder of a miniature painter in 15th-century Istanbul, *My Name is Red*, is, in fact, a debate about eastern and western values, a debate about modernity, conducted through form. Throughout the novel, the idealized conventions of Turkish miniature painting (and its venerable antecedents) are compared both favorably and unfavorably with the realism of painting in Renaissance Venice.

A Turkish tree — actually a sketch of a tree meant to be part of an illustrated manuscript page — says he feels lost because he is not part of a scene of a story. (He is also literally lost — having been accidentally separated from the manuscript and found in his unfinished state). At the same time, the tree also confesses that he secretly enjoys the idea of

6 Syzmborska, Wistawa. *View with a Grain of Sand*. London: Faber & Faber, 1996, 178.

7 Saramago, José. *The Cave*. New York: Harcourt, 2002, 66.

8 The possible exception is Charles D’Ambrosio’s “The Russian Orphanage,” which appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of *Nest: A Quarterly of Interiors*. *Nest*, published in the U.S. by Joseph Holtzman from 1997 to 2004, was itself a rare exception among design magazines.

being seen as a singular tree. But for all his vacillation, he'd rather be the meaning of a tree⁹ – the meaning that comes from a relational context.

Conversely, a horse drawn in the Turkish style is aggrieved that he and all horses appear “as if traced with an identical stencil twenty times back to back.”¹⁰ Venting his scorn for a feminized east, the horse likens Turkish miniaturists to “ladies” who never leave their houses, never look at real horses, and refrain from drawing the individual features that make him a particular horse.

A counterfeit coin circulating in Turkey, but made in Venice, draws attention to the hypocrisy of the West's scorn for the copy over the 'original.' All the while the coin regales his listener the pleasures of his life as a copy. (It goes without saying that all Turkish miniatures are copies and made to keep ancient myths and histories not just alive, but intact.)

The tree's ambivalence, the horse's self-hatred, and the coin's cosmopolitan identity are all surrogates for social responses to conceptions of modernity: continuity or rupture, or a cosmopolitan hybrid of both. The aesthetic debates conducted by Pamuk's characters may seem remote from design as we know it six centuries later, but for the fact that so much of the horrific violence the young 21st century has witnessed flows directly from it. My Name is Red reveals the ways in which tribal, national, and religious conflicts (and compromises) have their own aesthetic dimensions, and are therefore a matter of and for design.

Where Pamuk's book operates on the scale of conflicting cultural geographies compressed within bi-continental Istanbul, Charles D'Ambrosio's journalistic essay “Russian Orphanage” (2002) is set

against ideological geographies that are commensurately monumental – the legacies of Soviet communism and United States capitalism. In this piece for *Nest*, a now-defunct quarterly of interiors, D'Ambrosio visits a run-down barracks and former prison camp, now an orphanage in Svir Story, five hours outside of St. Petersburg.

Here, D'Ambrosio locates design as the occasion for spatial tactics and strategies devised by children. A hole punched into a wall between dormitory rooms functions as their telephone. The tiny architectural disruption serves as a conduit for the exchange of notes and a substitute for lost familial connections. The physical and institutional edges of the orphanage are softened by the wear and tear of daily contact between feet, shoes, and stair treads, between hands and railings. What in America would appear as “signs of decrepitude,”¹¹ in this context, are marks of vital social relations within an adoption system that regularly thwarts it. Here, future parents shop for future sons and daughters; most are left behind.

From the modest material witnesses of abandonment and survival – a scrapbook, bottle caps, shared cigarette butts, D'Ambrosio elicits a picture of ideological differences rooted in two different sets of politics that drove the 20th century and are still seeking relevance in the 21st. The notion of individualism, which values an “absolute right to an interior self,” is absent in the orphanage, where codependency is paramount. Clearly the polarity of values is not raised to evoke nostalgia for communal systems whose failures appear in congealed layers of paint and broken bricks. From a design perspective, one might argue that instead of fetishizing the scabrous, that focus be put on repairs and systems of repairs, and, more generally, the values and possibilities of continuity. Being able to recognize that which (and those who) came before

9 Pamuk, Orhan. *My Name is Red*. [1998] New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, 51.

10 *Ibid*, 218.

11 D'Ambrosio, Charles, “Russian Orphanage,” *Nest: A Quarterly of Interiors*, Fall 2002, unpaginated.

us, as part of the palimpsest that is our present, just might make us feel, as the poet Philip Lopate writes, “a little less lonely and freakish.”¹²

In contrast to the vastness of the territories embraced by Pamuk and D'Ambrosio, the terrain staked out by Darryl Pinckney's *High Cotton* (1992) is markedly intimate. Likewise, this analysis focuses on only a fraction of Pinckney's novel. Set in the latter half of the 20th century, *High Cotton* is a coming of age story of a black man, who describes his family's status (upper-middle class African American) as the “Almost Chosen.” The human propensity for naming and categorizing, reflected in that qualified moniker, here, takes on a profoundly different measure when applied to matters of race.

On a visit to relatives in the “Old Country” (the American South), Pinckney's narrator describes his elderly Aunt Clara's living room. In this instance, the design information lies less in the particularity of candy dishes, fire screens, and prism lamps, and more in the sum of their parts. The room is a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk* mirroring a system of racial prejudices — a system internalized by an aging Southern black woman, a system externalized in the arrangement and density of things.

Her house was a zoo of things...a wild preserve for the pedestal sideboard... I was perfectly free to study the living habits... of the lyre-backs in the vestibule... A sign on my mother's face said, “Don't feed the rugs.”¹³

Otherwise commonplace metaphors describing an interior as a cabinet of curiosities take on an entirely different cast, or more accurately “caste,” when his mother's face is likened to the sort of regulatory notices found in wildlife parks and urban zoos.

(Of course, this is a high-class zoo with lyre-back chairs.) The pointed prose is more than just a reference to the incarceration that was slavery. It illuminates one of its consequences: a social system among African Americans in which some lay claim to the dubiously exalted status of an exotic species.

Here, Pinckney is describing “a family that thought of itself as inhabiting a middle kingdom.”¹⁴ The language of classification is deliberate. The sitting room's material occupants — rug, chairs, and sideboard — are depicted to echo fictions of race plotted on percentages of blood mixtures. (Aunt Clara describes her grandfather as “seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighth Negro.”¹⁵) Such numerical formulations were reflected in a less precise but no less affective hierarchy of color. These calculations govern (and are sustained by) Aunt Clara, (and presumably others of the “Almost Chosen), who is prone to observations such as, “Why, you're the darkest one in the family.”¹⁶

Designations such as octoroon and quintroon may sound arcane to the 21st century ear, but they persist in the American social imaginary. In its turn toward the social and systemic, design would do well to examine the less obvious sub-systems and hierarchies contained in terms such as race, class, religion, and gender. Just as design systems iterate and morph through their deployment, so do social categorizations. Admittedly, design, by nature, is interrogatory, predicated on disrupting preconceptions. Yet, none of us are immune to the forces of our own experiences, hence concepts of, race, class, religion and gender. Pinckney's real gift to design may be the intergenerational perspective of his novel. He models a way to see our inheritances—the frameworks designers bring to matters of concern—at once sympathetically and critically. *High Cotton* makes the case for the vitality of history in the present.

12 Lopate, Phillip. “Introduction.” In *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994, xxxii.

13 Pinckney, Darryl. *High Cotton*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992, 32-33.

14 *Ibid.*, 33.

15 *Ibid.*, 33.

16 *Ibid.*, 35.

The stories like those of Pamuk, D'Ambrosio, and Pinckney, translated to design, are especially important now that design has been effectively diminished – viewed as either a brand of objects or a brand of management. In evoking the visceral and relational nature of things, behaviors, and desires, literature allows us to more fully comprehend the potency of design. A work of literature can cover a lifetime, indeed, generations of living with and among things, long after they cease to be thought of as design and become part of the fabric of life.

Designers can then extract their work from the immersive environment of story, put that work under close examination, and revise their plotlines accordingly. In the process, literature can help designers with the work of anticipating the affects of what philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek calls the multistability of objects and their mediations.¹⁷ As we work to tell a new story of our place in the world with a view toward sustainment and a politics of the anthropocene, literature may serve us better than any manifesto of design. For in what I will call the literature of things, all relations are reciprocal.

Having said that, it is also true that there are ways in which both literature and design can be construed as supporting actors in the realm of politics. This would seem to have been the view of Hannah Arendt when she wrote:

[A]cting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the ... builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all.¹⁸

This is literature and artifice interpreted as a residual of political action and speech. In using the verb “survive,” Arendt conjures representations that outlast the ephemeral speech and movement of bodies in space. But design is not to be confined to illustration, nor texts to documentation. They are themselves modes of speech and action, fully capable of projecting alternatives, formulating speculations, and occasioning political and ideological debate. Even in memorializing or standing as three-dimensional records of time past, design can redirect attention to the present.

In *Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald would have it do both, and in the process, defeat time altogether. Though at first, Sebald seems to frame design—specifically architecture—through the lens of retrospection. His use of photography might even reinforce Arendt’s position that buildings (as with other works produced by *homo faber*) testify to ideas but do not generate them. Furthermore, Sebald’s protagonist is an architectural historian. His journey to recover a past stolen by inhuman politics of purity of the Nazis could be mapped by the landmarks he visits.

At one point, we find him in London’s Broad Street Station, then under renovation, where he wanders into an abandoned Ladies’ Waiting Room:

In fact, I felt, said Austerlitz, that the waiting room where I stood as if dazzled contained all the hours of my past life, all the expressed and extinguished fears and wishes I had ever entertained, as if the black and white diamond pattern of the stone slabs beneath my feet were the board on which the end game of my life would be played, it covered the entire plane of time.¹⁹

At this juncture, his memories are stirred by a place, fittingly a place of transit (Austerlitz had been sent to Wales during the war along with hundreds of other children to remove them from the geogra-

17 Verbeek, Peter-Paul. *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*. University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005, 217.

18 Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago, [1958] 1998, 173.

19 Sebald, W.G. *Austerlitz*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2001, 136.

phy of National Socialist horror). But the point of memory is as much to explain his existence in the present as it is to discover the fate of his parents.

More pointed is his journey to the Theresienstadt concentration camp from which his mother never emerged. Again, the structures are representative of a horrific past never to be deactivated or given agency, except in memory. But the town of Terezín (now Czech) is something else. In the muteness of the shuttered village, we sense, with Austerlitz, the politics of denial. Sebald gives us a window onto the aesthetic of the political. In doing so, he lends a different interpretation to Arendt's perspective on the work of *homo faber*, and by extension design. He asks them to bear witness not to embody (or embalm) the politics of speech and action but to continue the conversation and interrogate it going forward.

A Coda

I recognize that most of the contributions to this collection are chiefly concerned with storytelling not by gifted writers, but by those people who live with and among the social systems engendered by designed things, by urban planning, by design strategies. Yet, one advantage of literature is that it the ability to cover a lifetime, indeed, generations of living with and among things, long after they cease to be thought of as design and become part of the fabric of life.

About the Author

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Fictions, frictions and functions: Design as capability, adaptability and transition

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NOTE

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Re-defining 'social'

These days, I talk about the 'socialisation of design-ing'¹ because the boundaries and interchange between 'authorised' (professionally trained) and 'non-authorised' designers (professional amateurs, other professionals and citizens) are being vigorously challenged. My phrase embraces social design, socially conscious design, socially responsible design, and design for social innovation. It also includes approaches based upon participatory design, co-design, open design and more. I believe this social turn in design, and the invention of new adjectives to describe design, is an innate response to our pressing contingent realities. It widens the remit and impacts of design beyond the narrow lens of late eighteenth century economic ideology – Adam Smith's 1776 'invisible hand' (the unintended benefits to society emanating from an individual's actions), self-interest and the division of labour² – and its present incarnation, neo-liberal capitalism. It recognises present day complexity, fluidity and fragility. It acknowledges that we all have the tools of design at our elbows, in our digital devices and, increasingly, on our streets and in our libraries – witness the growth of fablabs,

makerspaces, hackerspaces, co-worker spaces, pop-ups and mash-ups. Here individual and collective designing merge, separate and re-merge. Others apply their designing in intentional communities seeking ecological, social and economic alternatives through their daily living and working. And there is an increase in the phenomenon of pop-ups and other urban interventions by individuals, groups and communities. We can recognise these as 'alternative communities of emergent practice'.

This social turn is emergent and omnipresent, as Postma, Lauche and Stappers³ have recently noted:

'Recent societal issues and socio-technical developments, including the mass adoption of real-time social media services have made "the social" (i.e. the relationality inherent in human existence) an essential topic for design'

However, I would extend their concept of relationality beyond human existence. The political philosopher Jane Bennett, in her wonderful book, *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things*, brings fresh dialogue to notions of sustainability by asking us to consider the vibrancy and essence of all matter, human and non-human. She goes further by considering that even this binary division of matter alienates us from seeing ourselves and all around us as an assemblage of agents, a vital materialism,

'I believe in one-matter energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this plu-

1 Fuad-Luke, A. (2014). Design(-ing) for Radical Relationality: 'Relational design' for confronting dangerous, concurrent, contingent realities, pp. 42-73, in MA Jin and LOU Yongqi, eds., *Emerging Practices in Design. Professions, Values and Approaches*. Shanghai: Tongji University Press.

2 Smith, A. (1776). *The Wealth of Nations*. This edition is based on the fifth edition edited and annotated by Edwin Cannan, 1904. Bantam Classic Edition, 2003. New York: Bantam Dell.

3 Postma, C., K. Lauche and P.J. Stappers. (2012). 'Social Theory as a Thinking Tool for Empathic Design', *Design Issues*, 28, no. 1, pp. 30-49.

reverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continuously doing things. I believe it is wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms..... I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests⁴.

Bennett's discourse refreshed me. I started to reconsider the relationalities we urgently needed in design education and practice to address the challenge laid down by Tomas Maldonado forty three years ago:

'Designing that is devoid of a lucid critical consciousness (both ecological and social)...will always...evade contingent reality⁵.'

Relational design

I see four key relationalities⁶ that intertwine:

The first is philosophy. I've alluded, very briefly already, to stimulations that philosophy can give to design-ing and suggest you find philosophers to act as a foil for your thought-through actions. I like Jane Bennett, Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jacques Ranciere...

The second is the notion of 'diverse capitals'; I refer you to my open source framework called 'design-Capitalia'; downloadable on one of my blogs, window874.com⁷. It asks those who design to consider the implications of their designing on six key capitals; four anthropocentric (human, social, public, commercial) and two natural (biotic, abiotic). At

present there are 32 identified sub capitals. You can add more. Does the design grow, diminish or maintain a 'capital'?

The third is alternative economies and their models of enterprise. There is a myriad of familiar and emergent adjectives or descriptors: for example, local, green, open, money-free, time-based, gift, informal, lithium, and post-oil. My feeling is that design can help accelerate explorations and experiments to develop new models of enterprise. Presently, I've taken fashion as clothing, as a vehicle for developing new value propositions based on seeking new relations between designers, producers and consumers. Mode Uncut is an open fashion design network⁸. We focus on half-way garments and apply the Open-o-meter to explore copyright/copyleft combinations for the value proposition.

The fourth area of relationality is about understanding that designing today is poly-disciplinary i.e. it can fluidly move between solo-, bi-, multi-, cross- and inter-disciplinary ways of designing. It might even generate truly transdisciplinary knowledge, belonging to none of the original disciplinary fields. Perhaps, even more importantly, authorised, professionally trained designers (like yourselves) should embrace other professionals, professional amateurs, amateurs and citizens as 'complementary relational designers' all working together to make new relations and relationships. In so doing they can help deliver a new vision for design which I call relational design:

Relational design (taking inspiration from Nicholas Bourriard's 'relational art'⁹) is an evolving set of design practices which found their theoretical and practical directionality on the whole of human and non-human inter-action and

4 Bennett, J. (2010) *Vibrant Matter. A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, p122.

5 Maldonado, Tomas. (1972). *Design, Nature and Revolution. Toward a Critical Ecology*. Harper and Row: New York, NY, translated by Mario Domandi.

6 Fuad-Luke, *ibid*.

7 Available at, <http://window874.com/2012/09/28/designcapitalia-launched-at-okf/>

8 Mode Uncut, The Open Fashion Design Network, <http://modeuncut.com/> [Accessed: 17 February 2015].

9 Bourriard, Nicolas. (1998). *Relational Aesthetics*. translated by Simon Pleasance & Feronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland. FR: Les Presses du Réel.

intra-action within their social context. This involves considering the human and non-human actors, actants (sources of action, after Bruno Latour¹⁰), and their socially perceived and understood material assemblages (transitory configurations of elements, things, which can shift in meaning as new elements or things combine, or as they are unplugged from one system and inserted in another, after Deleuze and Guattari¹¹). All these considerations should be seen as a unified living entity with mutual and respectful relationality. Implicit in relational design is the embedding of an ethically driven design inquiry. And, perhaps, I could add, a holistic view of how designing alters life in the present and hence possibilities in the near-future.

You may, of course, add your own imagined or real relationalities.

Above all, relational design must not create ever more dependency on stuff, services and experiences. This I call pharmaka design¹².

'The Greek word, pharmakon means both medicine and poison...and is the stem word from which we derive pharmacology. Other meanings embrace sacrament, remedy, talisman, cosmetic, perfume and intoxicant. This microlexicon could be readily applied to describe the ubiquitous presences of design objects within our contemporary cultures. To continue the pharmacological metaphor, design has the potentiality of being a stimulant, palliative, sedative, toxin and placebo. Design fuels, while simultaneously appearing to ease, the inherent malady of conspicuous consumption (after

Thorstein Veblen, 1899). If we call it 'pharmaka design', and we all recognise it, then what can we see as an alternative?

Storytelling as design for re-relating, for anti-pharmaka design

Design is a storytelling activity using artefacts, scenarios, experiences, processes and tools to motivate people to change their perspectives, behaviours or both. It involves fictions about what could be. It must create friction to engage people. And, it should offer functions that meet real needs.

What do we mean by design fictions? Julian Bleeker sees design fictions as 'totems', 'conversation pieces', 'a mix of science fact, design and science fiction'¹³. Derek Hales notes that design fictions 'involve the appropriation and manipulation of the cultural forms of design and fiction' and that they create a 'discursive space within which new forms of cultural artefact (figures) might emerge'¹⁴. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby's notions of critical design and, more recently, speculative design, also engage with design fictions¹⁵. However, I like Monica Gaspar Mallol's notion of design fictions as being 'understood as projections'¹⁶ I would also suggest that design fictions are posited in the present, but have the latent potentiality to actually be-come the near-future.

How do we understand design frictions? Mallol sees frictions as irritations which when combined with fictions can be a cultural form of dissent. Carl DiSalvo sees objects as adversarial, bringing

10 Latour, B. (1996). 'On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications'. *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4, pp.369-381

11 See for example, Deleuze, G and F. Guattari. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press; and DeLanda, M. (2006). *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London, UK/New York, NY: Continuum.

12 Towards eudaimonic possibilitarian design(-ing), available at <http://window874.com/2013/02/09/towards-eudaimonic-possibilitarian-design-ing/>

13 Design Fiction by Julian Bleeker, 2009, available at http://drbfw5wfjlxn.cloudfront.net/writing/DesignFiction_WebEdition.pdf

14 Hales, D. (2013). Design fictions an introduction and provisional taxonomy. *Digital Creativity*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.1-10

15 Dunne, A. and F. Raby. (2014). *Speculative Everything. Design, fiction and social dreaming*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

16 Mallol, M. G. (2011). F(r)ictions. Design as Cultural Form of Dissent. Paper presented at Design Activism and Social Change conference, Design History Society, Barcelona, September 2011. Available at <http://www.historiadeldisseny.org/congres/pdf/38%20Gaspar%20Mallol,%20Monica%20FRICIONS%20DESIGN%20AS%20CULTURAL%20FORM%20OF%20DISSENT.pdf>

attention to contestation relations and experiences aroused through the designed thing and the way it expresses dissensus¹⁷. His ideas are underpinned with the political theory around agonism and agonistic pluralism as developed by Chantal Mouffe – where adversaries meet in continuous conflictual debate in democratic processes but, ultimately, respect the different positions of the actors. I see design frictions as a means to encourage agreement, agonism and/or antagonism, in order to focus attention on critical contingent realities. This allows designers to move between consensus and dissensus. These frictions must attract attention, engage and encourage participation. Ideally, in order to gain traction in societal thoughts and actions they must encourage collective ownership. In particular they must be open. Open to participation in the designing, open to being changed, adapted and evolved. Open as in for our common good, for our human/non-human shared condition. In this sense the narratives of critical, speculative and adversarial design can appear too narrow, too elitist.

And what of design ‘functions’? Can we re-think what we mean by design ‘functions’? I would propose here that relations or relationships between people, matter and time rather than products, services and experiences is a better way to think about functions. [This sounds like an echo from the past when I first thought about slow design in 2002]. The ‘function’ is met if the right relationship is created to meet the need. How do we think of needs? In anthropocentric terms, a useful framework is Manfred Max-Neef’s ‘Universal Human Needs¹⁸’ matrix where he proposes four basic existential needs (having, being, doing and participating) and nine axiological (value-based) needs (subsistence, protection, affection, under-

standing, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom). Later he added the category of self-actualisation. In biocentric terms we should think more like the deep ecologists (after Arne Naess¹⁹) and ask what are the conditions in which all living matter can flourish and have its needs met. In Bennett’s vital materialism the concept of ‘needs’ might seem to give sentient life to abiotic, non-living materials as well as biotic, living materials. This might seem a step too far, until we look at our planet from space and perceive it as a relational entity that is life. That is, if we accept James Lovelock’s original Gaia theory²⁰.

Collaborate with People and Matter

To raise the capability of people; to increase their autonomy is the way to new freedoms. This is the vision of the nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen who saw capability as a way of achieving alternative functioning combinations or various lifestyles²¹. Here, Sen sees ‘functionings’ as things that a person values being or doing. Design can only deliver capability, and its inherent functionings, if we accept a new way of being for design. That way of being is for authorised designers to work together with non-authorised designers, to raise each other’s capability by flipping between our needs for our individual and communal capability. These ways of designing are already being tested under the monikers of do-it-yourself, DIY, do-it-together, DIT and do-it-with-others, DIWO. Perhaps, we should add, DIWN, do-it-with-nature, i.e. do it in symbiosis with nature.

Designs must be open and open-ended and, so, be capable of being adapted and adapting to changing circumstances, to new contingent realities.

17 di Salvo, C. (2012). *Adversarial Design*, p7. Cambridge, Massachusetts, MA: MIT Press.

18 Max-Neef, M. (1991). *Human Scale Development*. Cambridge: Apex Press. Available at http://www.area-net.org/fileadmin/user_upload/papers/Max-neef_Human_Scale_development.pdf

19 See ‘Deep ecology’, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_ecology

20 Lovelock, James (2000) [1979]. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

21 See, for example, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_approach

This open-ended-ness brings us neatly into how anthro- might combine with bio-²² and non-bio. Perhaps the way forward is to simply embrace dynamic, constant change as the underpinning rhythm of life, which design can facilitate to encourage flourishing for all vibrant matter. How might this be exemplified in a new urban ecology?

Towards a transitional, adaptive urban ecology

A guiding principle to help us with transitions, from one state or condition to a new one, might be what I call return on giving, ROG²³ – you put in and later, sometimes much later, sometimes several human generations later, you (or your progeny) receive something back.

Perhaps I can capture the spirit of an urban ecology in transition by showing some images. These transitions appear in personal/private/semi-private/semi-public and public spaces; they also appear in forms of spatial arrangement in synchronous, real-time interaction through digital and technological means²⁴; and they also exist in conceptual or mental spaces. Their presence as 'design f(r)ictionsto refabulate the commonplace' (after Mallo²⁵) offers designers exciting opportunities to co-design and co-create new relations and new functionings. These facilitate transition because they disturb the existing power structures by extending people's capabilities and freedoms.

About the Author

I have worked in design and sustainability thinking and practice in academia and industry (2000s to present day), the media industry (1990s) and my own landscape design & build company (1980s). I am well known as a writer who actively promotes design thinking, research and practice to encourage transition to more sustainable ways of living - my books include Design Activism, The Eco-design Handbook, The Eco-Travel Handbook.

My aim is to lever positive change for sustainability transition by applying design to experiment with new ideas of enterprise, socially driven innovation, and the development of alternative economies for Our Commons.

22 Myers, W. (2012). Bio Design. Nature, Science, Creativity. London, UK: Thames & Hudson.

23 A term I learnt from a conversation with Patrick Delalandre at SKEMA, Sophia Antipolis, Nice, FR in January 2014.

24 Fuad-Luke, A. (2013). 'Design activism: Consensus, Dissensus and Transitional Practices'. In, S. Walker and J. Girard. eds. The Handbook of Design for Sustainability, London, UK: Bloomsbury. pp.466-487.

25 Mallo, ibid.

Correlation is Dismantling our Urban Narratives: A Lament and a Plea

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ABSTRACT

Data mining has come to the fore in recent years as a way of analysing large data sets through identifying patterns. This is increasingly being used to shape decision-making, including in urban planning and design. Michael Kaethler lays out his fears in a lament that the correlation-based approach found in data mining will disorient the emergence and retention of urban narratives. He argues that the story telling that occurs, internally and externally, relies on a causal narrative, which is threatened by a data-centred approach. Saba Golchehr provides a rebuttal in the postscript, a defence of data mining as a new means through which socially innovative narratives can evolve. She argues this requires an open mind and a non-dogmatic approach in order to use correlation as the starting point for the narratives we create.

TAGS

Data Mining, Narratives, Urban Planning

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1. A Lament

by Michael Kaethler

Sandwiched among chapters of sharp scientific reason and penetrating philosophic chin scratching you have found this, my lament. There is little space afforded to laments in today's more thoughtful publications, or if there is, it must be couched in academic nomenclature and cushioned by a bed of citations. As much as I try to keep to the tradition of a lament, I regress, cite works, offer slippery arguments and send the reader here and there before the passionate grand denouement.

This chapter is inspired by my fear of correlation. An utmost distaste towards the quick-and-slippery foundations established through facile observation without care or concern of what begot what, and what will be begot. It is a fear of technology streamlined on levels, which are imperceptible, impregnable to our reason, but somehow based upon our naiveties of power and pleasure. I make assumptions rooted in a love of literature, reflecting a plea for a greater sense of poetry in the everyday; a plea for the city to be understood socially, morphologically, processively as a set of causal narrative threads, like tangled strings of a vast harp, ordered but chaotic, sensible but off-key.

To begin with, I ask the reader, you, to ponder an experience at a supermarket. You enter; the familiar sterile lights welcome you, easy music interrupted by occasional intercom announcements. You search for diapers (nappies) for your young child (yes, you know the one). Box upon box of pastel coloured

packages demand your attention, urging you to select one and only one and specifically that one. But you become distracted, you look to your right and there, next to the diapers are several shelves of beer. "Hmmm..." You mumble to yourself, rather amused, "that's odd". But you continue on your way, undeterred, diapers in hand, and now to locate ingredients for tonight's dinner. You notice nothing else amiss; the yogurt is next to the cheese and toothpaste shelved near the hand soap. But the beer, why next to the diapers?

You return next week to the same supermarket, the sterile lights, rumbles on the intercom etc... This time you can't locate the bread. You circumnavigate the maze of shelves, still nothing. You lose hope, you despair, and you break down and ask the young man stacking shelves. "It's next to the stationary", he casually replies. You look startled; he doesn't catch your eye. You find the bread and you also find some duct tape that you've been meaning to buy.

The parable of the supermarket elicits the ordering we come to expect in our daily lives. We search for order and project order on to the multiple experiences we have throughout our day. In the supermarket, we demand to have order, some type of order. But what if there is an order, a 'higher' order, and one that works 'better', more efficiently, but that we cannot comprehend. What if our lumping dairy products together isn't the most efficient way to stock shelves?

One of the most common examples of data mining, one that is shrouded in considerable myth, is

the correlation between consumers buying diapers and beer. The story goes that a supermarket chain in the US decided to take a large volume of sales data and look for patterns according to different criteria – gender, day of the week, and purchasing habits. They found that on Saturdays, there was a tendency for men buying diapers to also buy beer. It appeared that men with new-borns wanted to knock-back a few cold ones too. The store, thereafter, started stocking beer next to diapers on Saturdays.

Data mining is the process of finding correlations across multiple fields of relational data in order to identify useful information – in this case, increasing revenue. Its starting point is not for instance, “we have a problem with selling beer to young men, let’s analyse their shopping habits.” The algorithm doesn’t have an inbuilt idea, it is not testing a hypothesis, it is an automatic or semi-automatic analysis of large volumes of data in order to extract patterns. This allows for relatively quick and easy inquiries of the data-field world around us, even if we don’t know what questions we are seeking answers for.

What if we apply this logic onto cities? What if the minutiae of the everyday is shaken up and spilled out in new sequencing and order; a city as a self-governing complex adaptive system, run by algorithms and bespectacled managers humming and hawing over performance measurement?

Cities, what many considered the battleground of ideology, are now becoming petri dishes for science. IBM has its Smarter Cities programme, Cisco has a Smart+Connected Communities Institute, and likewise, so does Samsung, Intel, and the list goes on. What was once a question of justice of the city or right to the city has now been transformed into quantifiables – efficiency, resilience and sustainability. Urban futures are being shaped by questions posed from the sciences and less so from the hu-

manities. At the heart of this are technical developments, which allow large data sets to be analysed and compared. This is made possible by the surplus of data now in digital form, such as mobility tracking, consumption habits, and social activities. These can be analysed through algorithms discovering correlations that can be used for ‘tuning’ the system (is there a spectrum between in-tune and out-of-tune?). Authors like Morozov (2013) argue that this falls into an approach of ‘solutionism’, allowing for complexity to be translated into data, processed by computers and optimized with the ‘right’ algorithm. There are obvious issues to take up with this datafication, not least the reductive approach to the complexity of human agglomeration (such as cities). However, what I wail about here is the disorienting affects of correlative decision making on planning and the consequent urban experience. As every social science student is made to memorise, “correlation does not imply causation”. However, what we’ve also neglected to keep in mind is that correlation results in weak and nonsensical storylines.

“We dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.”
Barbara Hardy (1968)

As data mining finds patterns through computer processing, the human mind constructs narratives for a not so dissimilar purpose. Narratives are a sense-making device bringing alignment to complexity. They play a significant role in the development of consciousness (Dennett, 1992), personal identity (Nelson & Lindemann, 2001) as well as in establishing the coherence of the world around us (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). Narratives are based on singular causation – a line or multiple threads of events, which are based on a temporal order, and which is made coherent through the linkage of the

line of events through that temporal order. Paul Ricoeur (1981) argues that narratives construct 'meaningful totalities out of scattered events' and that to construct and follow a narrative we must be able to 'extract a configuration from a succession'. We use narratives to give order to the world around us, making it believable.

The influential urban thinker Kevin Lynch (1982) had a few things to say on this related to our experience of the city. In his attempt at making sense of how people experience the city, he came to the conclusion that legibility by inhabitants is the recipe for a well-designed space. This impacts the visual and functional quality of the city, shaping how we identify with that space and perhaps with others with whom we share that space. As urban inhabitants, he argues we seek out comprehensible patterns in our surroundings, patterns which make sense of the complexity, in order that our perceptions of various occurrences can be joined and given sense. He argues that being able to order things in one's mind, such as the urban spaces around us, enables us to deal with larger and more complex wholes.

This is not about creating clean geometrical urban spaces; he wilfully acknowledges that what may appear to be chaos for the outsider is ordered for the native dweller. Order may appear differently depending on perspective but preserves its character through either its consistency or that its changes are logical to that order. In short, what Kevin Lynch means by order is legibility, the piecing together of space so that it can be ordered and, in a broad stroke, read through a narrative.

I prefer not to go down the bumpy road of grand narratives, instead I side with the small *petits récits*. I simply want to focus on the lived sense-making device that we use to experience the spaces and order the processes around us. I am talking about the logic of the everyday movements and experiences of the city. For most of us, we expe-

rience the urban morphology less as a monstrous pop-up book of braille and more as spaces where we conduct our daily routines. Whether we realise it or not, Lynch is right, we anticipate certain order and rely on this to carry out our activities and sustain a grasp on the world around us. City spaces are legible because we can find a degree of order in them. This is, of course enhanced, if this understanding is scaled up/or down to an ideological level. For example, Franco's Barcelona witnessed the transformation of a number of public squares into parking lots. I'm sure it made some sense to the inhabitants considering traffic congestion and the incessant problem of locating parking spaces. But it made more sense read through political ideology, this was a political act, public assembly was discouraged. Likewise, the giant Rolex billboards were surely a tad confusing to Muscovites as they perambulated through Red Square. But after a few years, I assume that being insulted by western decadence became part of their understanding of a space that had previously symbolised resistance and revolution. Placing it within the narrative of hyper-capitalism, does indeed help make sense of their daily experience of that space.

And now we return to the question of data mining, can it, in its complex algorithmic genius, provide the conditions that facilitate urban narratives? Or will correlations with their purported apolitical nature prove too disorienting for the entwining of narrational strands?

In 2013, a data set of 10 million journeys on London's cycle hire scheme (aka Boris Bikes) were analysed looking for correlations, and correlations they found. The research, carried out by Beecham and Wood (2013), showed distinct patterns of bicycle usage according to gender lines: for example, the frequency and time of use as well as destination. One of their findings is that women are 9% less likely to cross the Thames by bicycle. What does this mean for decision making such as urban

planning and design? Will we witness changes to target women, motivating them to cross bridges making them feel more welcome (a dash of new colour, perhaps?) or new bike stations located near the Thames so women can park their bicycles, walk across and then take another one on the other side? These are some of the responses that might make sense if we adhere only to correlative thinking. But instead, hopefully, we take this as a starting point to look into gendered cycling habits and why women are not cycling across the Thames — is it a bigger question of infrastructure and safety or a coincidence resulting from anomalous commuting patterns?

This example demonstrates the need for exploring the causal elements behind patterns in data sets. However, it is often costly and time consuming to do so, especially compared with algorithmic processing. Developers in London are now using data-sets as a tool to justify changes in urban morphology, shaping zoning laws and traffic flows based on nothing but data-sets. It appears that a growing number of individuals involved in the shaping of our cities accept that correlation does in fact imply causation.

It would be amiss of me not to mention that data mining does offer a new and tantalising way of exploring patterns in the world around us. In an ideal context, it could bear a number of benefits. However, I suspect its seduction is too great and its claim of representing disinterested data too easily misappropriated by those seeking to reproduce power relations.

And now back to my lament. I envision a city being perpetually tuned by the exigencies of sustainability, resilience and efficiency. Tuning occurs by encapsulated devices, impregnable to simple human understanding and thus unquestionable in its great wisdom. Hark, listen, the data speaks, it is madness to challenge the wisdom of, say, 10 mil-

lion logged bicycle journeys. I imagine decision making being increasingly lodged in the logic of correlation, where causality is too tiresome an endeavour to explore. And I imagine a city where changes occur regularly and without clarification, explanations are not correlations' strong points; such changes freckling our daily lives, being left without a guide to help form urban narratives except for the empty ideology of resilience, efficiency, and sustainability. The end is not nigh. Indeed, inhabitants will continue to create narratives of their urban experiences. But with incomprehensible changes, it is harder to read the context and create coherent narratives that link space and our experience of it—think of a supermarket where beer and diapers are natural bedfellows this month, next month it's cat food and dental floss. The singular causality, where we can read present phenomena through its emergent context becomes increasingly arduous when the emergent is established on algorithms and correlations. Instead, I make an appeal against efficiency, an entreaty for a more reflective method of analysis and planning, one that does not seek to include the complexity of millions of data but instead one that embraces the complexity of causality in the myriad of social and morphological processes that constitute our urban experiences. And so I lament.

2. A Postscriptum Plea

by: Saba Golchehr

As much as I, along with many critical thinkers in the field, agree that Smart Cities are not the way to go, I am growing tired and wary of the Smart City doomsayers and Big Data naysayers. Instead of fighting the alleged 'fourth paradigm', why not embrace the possibilities enabled by these technological advances? Instead of antagonizing neo-liberal tendencies of correlation-driven decision-making, why not strive to find new ways of using correlations to our advantage?

Leading examples within the Big Data debate still primarily exist of the exceedingly celebrated successes of companies such as Amazon, Google or Walmart. However, there is a far wider, and for a large part yet undiscovered, field of Big Data possibilities. Kenn Cukier (in Chadwick, 2013) compares it to our understanding of the World Wide Web in 1994. There were a lot of competing definitions, and in hindsight that has proven to be a good thing, we were not confining its possibilities by definitional borders. So why should we do so now? One might say that data mining is restricted to uncovering correlations, but that doesn't mean that our journey needs to end there. Take for instance the London bicycle example. It might be that the underlying problem of the meager number female users is the lack of (a sense of) security. Data mining allows us to make sense of the vast amount of data that's available to us today, but it doesn't mean that we should be constrained by its findings. While data mining doesn't provide definitive answers, it can however direct our attention to certain correlative phenomena that are worth being explored further. We shouldn't dismiss our existing knowledge on urban environments developed and shaped by experiences over time, however we shouldn't be so eager to reject the contemporary technological evolution either. I believe it is our responsibility to evolve in our profession along with the technology that is available to us.

While there are currently several professionals within urban and architectural planning practice and research concerned with data mining explorations, overall a false dichotomy seems to be emerging in this field with professionals that aim for participation, citizen empowerment and co-creation on the one hand, and data-loving, pattern-mining, technology admirers on the other. Again we step into the pitfall of black-and-white thinking: either top-down Smart Cities or a bottom-up participation society, either data-driven or theory-driven approaches, either correlation or

causation. These false dilemmas merely restrict us in our professional evolution. Our mission should set sail to explore the grey area in-between the two: Big Data and data mining for human-centred explorations that are not focused on optimising processes in the city, but on empowering citizens to become active agents of change in their environments.

Therefore I plead: Let us use smart technologies for new goals that we set for the city, goals that are not about efficiency and optimization of urban systems but about citizens, communities, and their empowerment in urban decision-making processes – in effect, empowering new bold urban narratives. There are already some existing examples of digital tools aimed at civic empowerment, developed by individual programmers during Hackathons or by non-profit organizations such as Code for America (www.codeforamerica.org). What these civic applications however often lack is a broader (theoretical) understanding of participation. The city, with its public goods and services, is often seen as a service, and (local) governments as the suppliers of these services. With reference to Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969), these applications merely reach citizen consultation, and therefore are nothing more than tokenism. In order to reach true citizen empowerment, we should aim for citizen control. How can data-driven approaches help us to achieve this? There is still a widely open field for us to explore. This should motivate us to test new smart applications, collect data through these digital tools and build our own archive of data to give us new insights in our profession. Correlation is the start for exploring the narratives of causation. So let's become smart.

About the Authors

Michael Kaethler is a Ph.D candidate at KU Leuven and research fellow on the Marie Curie project TRADERS. His research focuses on sociology of knowledge and the curatorial. Previously, he was involved in policy formation and research of human rights in development and post-conflict contexts. He holds an MA in Slavonic and Central Eastern Studies from the University of Glasgow and an M.Eng in Human Settlements from KU Leuven.

Saba Golchehr is a Ph.D researcher at the Royal College of Art and a Research Fellow in the Marie Curie project TRADERS: 'Training Art and Design Researchers for Participation in Public Space' (tr-ad-ers.eu). Her research questions the potential role of Big Data and data mining in design for public space, and explores whether this new method can help designers sustain participation. She holds an MSc in Urbanism (Spatial Planning and Strategy) from Delft University of Technology, where she graduated with distinction, with an awarded thesis on empowering marginalized groups in urban regeneration through participation in local public space.

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video-statement 04 | Belgium calling Italy



Video-statement from Nik Baerten for the
DESIS Philosophy Talk at School of Design
- Politecnico di Milano (Milan, May 2014)

To view the full video:

<https://youtu.be/LWLnMhycgnM>



*Stories are only
as good as the
room they leave for
others to use their
imagination.*



Video-statement 05 | France calling Italy

Video-statement by Sophie Krier for the
DESI Philosophy Talk at IED Milan -
Cumulus Conference (Milan, June 2015)

To view the full video:

https://youtu.be/kJT6jSzY_FQ

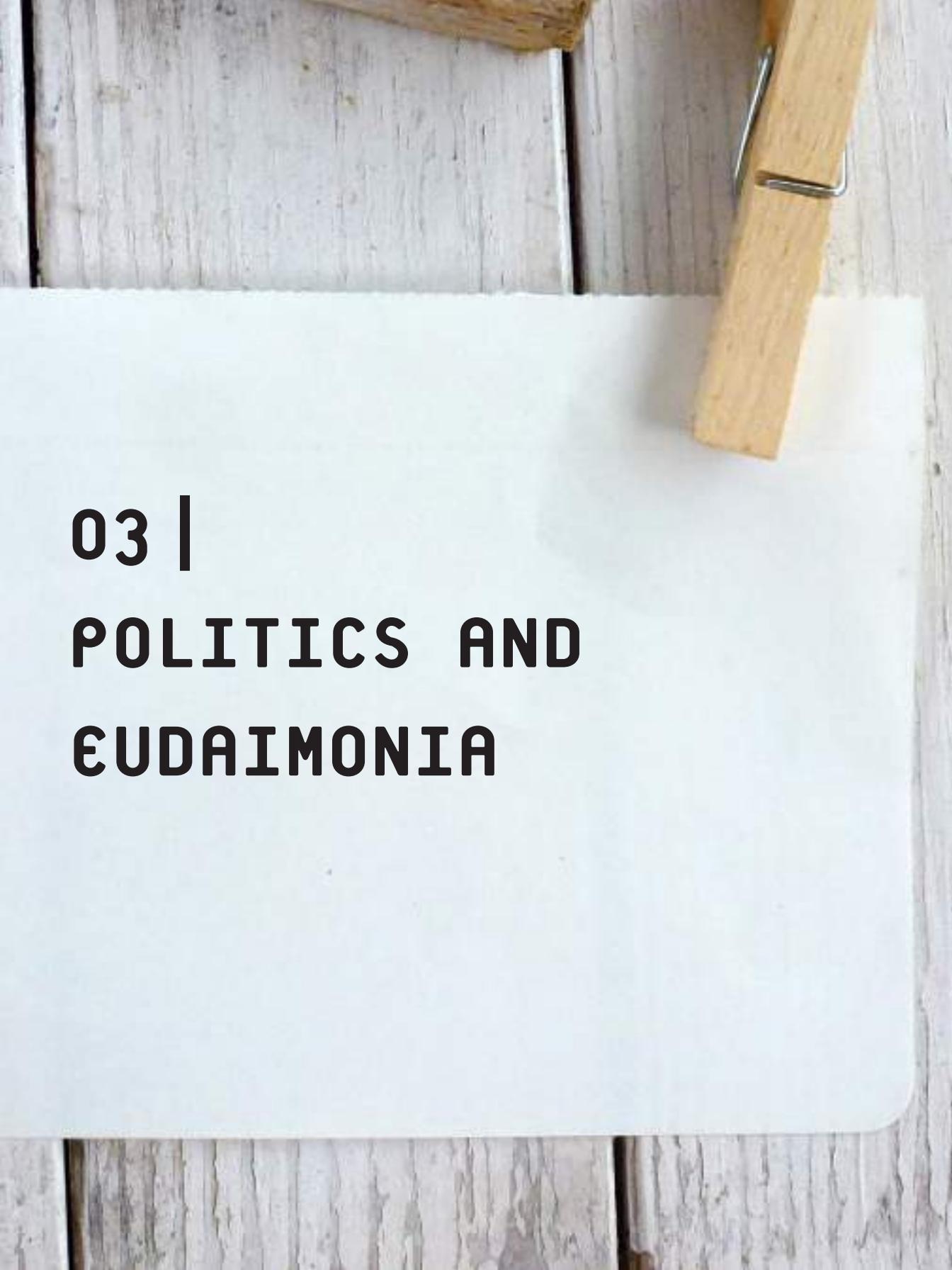
*For me, and it is also linked
to surviving, without culture
men cannot survive.*

*So we really need to connect
with the landscape inside us.
For me, storytelling is a bit
like trying to shape a
collective landscape, trying
to also learn to read it first,
before you can actually
shape it.*

*For me this is where there
is a lot to think about
in this relation between
walking, writing, storytelling
and moving through the
landscape.*





A wooden clothespin is positioned at the top right corner of a white, rectangular piece of paper. The paper is placed on a light-colored wooden surface with visible vertical grain patterns. The clothespin is made of light-colored wood and has a silver metal spring mechanism. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and a faint horizontal crease near the top edge.

03 |

**POLITICS AND
EUDAIMONIA**

03 | Politics and eudaimonia

by: Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam, Francesca Piredda and Virginia Tassinari

“Eudaimonia means neither happiness nor beatitude; it cannot be translated and perhaps cannot even be explained. It has the connotation of blessedness, but without any religious overtones, and it means literally something like the well-being of the daimon who accompanies each man throughout life, who is his distinct identity, but appears and is visible only to others. Unlike happiness, therefore, which is a passing mood, and unlike good fortune, which one may have at certain periods of life and lack in others, eudaimonia, like life itself, is a lasting state of being which is neither subject to change nor capable of effecting change.”

Hannah Arendt¹

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt believes that storytelling is a tool that can be used to reopen the idea of public space and to facilitate dialogue/action among citizens in order to attain a more participative society. In her book *The Human Condition*² she says that storytelling is essentially the act of recognizing what is hiding outside the mainstream and to be able to read it, to translate it and to tell its story. She regards storytelling as the only real political action, as it opens up the idea of public space where everybody is invited to take part in the discussion in which decisions about the polis – the common realm – are taken together.

This act of telling stories brings together the act of telling and the act of making. To her, storytelling is an action taking place through words. She agrees with Benjamin's idea that through storytelling the potentialities of what is already there, but has not had the chance to become relevant, finally have the chance to become realized and to demonstrate their own significance.

One action that might in Arendt's opinion be enabled by storytelling is the opening of the public space to participation, possibly empowering a fully democratic process of active citizenship to take place. These thoughts are remarkably close to what at first glance appears to be the aims and meaning of practices of storytelling in design for social innovation. When we act as storytellers in this sense, we potentially (but not necessarily) have a political impact on society; we might – as citizens among citizens - enable a collaborative construction of the public realm.

Arendt says that in Ancient Greece storytelling was used as the principal way of constructing the public sphere. Every day, citizens experienced how to create a common voice by means of debates taking place in the Agora. It was through this dialogue, which often became forceful, that citizens could form a collective voice with many tones and shades. These dialogues were then translated into concrete actions, thus giving shape to the com-

1 Arendt, H. (1958)

2 Ibidem.

mon realm. In Greek theatre, the citizens' voice was embodied by the figure of the "choir". They could recognize themselves in the daily activity of the dialogue in the Agorà. The choir allowed citizens to acknowledge that they were not only individual voices: together they formed a body where the views of individuals were taken into account, and where decision making was a societal process involving multiple points of view.

This process is dynamic and allows citizens to construct the common sphere. The discussion, as in the Agorà, is "poetic"; it is never speculation for speculation's sake. Decision making thus coincides with speculation that, in turn, coincides with a performative action shaping the common sphere. There is no discussion that does not translate into action. This participation in the common sphere enables the citizens to find their own happiness. The Greek word for happiness is "eu-daimonia", or literally "good daimon". If one finds good daimon, one's original vocation, then one has the possibility to access "eu-daimonia". The daimon is the real image of the self, and is often overshadowed by the expectations of others, conforming or lack of reflection. It is who we really are: the original nature of man. By who is really "man"?

Arendt goes back to Aristotle's definition that man is a political animal, "zoon politikon". To participate in the construction of the common realm and to be an active component of societal life is the most profound human vocation. He, who finds his civic vocation, or his intrinsically political nature, is he who finds his good daimon, his real self. As he has found his role in society, he has also found his happiness. Arendt sees this as the meaning of the word "hero"; not a superman, but rather one who contributes to the construction of the public sphere. In the theatre it is the choir who tells the stories of those heroes and allows the role of the hero – he who assumes responsibility in society – to emerge. By means of those stories being enacted, citizens were

also able to recognize their own vocation, their own happiness within the common sphere. They too could be a hero in their daily life and assume their own responsibilities in the common realm.

This idea of politics disappeared after the birth of representative democracy in ancient Rome; participation in the public realm no longer existed. And for Arendt, the meaning of storytelling changed after the decline of participatory democracy that characterized ancient Greece. Now, the only possible understanding of storytelling for her is to collect stories of the fragments, of narrations which result from the failure of mainstream narratives characteristic of modernity. Yet, this new understanding of storytelling has the same ability to empower people to become a hero, i.e. to go beyond the ideas of politics suggested by contemporary mainstream narratives – where the citizens, in the best case, simply choose someone to represent them in the political sphere – and take an active role in society.

The Greek meaning of the hero and his happiness has been disregarded in contemporary Western society. The hero is understood as he who takes it all, the winner. Happiness is often misguided by the pursuit of possessions and ambition. In this contemporary crisis of values and priorities of Western society, Arendt foresees the possibility for storytelling to once again support the role of the Greek hero and the meaning of his happiness, despite the sometimes difficult situations he has to face. The action of telling the stories of these fragments will give renewed access to the Greek meaning of hero and happiness, where the political/social nature of humanity is again taken into account when evaluating what makes people happy in their everyday life.

Designers and politics

The stories of design for social innovation that we encounter when designing for empowering

and increasing social innovation seem to be these kinds of fragmentary, residual, generative, poetic, deeply “political” stories. If one views design for social innovation practices through the lens of Arendt’s line of reasoning, when we tell stories of social innovation we potentially contribute to opening up the public realm. Like the choir in Ancient Greece, designers may also facilitate discussions and actions that empower individual citizens to participate in the construction of the common realm. The stories of social innovation we tell may point to the fact that there is happiness for those who find their own (active) role and responsibility in society.

Grassroots initiatives are based on visions to be shaped and actions to be performed: envisioning and enacting stories means building a mythology of everyday social innovation where people are heroes of everyday life³. By telling stories of these heroes who try to understand and fully live their vocation in society, we can inspire and eventually empower other citizens – including ourselves – to follow these paths.

Such a collaborative construction of the public sphere is not a peaceful process. Experience says that agonism is what gives society its dynamism and the energy to grow⁴. Arendt says that politics does not exclude conflict. Narratology teaches us that we can talk about “real” stories only when there is a conflict activating a plot. This means that a story only makes sense when one can identify tensions towards the challenges being faced and the role of

the hero can only emerge when one considers the tensions and conflicts that are initiating the plots⁵.

We can say that each stage of the design process is characterized by a specific conflict and has its own form of storytelling⁶. As storytellers, we should not be afraid of relating to these fractures, dialectics and movements; while telling stories of social innovation we should not be scared of conflict.

In conclusion, reflecting on the political value of storytelling in Arendt’s philosophy leads us to consider the idea of politics that we want to convey when we tell stories of social innovation. Which idea of politics do we want to sanction by means of our work? Are we also embracing the idea of being an active citizen in our own life? Are we open to being inspired by these alternative narratives, and to personally contributing to a more participatory idea of politics and society? By telling stories of everyday “heroes”, have we ever witnessed a transformation in the approach towards the common realm in people we work with within our own projects and in our own life? Have we ever experienced the stories we tell to help the generation of “eudaimonia” (in others and in ourselves)? What can we eventually do to make our stories more transformative⁷ – of society and of ourselves?

At the same time, when working at enabling more participation in the common realm, we are also running a risk that the practices we are co-creating with other citizens could be part of the existing system, the ‘business as usual’ that we are in

3 See the interview to Virginia Tassinari for N4V talking about Rancière - <http://n4v.imagishub.it>. In terms of practices, see also the projects developed by Imagis lab and the students of the School of Design – Politecnico di Milano for Plug Social TV (www.facebook.com/plugsocialtv). All the stories published on Plug Social TV are part of main narrative worlds, built on the base of the exploration activities (collecting stories and iconographic repertoires, interviews, etc.) according to the topic of the workshop: “everyday heroes”. The main goal is to experience audiovisual storytelling applied to specific contexts and communities, in order to build new possible visions and scenarios. People who are already active in real life, become the main characters in fictional worlds.

4 See Mouffe (2006) and DiSalvo (2012). Stories coming from conflicts might represent the engines ‘driving’ a story to its end. The inner being (interior world) clashes with the external world of societal conditions and constraints.

5 As Jacques Rancière (2004) notes, Arendt does not stress enough the idea of the tension in the common realm.

Manzini (2015) points out that stories coming from conflicts might represent the engines ‘driving’ a story to its end. The inner being (interior world) clashes with the external world of societal conditions and constraints.

6 Another element we should keep into mind is that we need to choose the kind of relationships that we want to establish with others when we listen to and tell stories in a collaborative way, echoing the choir of ancient Greece (see the articles in this book by Francesca Antonacci and Mika Tuomola). This is also needs to be thought and designed.

7 Here we intend transformation as a transformation of the approach of people towards the common realm (and, therefore, the transformation takes place in society).

fact working to change. Our collective actions for change could be construed as some form of citizen participation, which would give the illusion of a participative society that is not yet in place, or these actions could create the “states of exceptions” that are needed for the status quo to confirm its own authority⁸. The collaborative initiatives we work on often risk being instrumental; a sort of “social greenwashing” for cities or local authorities, a cheap and easy tool for them to give the illusion of solving societal issues in their region⁹. Are we aware of these risks when we design collaborative services and initiatives? How do we eventually deal with these risks in telling stories of social innovation? Do we always show this complexity and eventually portray these risks in the stories we tell?

* See page 232 for references.

8 Agamben, G. (2003). *Lo stato di eccezione.*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
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9 See the DESIS Philosophy Talk “From Welfare state to partner state”, Liege 2012 (with Ezio Manzini, Pelle Ehn, Adam Thorpe, Lorraine Gamman, Andrea Botero, Per Anders Hillgren, Eduardo Staszowski, Francois Jegou, Margherita Pillan, Virginia Tassinari, Nik Baerten).

How does storytelling unlock the potentialities of communities; the designer-client relationship?

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ABSTRACT

When looking at research that explores approaches to designing, it is apparent that some people believe adopting a storytelling perspective can be fruitful in garnering new knowledge. This paper adopts a storytelling perspective when analysing design pitches, with the intent of understanding how an approach to storytelling can unlock potentialities in the audience. More specifically, these potentialities include: an appreciation of the concept's value; an ability to discuss a concept critically; and to be able to think more holistically around the concept territory. This context is particularly important in understanding the relationship between designer and client.

To devise a theoretical framework to illustrate the relationship between storytelling approach and these potentialities, twenty-five design pitches were observed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with their audiences. This paper focuses on a design pitch delivered by designers from Northumbria University to employees of The Traffic Penalty Tribunal, presenting a concept for a new parking appeals service. This example acts as a tool for illustrating the findings communicated in the theoretical framework devised after the analysis of the interviews.

It is proposed that acknowledging a user's perspective and cultural beliefs, being diverse and different, detailing concept development, and using imagery (in particular analogy), are all approaches to storytelling that can play a role in unlocking the potentialities highlighted. However, it is important to state that the framework serves as a tool to encourage the consideration of the impact on the client when approaching storytelling at the design pitch. It is not claiming that taking one of the approaches mentioned would guarantee the unlocking of a related potentiality.

TAGS

Storytelling, Design Pitch

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What's in a story?

McDonnell, Lloyd and Valkenburg (2004, p. 509) propose that storytelling is a useful perspective to adopt when examining collaborative processes as stories represent 'a powerful and an accessible means of sharing knowledge and their value and pervasiveness in conveying knowledge is well-recognised' (Nonaka & Takeushi, 1995; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Collison & Mackenzie, 1999). Consequently, it stands to reason that during a collaborative process, such as those that occur between designers and clients, storytelling will occur in some form during the conveyance of knowledge from one party to another (Leonardi & Bailey, 2008). One such conveyance of knowledge is the design pitch, where designers present concepts to clients in a formal setting at the end of the conceptual design process.

Storytelling occurs in many different contexts, and thus there are many different definitions applied to story. Perhaps the most widely recognised context for storytelling is the storybook, as many look to literature and the written word in order to assemble philosophies for story (Jones, 2006; Ochoa & Osier, 1993). Perhaps a more relevant perspective to the storytelling that occurs at a design pitch is that of psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) who looks at societal interactions to define story. Bruner (1990) provides the following set of criteria for an occurrence of storytelling:

- Action directed towards goal
- Order established between events and states
- Sensitivity towards what is canonical in human

interaction

- The revealing of a narrator's perspective

If we relate these criteria to a design pitch, the relevance becomes apparent. The goal of the story at the design pitch could be the purpose of a concept. For example, if we take a concept for a new road bike, the goal of a story about it could be getting from A to B. An order established between events and states could become the maintenance required such as putting air in the tyres (events), and the various locations on the journey between A and B (states). Sensitivity towards what is canonical in human interaction is central to design as all concepts are created with a user in mind, and the concept itself could be considered the perspective of the designer.

The relationship between storytelling and design has been studied from a wide variety of viewpoints. For example, design researcher Peter Lloyd (2000) examines dialogue between members of design teams in order to extrapolate the stories that they tell. In doing this, he has established the following criteria for what he believes constitutes a story:

- It can be interpreted or read
- Different narrative viewpoints can be included
- There is a sense of closure; a definite ending
- A name can be invented that references the complex of action

However, a verbal exchange during the process of designing is a very different context to a more formal presentation at a design pitch. Therefore,

these constituents have to be viewed critically. The first criterion suggests that a story is interpreted or read. With respect to a design pitch, a story is also heard or watched, both of which also require interpretation. Therefore relating this to a design pitch the criterion might be adapted to state simply that 'it can be interpreted'. The third criterion suggests a sense of closure is required; however, a concept, which by all intentions may require further development, can be told using an open-ended story to stimulate further discussion. Therefore, it is not necessary to fulfil this criterion. Finally, the last criterion suggests that after storytelling, a name is established by an audience to reference the story. When pitching a design concept, it is likely that the name for the story is the name of the concept, and that the storytelling occurring during the design pitch becomes attached to the name, which now acts as a recall for the design pitch.

Important Potentialities

Now that the context and parameters for storytelling at the design pitch have been explored, it is important to establish the potentialities this storytelling attempts to unlock.

With respect to the development of a concept, a number of potentialities can be deemed important. In essence, storytelling at the design pitch will communicate an understanding of a concept to the audience, but more importantly an appreciation of its value. Marketing theorist and practitioner Smith (2007) proposes that when developing concepts, the creation of value is a critical task. If the client sees a value in the concept after understanding what it is and what it does, this may motivate them to take action in terms of developing that concept. Therefore, the first potentiality can be described as 'appreciating value'.

As well as giving someone the motivation to do

something through appreciating its potential value, it is also important to consider how they must do it. In terms of concept development this constitutes being able to critically discuss a concept. When developing a concept critical discussion is used to negotiate necessary changes in order for the concept to become fit for purpose. Therefore, the second potentiality that is desirable to unlock in the audience of a design pitch is 'a capacity for critical discussion'. Schön and Wiggins (2006) promote the importance of critical discussion for concept development and believe that observing a series of artefacts, such as iterative sketches and prototypes, can introduce the critical discussions exchanged between designers that occurred during a design process.

Finally, it is arguable that when developing a concept in a territory that is well understood by the client, it is important to present an alternative way of thinking. For example, framing a concept for a vacuum cleaner as a dirt extraction system may introduce an alternative perspective that allows the client to think more holistically around the project's territory. Adamson et al. (2006) describes an instance of storytelling that likened the job roles of employees at a medical centre to characters in a well-known film. This alternative perspective allowed employees to take a more holistic view of their job roles in relation to the overall operations of the medical centre. The adoption of this alternative way of thinking led to improved internal relations. Therefore the final potentiality that is desirable to unlock is 'more holistic thinking', and this can be achieved through a story that presents alternative perspectives.

A Storytelling Framework for the Design Pitch

To unlock a client's potential to develop a concept, it has been rationalised that the storytelling occurring during a design pitch needs to demonstrate value, stimulate critique, and encourage more ho-

listic thinking. To uncover how approaching storytelling at the design pitch can achieve this a research study was carried out by the author.

In brief, the methodology of the research study involved the conduct of approximately twenty five semi-structure interviews with design pitch observers, including various clients from global organisations such as Unilever and Accenture. They were asked about the impacts observed after the delivery of design pitches, and the relationships that these impacts had with the approaches that designers took whilst storytelling. In total, approximately fifty design pitches were discussed. Transcriptions of these interviews were synthesised using a thematic analysis to establish a framework of relationships between approach and impact. This framework acts as a prompt for designers to philosophise ways of presenting concepts, with the impact on the client in mind. An overview of the relevant findings is presented here, along with pertinent examples from a design pitch belonging to a project entitled 'Parking Appeals'. This project required designers to present new products and services to stimulate behavioural changes in the general public of the United Kingdom with respect to car parking. Their client was The Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

Concerning the demonstration of value during a design pitch, two storytelling approaches proved to indicate value to employees across all of the organisations involved in the study. The first approach was acknowledging a user's perspective or cultural belief during the telling of a story. It transpired that the contextualisation provided in doing this emphasised the value of the concept. The second approach was being diverse and different in the telling of a story. This diversity or difference was achieved in various ways. In some instances, it was achieved through storytelling mode (such as using stop-frame animation rather than a PowerPoint presentation); in other instances it was

achieved through storytelling content (such as presenting an idea with a metaphor, rather than a literal explanation). However, in spite of the way that diversity or difference was achieved, interview participants agreed that judging the story as diverse or different attributed a quality of rarity to the concept, which in turn was perceived as valuable.

An example of diversity and difference in the pitch belonging to the Parking Appeals project was encompassed by a story told using the medium of Twitter. Essentially, snippets from a fictional Civil Enforcement Officer's (those charged with ticketing illegally parked cars) Twitter account were shown, which documented his humorous accounts and images of the observations made on his daily routine. This alternative platform for the communication of a Civil Enforcement Officers experience was perceived as a valuable piece of communication which became widely known amongst employees of The Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

Concerning the stimulation of critique, a further two storytelling approaches proved to open critical discussions about design concepts amongst employees across all of the organisations involved in the study. The first was revealing concept developments during the telling of a story. It proved that a familiarity with the design process gave employees more confidence in having critical discussions about them. The second approach was including imagery, in particular analogy, in the story. As an analogy proposes an idea in an abstracted way, this awoken a curiosity in the clients. They were compelled to uncover the apparent relevance of the analogy in order to understand why it had been used. This prompted them to question its appropriateness and thus, critical discussion ensued.

An example where an analogy was made that stimulated critical discussion during the pitch belonging to the Parking Appeals project was when designers referred to Civil Enforcement Officers as

Parking Gurus. This stimulated The Traffic Penalty Tribunal to question the job role of a Civil Enforcement Officers, considering whether it should be to provide guidance on appropriate parking, rather than to punish those who broke the law.

Finally, concerning the encouragement of more holistic thinking, another two approaches to storytelling proved effective across all the organisations involved in the study. The first approach, similarly to demonstrating value, was being diverse or different in the telling of a story. However, this specifically related to storytelling content, not mode. It became apparent that the novelty of telling a story with diverse or different content often triggered the adoption of an alternative perspective about a particular aspect of a project. The second approach, similarly to stimulating critique, was including imagery, in particular analogy, in the story. As well as awakening a curiosity, prompting alternative thinking in the client, analogies also proved to manifest a different or diverse perspective, presenting a novel idea triggering the adoption of an alternative viewpoint on an often overlooked aspect of a project.

Revisiting the analogy made in the Parking Appeals project's design pitch, by referring to Civil Enforcement Officers as Parking Gurus, it can be seen that this also encouraged more holistic thinking in The Traffic Penalty Tribunal. After establishing a new name, a character was created (Gary the Guru) and a story was told about him that was likened to stories told about characters such as Postman Pat and Bob the Builder. As these characters are well respected, well liked members of their communities, The Traffic Penalty Tribunal adopted the opinion that the perception of Civil Enforcement Officers needed to change.



Figure 1: Gary the Guru

Summary

The relevant findings of the research study discussed in the previous section are presented in figure 2.

It is important to point out that this framework serves as a tool to encourage the consideration of the impact on the client when approaching storytelling at the design pitch. It is not claiming that taking one of the approaches mentioned will guarantee the related impact. As change management strategist Steven Denning (2007, p. xxi) points out, 'storytelling is not a panacea for eliciting change. It can only be as good as the underlying idea being conveyed'. The same is true for concept development, if a client is of the opinion that a concept is flawed due to their own inherent experiences of the world, a story will not change this. However, in spite of this, should a concept be worthy of development storytelling should be viewed as a vehicle to drive it forward. Therefore, it is always important to tell the right story.

About the Author

David's experience within the design industry predominantly consists of the management of service and product development projects within the health sector (NHS) and FMCG industry (Unilever). His research focuses on understanding the relationship between design and storytelling. In particular, he relates storytelling approaches designers take during a design pitch to their impact on a client's ability to: understand, value, and think more critically and holistically about a concept.

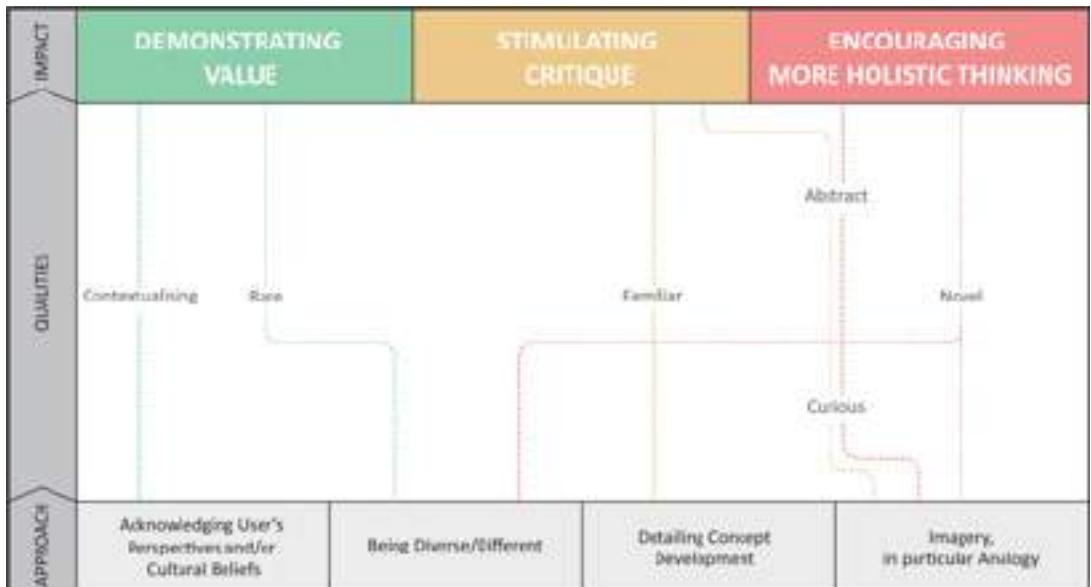


Figure 2: Storytelling at the Design Pitch, relating Approach to Impact

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The designer as the lens

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ABSTRACT

This brief reflective article presents a perspective on the role of the (communication) designer and the process of storytelling within social innovation and sustainability. In order to develop an understanding of what storytelling is as a tool that enables greater understanding between people and the surrounding world, we draw upon Benjamin Walter's proposition of the attributes that make someone a story-teller. We critique the role of the designer by proposing one to be as a lens and by highlighting the designers inherent capacity to bring forth details of people and places which would otherwise be unnoticeable and marginal to mainstream society.

TAGS

Communication Design, Reflective Practice, Marginal Storytelling

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"The universe is made of stories, not of atoms."

Muriel Rukeyser "The speed of darkness"
(1968)

In the same way that atoms live microscopically, some stories can live unnoticed if not placed under a lens. This is the case of many emerging initiatives that promote sustainability across industry sectors worldwide. In this space the designer plays a determinative role to magnify and frame essential stories of this world in constant transformation, stories which are often shy in their nature, imperceptible and on the periphery of mainstream.

Storytelling as a method in design has gained large momentum over the last decade. Frameworks, media and technological advances are vastly explored, whether to communicate complex information through narrative and visualization (Lankow, 2012; Klaten, 2011) or to engage actors in systems, interactions and experiences (Erickson, 1996; Brooks, 2010). However, with the purpose to understand how the designer himself plays a role in listening and telling the story of things on the edge of the mainstream, the unconventional or unfamiliar, I will take a step back to reflect on the purpose of the art of story-telling and of story-listening.

Storytelling is more than a method. It is a universal ancient means of education, cultural preservation and way of imprinting moral values across soci-

eties and generations. Stories have allowed us to travel both back in time and forward in the future. For a story to exist it requires a time and space, a plot, characters and a narrative voice. The experience of storytelling is vested in the narrative that is, both told and listened. Throughout history, stories have unlocked the potential to aggregate common beliefs and move people to create communities of shared interests. This is still true today, however through very different means and for very different ends. Technology, communication and connectivity has allowed for the constant telling of stories, embedded in the mundane, through complex multiple layers of time and places. Regardless of the technological advances, it is still through storytelling that in fundamental everyday life that we make sense of our existence and our contribution to the wider world.

In the current times of abundance for initiatives promoting more sustainable ways of living, designers play a key role in deciding what stories and details are brought into actuality – what to magnify, what to talk about. The designer as a maker is a native explorer of the world equipped with the tools to discover the most interesting stories in society. However, each designer is also an individual with a background, unique point of view, beliefs and motivations, which inevitably shape the way a story is told and how others take part in that vision - imagining the way things are, were, or could be. I understand this diversity of voices to be a positive trait, a collective of rich potentialities that can feed into each others' narratives and build new ones. I further illustrate this

point borrowing from Walter Benjamin's perspective on the nature of storytelling.

In the late 1930s, in his seminal essay "The Storyteller" Walter Benjamin expressed a deep concern for the oral tradition of storytelling coming to an end. He feared that "experience of value" was decreasing as a consequence of Modernity; technology, industrialisation and new forms of social organization. Storytelling was being replaced by The Novel. Although both narrative formats, the ultimate difference between the two can be paralleled to the difference between speech and writing, voice and text, fundamentally presence and absence. The novel is seen as a solitary experience of the reader, whether storytelling is understood as a participatory and collective experience. The purpose of storytelling is inspiring others through the embedded moral of the story - or "the experience of value". In this perspective, what distinguishes the storyteller from others who tell narratives (such as the novelist) is that the storyteller tells the narrative from experience - whether his own or that of others - and in the process it becomes a shared experience of those who listen. In this sense, when telling stories of unconventional sustainable behaviours, the storyteller (the designer) has an imperative position to bring about positive human value because "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel". This is why the capacity of the designer as a lens is extremely valuable. Through correctly amplifying positive aspects of unconventional sustainable behaviours in a designerly, compelling and engaging way, it guides the listeners to understand why these sustainable behaviours exist and why they matter.

The role of the designer as a story-listener is equally important to that of telling the story. As a lens in the world, the designer needs to be participative and present because people ultimately are the milieu of the craft. These qualities are true

of designers working within social innovation and sustainability, a fertile ground for stories of unconventionality. Throughout time we have been fascinated by stories of novelty; tales of unsung heroes, of travellers in journeys from far away places, of epic places where history was made. As Walter Benjamin recalls, the best stories are "embedded in rooms in which people have died, or rooms where people have been born". Hence, the elements of uniqueness that memorable stories are made of, can be found on the fringe of the mainstream.

This is where I am at odds with Walter Benjamin; "the art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out." On the contrary, I believe it is emerging. We have not lost the ability to exchange experiences. Considering the growing number of social innovation projects inspiring values towards a sustainable good life, the art of storytelling is now extremely important to transform and leverage the audience formally known as "passive listeners" to become "active tellers".

About the Author

Joana is a communication designer and Ph.D candidate at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London. Her thesis "Design for Communication" proposes a collaborative practice for non design-experts that empowers them to design communications that amplify their qualities of sustainability.

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“We are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

- Preamble to the International Workers of the World Constitution, 1905.

Present-futures

Daniel Anthony Rossi and Bettina Schwalm

ABSTRACT

We conduct our research on “possible future realities” using and developing methods through a combination of art, craft, storytelling and experience design practice. Within a structure of experiment and evaluation we develop a strong body of work, as tangible objects, experience and theory. This framework is embodied and comes to live in a collection of narratives, metaphorical descriptions and word creations. They allow us to bend and break reality, to recreate possibilities and uncover potentials. Present-Futures tries to empower people into taking an active role in shaping their own desired future. What we strive to look at is not a prediction or future forecast, but rather an awareness and critical reflection on our current trends and behaviors. The object we create becomes a vehicle, a prop in a narrative. By maintaining a direct connection to the ‘now’, the space of direct action becomes apparent. We render visible future possibilities as alternative realities so “The Future” becomes less abstract. To render our principles and methods visible we decided to walk you through a case study, an experiment conducted in Milan during the Salone del Mobile 2015.



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Welcome to the Best Futures You Ever Had

"Fake it till you make it" he yelled.
"That's it!"

The skype screen flickered.

"What are you talking about?"

"All we need is a way to make them understand their potential, to think about it and to give them a vehicle to eventually use it."

"Them, who is them?"

"I don't know. A bunch of normal people"

"Maybe weird normal would be good..." she smiled. *"OK good. So we need a magical box, a place, time and a vehicle. Sounds easy"*

"Exactly," he laughed.

And so began their new experiment.



THE SPECTACLE

The Milan Furniture Fair (Italian: Salone Internazionale del Mobile di Milano) is a furniture fair held annually in Milan. It is the largest trade fair of its kind in the world. The exhibition showcases the latest in furniture and design from countries around the world. It is considered a leading venue for the display of new products by designers of furniture, lighting and other home furnishings. The show, also known as "Salone", "Milano Salone" and "Milan Design Week," is held every year, usually in April, in the FieraMilano complex in the Milan metropolitan area town of Rho. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan_Furniture_Fair)

*"You can't roll the box over this stone floor.
This place was built in the 17th century."*

–The lady in charge of operations
whispering nervously.

The Magical Booth

A box shaped Trojan Horse. 160cm total dimension, 23 kg, average luggage size. Light spruce wood, 42 pieces including wing-nuts, and screws.

Designed to be:

The Present-Futures 'Fakery' pop-up booth.

The Locations

The Present-Futures 'Fakery' pops up in different locations. It is surprising being that it plays outside of the unspoken etiquette that governs such a spectacle. Appearing and disappearing we blend into all types of spaces.

"Who are you and what are you doing with that structure? Can't you see I'm having an exposition here?"

–Two beady eyes glare from behind a pair of large round sunglasses.

"Oh fantastic! Of course you can make a mess. I love when people see how things work."

–A friendly, inquisitive individual.



TROJAN HORSES

Hiding or masking meaning and intent within the constructs of an experience or an object. This is often connected to the power of context that by placing an object or crafting an experience within a known reality, the effects can be felt and interpreted under real circumstances and with the true dynamics of an existing and familiar framework with 'genuine' stimulus. In this way, meaning should be discovered by the individual, through a personal experience that gives space to interpret and make sense of abstract information. This understanding being confirmed and validated within the information being communicated by the artefact.

SITE SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

Our experiments are situated in everyday environments. We try to communicate the abstract concept of future possibilities through experience. Within this setting we aim to bridge the gap between the present and the future through a series of 'Critical Future artefacts'.



The Spectators/weird People

The crowd began to gather as this peculiar shiny installation began to take shape. Silver foil hung from a wooden aisle-like structure upon which two light bulbs dangled ever so slightly.

“What is this; “Why are you doing this?”

Those interested started forming a line. A man in a tweed costume got stuck between two loud women who were trying to bend down to fill out some sort of order form.

“How much is it?” The lady in the bright primary color ‘Jackson Pollock patterned’



The vehicle

To show the alternatives - to be present-minded of future potentialities. To put forth a desire, and to see its manifestation as a possibility. We did this by custom making business cards.

We provide you with one manifestation of a potential future. One possibility to embody and embrace this alternative reality and to “fake it” until you will actually make it happen. As what it says on a business card holds an invisible credibility - a reality worth exploring.

RE-CRAFTING

By applying craft techniques on the existing artefact - we create “abnormal” objects adding a layer of “offness” that reflect their future implications. Within our work of “re-crafting”, these objects work as catalysts and focus on the invisible qualities, the tactile or intangible informations that shape our behavior when interacting with them.

dress asked while handing over the order form. *“It’s free”* he replied without taking his eyes away from his work station. He remained focused on the stencil so as not to make another spelling mistake. *“Can I watch you?”*, the man in tweed asked, as he was not in the mood for seeing the rest of the exhibition. *“It’s very soothing”* he later added, following the strokes of pen on paper that somehow made him relax.

OFFNESS

If you try to imagine what 100 grams feels like in the palm of your hand, one could imagine the weight of a chocolate bar. Most everyone knows the feel of a chocolate bar, and knowing that they are in most cases 100 grams, you can imagine this feeling in the palm of your hands. ‘Off-ness’ is the moment you pick up a chocolate bar, and it feels slightly heavier than normal, or colder than average, or wider than the last 100 times you picked one up. It is this off-ness that triggers a little voice in your head saying ‘something isn’t right’, which then follows with the question ‘why isn’t it right?’

Experience as Glitch

On a sandwich board written in black type on shiny space blanket is the question “Who are you today?” With that, you are left with the task of filling in your name and your desired occupation.

“Oh this is actually really hard!”

We hear a woman gasp slightly, and then look around for a calm corner where to reflect on this seemingly simple, yet existential question. Some teenagers gather and come to terms:



THE GLITCH

We measure the world by putting its element in relation to the familiar. We create a framework of reliable arte-facts (example business card) which help us to define the framework we are placing our actions in and calculate constantly the outcome. Within our experiments we try to create a “glitch”. It is meant to create a disturbance, an impulse to draw attention, to convey an experience and ultimately to break a normative behavior or routine. By shifting the grid we are shifting the whole system. Therefore we destabilize the known to create space for the possible. We ask for responsibility and action as we remind you that we are the makers of every detail, the grid and objects we base our lives on, the habits we forget about and the futures we fear or desire.

“Who are you - oh I want to be that too”

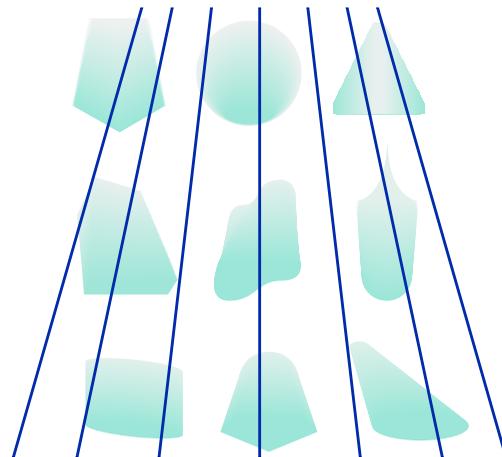
And just like that we encounter 4 future architects.

“May I be an animal too?”

A middle aged lady with short grey hair asks this while giggling, when in almost the same instant becomes a bird of paradise.

The tall girl from Berlin then says, **“Thank you for this personal connection”** and picks up her card. **“You know it is really nice to see people actually doing something before your eyes. It was nice to talk to you”.**

We encounter the right amount of personal and the right amount of absence. We become props



in a play, and sometimes even the vehicle. The context defines what is “right”. It is personal and in-personal at the same time. Sensing carefully: “Talk to me” - “Don’t talk to me” “When do I look up?” or “Just continue doing” Becoming experts in: “Who do you choose” approaching the boy or the girl and “Who you want to be today...”



AGENCY OF OBJECTS

Anthropologist Daniel Miller argues that ‘...in many respects stuff actually creates us in the first place.’ (Stuff, pg.10)* Not only does stuff create us, it also shapes the way in which we behave, be it directly or not, intentionally or not. Our environment provides us with clues on how to act, how to move, how to interact, and oftentimes we grow so accustomed to such cues that we don’t stop and question our behavior, and whether it is in a desirable way that we behave and conduct ourselves. An awareness to the agency of objects sometimes must come from a glitch in the known system in order to gain an overview of ones behaviors and actions. In the “Milan case” the lens of reflection provides this moment of awareness.

* D. Miller, Stuff, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2010, page 10

Lens of Reflection

“What is this bottle for” the wrinkled hand points at the little bottle fixed to the frame of the booth.

“That is your lens of reflection. We hid a secret message in each card. By holding it in a certain distance behind the water. It will reveal the secret message.”

“Oh” the hand reached out for his business card squinting his eyes and moving the card back and forth.

“There it is!” he shouted excitedly. *“It says: ‘And now...’”*. He nods lifting his eyebrows and walks away slowly.



OVERVIEW EFFECT

The overview effect is a cognitive shift in awareness reported by some astronauts and cosmonauts during spaceflight, often while viewing the Earth from orbit or from the lunar surface.

It refers to the experience of seeing firsthand the reality of the Earth in space, which is immediately understood to be a tiny, fragile ball of life, “hanging in the void”, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. From space, astronauts claim, national boundaries vanish, the conflicts that divide people become less important, and the need to create a planetary society with the united will to protect this “pale blue dot” becomes both obvious and imperative.

As the Story Unfolds

“Thanks so much!” she exclaimed taking the package handed over to her carefully with both hands.

“Welcome to the best futures you ever had” it says on the folded paper in her hand.

Then she pulls out the first tiny triangle and reads out loud: *“Today, is the day, to turn things around.*

To embrace the person you always wanted to be. Or, perhaps, the person you thought you could never be.”

She looks up excitedly and unfolds the next bit of information. *“To shift perspective. So let’s get started!!! The Present-Futures ‘Fakery’ is here to support you on this journey. All you have to...”*

the next fold follows *“... do is make it happen. This personalised, handcrafted, one-of-a-kind, business card, is the physical proof - of this alternative reality.”*

As she unfolds the final flap it says *“The power to shape your own desire-able futures now lies in your hands.”*

And carefully she pulls out the white square.



With our projects we try to make people rethink the givens, to put them into perspective and open the space for potentials. By manifesting possibilities we allow a space for action.

storytelling for a wisdom economy: an interview with Luigi Ferrara

Luigi Ferrara and Heather Daam

Dean, School of Arts, Design and Informatics at George Brown College & Director of IWB and Academic Coordinator and Faculty at IWB in George Brown College

ABSTRACT

In an interview discussing the workshop that he and Virginia Tassnari held at the Politecnico di Milano in May of 2014, Luigi Ferrara discusses the idea he has proposed for a wisdom economy where storytelling and sharing of insights between people through a new model for design that is inclusive, interactive and transfigurative. Ferrara discusses the importance of an emerging “both and” paradigm and an evolutionary design practice that looks at ecologies of innovation and transformation over time using the methods of co-creation, engagement, systems thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration. He re-iterates the need for us to design together and to share and build our wisdom together to solve the challenges we are facing in a more humane and compassionate way.

TAGS

Storytelling, Wisdom Economy, Transfiguration, Dematerialization, Rematerialization, Compassion, Institute Without Boundaries, Evolutionary Design, Embodiment, Integrator, Interdisciplinary

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One of the amazing possibilities that's emerging right now is to re-imagine how we design and what design means to us. In the industrial era design was based on a model where the designer created designs on behalf of others, creating multiples by thinking of what would most appropriately serve many. This model of design was radically different from that of the pre-industrial era where designs were based on collective design conventions that were self-interpreted because they were handmade. At that time we had a kind of somatic knowledge that was shaping our world and as a result we were making our world with the knowledge gained from our own bodies and hands. I love to think of my mother's family where she knew how to knit, her sister knew how to sew, her other sister how to embroider and yet another sister how to crochet. The reason they learned these skills was so that they could create their own world because they had to make everything in their world as there was no systems of production making it for them. That world was really an amazing place because it was a world of beauty, a world of unique and durable things that lasted many lifetimes, but it was also a world of scarcity, poverty and inequality. In our industrial world we are able, through knowledge and through mechanical reproduction, to make many things quickly, to a high standard and very affordably. The result is that we have a world of abundance. The complete and integrated somatic world of shared wisdom was fragmented into a world where discreet bits of knowledge and capacity were indirectly orchestrated to bring about this affordable abundance for all.

Our world is very caught up in the model of abstraction, and of industrial production, which is based on knowledge. We describe our information economy and our knowledge economy as such because what is circulating is information and knowledge, but when we contrast that with traditional cultures we see that it wasn't just knowledge that was valued. What was valued was wisdom, which emerged through experience.

Now this abstract economy in which we are living in tends to modify everything and turn most things into commodities or resources that we can exploit to the fullest. The result of this super co-ordination is an abundant world, and that's a powerful metaphor because before this what we had was a world of scarcity and it lacked goods, equity, health, sanitation and many elements that we needed to be able to build a better society. However, if we are going to go beyond our current societal model which is hyper-abundant and over-productive, then we are going to have to rethink the current model. I believe that we need to move towards a model based on the process of transfiguration rather than abstraction. By that I mean that we should not be exploiting things as commodities, but rather using them in a balanced way and then restoring them after use and actually considering how we share what we use with others so that we can extend our thinking beyond what is the term of our own singular ownership of a product of service. We need to think in a way that allows everyone in the world to have access to these resources, and in that way everyone in the world can be included in the benefits we are creating from human activity. More importantly,

other life forms on the planet also need to be considered and respected as we evolve human activity.

So this transfiguration economy that I talk about, or as I like to call it, a “wisdom economy”, is one in which we all share our knowledge, where we take the material world and we dematerialize it to re-materialize it in a way that extends access and experience to everyone. What happens in this new model is that we don’t move physical things and exhaust physical resources so dramatically. Instead, what we do is we find new ways of sharing ideas, resources and practices with each other – and these new ways of sharing are promoted through shared stories and understandings that we can rely on. Like the conventions of the pre-industrial era we can share digital embodiments that circulate the globe that can be varied by the people that interact with them in the various local cultures that they belong to.

If you imagine simple things that were created such as Airbnb, which is a kind of social innovation, it’s a way of us sharing our lives with others and actually extending our life experience with others and in doing so providing economic benefit to more people in a more distributed fashion. I believe it is for that reason that it is now the world’s fourth largest hotelier. Who is benefiting? All of us are by earning revenue and by accessing a more integrated experience and by becoming part of the story of someone else’s life by having had them share their environment with us. These kinds of examples are touchstones of what this wisdom economy could be. Of course this new experience is richer than a Holiday Inn hotel experience where “no surprise is the best surprise”. The best aspect of the experience is the beauty of the different being better than the perfect, of the unique experience over the standardized one. Examples like Airbnb are about the beauty of a world where we all get to know more about each other, and I think that is fundamentally at the heart of the power of the wisdom economy. This is something I learned from my grandparents: they would

share their knowledge with each other and their insight such that you had an experience. You understood from them your connections through time, history and of your responsibility to the future. If we consider ideas such as sustainability, which grow out of indigenous traditions and thinking, we see that they are thinking about seven generations into the future. They are thinking multi-generationally. Already they have moved to a different paradigm, it’s a way of seeing things where the sharing of wisdom is more powerful and important than the exploitation of commodity.

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I think compassion is one of the fundamental qualities that we are going to need in the future. It is aligned with passion but contains the seeds of loyalty and understanding. Compassion, loyalty and understanding are amongst the most important resources that society will need as the hard work of building the future is going to need people who are loyal to each other and who can be compassionate with each other. In fact I always sense an irony within our dominant digital world which is so reliant on things that can be done quickly. The danger of that world is that it is caught up in an extension of our current paradigm of abundance and consumption that will ultimately lead to the destruction of our physical world. The power of compassion is what we need to deal with the real problems of the world, because the real problems aren’t what Paris Hilton is going to wear next or what goes viral on Vine. The real problems of the world actually have to do with things that take a lot of time to solve such as creating buildings that are carbon neutral or creating products that are completely recyclable. This actually takes a lot of work, it takes a lot of

effort. Making a society that is more equitable really takes a tremendous amount of compassion and understanding and takes a lot of work so the idea that things can be solved quickly is really, really naive. The complexities and wicked problems of our world are going to be even more difficult to solve and so the most important thing is the compassion we have for each other and our determination to pursue the work at hand.

I run an interdisciplinary think tank called the Institute without Boundaries and every year we host people from around the world, people from different disciplines; amongst them architects, engineers, scientists, sociologists and artists. The biggest lesson that we have learned at the Institute is to develop the compassion and patience to listen to each other and to support each other in our work ahead, to actually have each other's back. In slang, just to be there for each other, to be able to do what we say we are going to do and to have that kind of integrity. The compassion we practice at the Institute without Boundaries is fundamental in a

shift towards a 'wisdom economy'. This compassion is what's driving certain aspects of social innovation like Slow Food, which is battling the meme of Fast Food, which was based on making food very quickly and serving it to people very fast, and having them eat it even faster. You can see where this has led us? It's led us to be super sized, it's led to obesity, it's led to the worst health conditions that we've had in years. So we need the passion for Slow Food to help us define a new path and possibility for ourselves away from the trap of Fast Food.

One of the odd things that happens when we follow our current paradigm is that we are actually becoming weaker and in effect rendering us immature under the guise of convenience. The paradigm makes us behave very much like teenagers, because the drive of industrial society towards individualism and individual rights, etc is increasingly making a society of people that are really not fully developed, not fully mature who are seeking their own ambitions exclusively at the expense of social cohesion. There is this vision that somehow



A team of interdisciplinary students and local stakeholders work together at the Institute without Boundaries.

if we all seek our own ambition then everything will work out. But in my experience when we are all seeking out our own ambitions what starts to happen is we can't create anything real because we are isolated, and we can't share things. The result is we're unhappier and we are struggling with our unhappiness.

So, how do we teach passion, that I'm not quite sure. I do know that the wisdom that I see in elders is usually the wisdom of a lifetime of amazing passion that evolved into compassion. All of the people that I've been mentored by, those that have really helped me, their common characteristic was that they were passionate about something and they gave me nuggets of wisdom that made me see things anew and they did this in a very gentle way because they had evolved passion into compassion. Because of this gentle wisdom I started to understand more, and actually be able to do things better. So I believe that compassion is probably fundamental. Le Corbusier used to say "Creation is a patient search", and for me that perfectly describes the approach we need to foster in the coming years.

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Another issue that is critical to examine these days is the issue of 'belief'. I am very perplexed and have very ambiguous feelings about the issue of whether people should dare to believe in things anymore. The traditional world of 'belief' was a powerful driver of behaviour and when we moved to a world of 'abstraction' the paradigm became that of knowing, meaning you wanted knowledge not belief. However in a world of knowledge there is somehow a lack of emotion, a lack of conviction and in a way a lack of responsibility because your knowl-

edge can abstract you from the realities of life, and in effect promote a sense of disassociation. I think with everything there are two faces – on one side is belief, and the other is knowledge. When your belief is so powerful you might not recognize the knowledge that is before you. With too much of an emphasis on knowledge, the problem might be that you know so much you stop seeing what is there in front of you. We have seen points of history where the paradigm of knowledge is taking us to places of terrible destruction, such as it did during most of the 20th century. I'm trying to imagine a paradigm in the future of trying things on in the sense that you know things by trying on experiences, and through knowing you have a power of understanding, of compassion and empathy and yet have some sort of the distance provided by abstract learning. The idea that you might try something on and understand the other would not necessarily create belief, but understanding, and therefore it would create wisdom. When I think of people that I know who are wise they have that sense of being able to see themselves and to see the other, to understand the other, to forgive the other, to truly empathize and to know what to say at the right moment. So I ask myself how do we get there? How do we get beyond knowledge as designers? Do we get there through belief? Do we get there through a simulation of some sort wherethrough a process of participating it allows you to understand things from the perspective of the other? I have described this phenomenon as a paradigm of the 'both and' which I choose in distinction from that of the 'either or'. For me the 'either or' is that paradigm based on the stance of the skeptic and the critical thinker that brings us to the place of knowledge. We are trying to categorize the world, we are trying to compare it, we are trying to understand what makes it up. In the case of a 'both and' perspective in a weird way what we are trying to do is to see what goes together in the world, what makes an ecology, what are the ranges of experiences, how the experiences change over time, how truth evolves. We are seek-

ing out understanding of the processes of transformation rather than understanding only what things are now in the moment from our subjective perspective. We are moving away from the mechanical to the conscious.

So if I think of some of the work of Alfred Kinsey on sexuality as a beacon of this new approach. Before his work there was the idea that you were, either homosexual or heterosexual. Kinsey showed that there was something different, that there was a range of sexuality and so thinking about things as a range meant that the world could become different for people because you didn't have to be categorized in one way or another. That possibility was extended in the late twentieth century sexuality theories like the "Klein Sexual Orientation Grid" that looked at how people's sexual orientation changed over time, showing that you do not only have a range, but that you can actually have a change in range overtime. For me this way of thinking of things as ecologies or 'both and's' is very powerful. It opens up another type of knowledge and models a different type of world that allows for creative solutions that are evolutionary. It begins to reflect a world which is finer grained and where all of us are included. This is a world where our view of the world does not cancel each other out. It's a world where we can understand each other and therefore find a harmony of co-existence where we are benefitting from each other's differences. This creates a totality that is possibly more powerful in that we all belong, we all exist and we are all included and therefore our world is richer, more varied, more complete and more capable—a world without boundaries. I see this in the city I live in, Toronto. It's a city with a global soul because it has somehow found a way of fostering this harmonious diversity by emphasizing a 'both and' approach to living together, this contrasts with the either/or approach one finds so predominant in American cities.

So how do we design a world where we can all belong? A world with a 'both and' approach? I think that's the big question which Martin Luther King identified in his Nobel prize winning speech where he said that we have to create a World House. Or we can think of Marshall McLuhan who identified it when he very presciently thought that we were becoming a Global Village. We know as well that we are going to be confronted with space travel and eventually the possibility one day that we will meet other planets and civilizations, so we need to evolve to be able to respect everyone on our planet and be able to respect people and things from these other planets as well.

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I have always felt that designers have a strong role in enabling stories and lives to unfold. An author who is telling a story integrates a sort of experience into a reality that we can enter into, a kind of visualisation of our world. This is exactly what a designer does. He takes fragments of reality and coordinates them into a design that expresses a poetry of living and the possibilities of living in a particular way.

If you think about the role of a designer as an 'integrator', you understand that he or she is taking fragments of reality and coordinating them in a way that illuminates the lives of people. Designers are looking at what already exists, they're not only looking at the past, they're looking at possibilities, the potentialities that exist within the past and the present. A good designer's strength is looking at what people might want and might need and during that, to transcend belief and develop a power of understanding and empathy. With this wisdom the designer is able to take a reality and develop a

structure able to generate new possibilities, almost limitless possibilities. So if you think of an empty room and a cardboard box and what a child does with that cardboard box there is the limitless possibilities that the child uses that box for: he plays, he puts it over his head, he climbs up it, he jumps off it. And so a great designer has that power, has the power to make stories unfold and to make potentialities become real, because it enables us to take what is inside us and to externalize it into the world in a way that is really special, in a way that can be shared with others. It's that simple trait of embodiment that enables design to tell stories. And if you can take the best fragments, if you can be wise, then you can create surreal pieces of beauty that augment the poetic moments of our lives.

About the Authors

Luigi Ferrara, Dean, Centre for Arts, Design and Information Technology arrived at the college in 2002, and has since broadened the programs within the Faculty of Design more than threefold. Under Ferrara's guidance the Centre for Arts & Design was ranked as one of the top 60 design schools in North America, according to Business Week magazine and its Institute Without Boundaries was ranked as one of the top 4 Urban Design programs in the world by Azure magazine.

Despite the demands of his role, Luigi continues to take on two professional design projects every year, and lends his expertise to almost a dozen boards and associations, while showcasing his talent and knowledge through his exhibitions, publications and speaking engagements. Luigi holds a BA in architecture from the University of Toronto, is a senator of the International Council of the Societies of Industrial Design and a registered architect with seal.

Heather Daam is a designer and design researcher that works with people. She is currently Academic Coordinator and Faculty at the Institute without Boundaries. Heather is interested in understanding the role a designer plays in bringing together different stakeholders in the design process and focusing the process.

Heather has spent most of her professional career working in the Netherlands where she received her Master in Design 'Man + Humanity' at the Design Academy Eindhoven. She is a former lead designer at T+HUIS, a social design and educational community organization. She has also worked as a Design Research Associate for the Design Academy Eindhoven. Heather has always carried out many independent projects in the fields of social innovation, social design, and education, and has cheerfully presented and been published internationally.

Engagement & storytelling for social innovation

Marisa Galbiati

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ABSTRACT

People and communities, architects and designers, public administrators and others have discovered storytelling. Storytelling simply means telling stories: stories and tales are much more effective at representing meaningful worlds than abstract representations. Using a narrative gives the audience to experience an event empathically, and to translate real or imagined scenarios into a flow of time, giving them an understandable representation. As such, if storytelling is created with audiovisual tools, the degree of effectiveness is higher, because of the image-movement's ability to describe and represent the depth of an event, an action or a context. And this is the real challenge, since the problem is not so much to make a good video, but ensure that it will become interesting, engaging, appreciated and seen by many people, in short, that it will go viral. What seems to be the driving force is an unconventional creativity that uses simple but catchy language.

If the designer is emerging as a cultural mediator, capable of interpreting the needs of communities or individuals, finding solutions that can improve quality of life, it becomes evident the importance of their communicative abilities in terms of both listening and communication skills.

An effective message is a message that can elicit a change in the person who receives it. It may be a change of perspective, thought or behaviour. In the field of social innovation, storytelling is assuming an important role as a translator of messages, and also as a catalyst for interests communities can identify with.

TAGS

Audiovisual Storytelling, Engagement, Viral, Empathy, Change of Behaviour, Listening, Communication, Mediator Design

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People and communities, advertisers and architects, designers and public administrators have discovered storytelling. In truth, storytelling has always existed (as stories, tales, fables and testimonies) since our ancestors came together around a fire to tell each other about the events of their daily lives, or even before, when people told stories by drawing scenes of their community life on cave walls in prehistoric times.

Moreover, until the advent of writing, knowledge was transmitted orally, and stories were told through spoken words and accounts. Then, from the late nineteenth century, film translated the narrative flow into images and movement, incorporating the dimension of time and emotion to make the viewing experience realistic and exciting. What has changed in the contemporary scenario, in relation to the past, is attributable to a number of factors that make storytelling an object of worship today. Of these, there is one that undoubtedly plays a crucial role: the paradigm shift in communication moving away from one-directional communication (cinema, advertising, novels, theatre, etc.) towards a model of participatory, shared and viral communication, where the contents are re-modelled by the end user, who can determine their success or failure. The digital age (and in particular the development of social networks) has therefore favoured a return to the story and sharing, just as in pre-technological societies.

However, although everyone is now appealing to the communicative qualities of storytelling, it is necessary to understand some linguistic, structural,

grammatical and semantic specificities in order to take full advantage of its effectiveness as a means of communication.

Storytelling simply means telling stories: stories and tales are much more effective at representing meaningful worlds than abstract representations. Using a narrative gives the audience the opportunity to experience an event empathically, and to translate real or imagined scenarios into a flow of time, giving them an understandable representation. As such, if storytelling is created with audiovisual tools and languages, the degree of effectiveness is higher, because of the image-movement's ability to describe and represent the depth of an event, an action or a context. In a sequence that describes a craftsman at work, for example, we intercept a lot of information relating to the context (the environment in which the person is placed) and the text (the person in question).

But the information we receive from the images is not enough to recreate the whole landscape if it is not accompanied by an emotional representation. This emotional representation can be achieved through the beauty (aesthetics) and the accuracy of a video, or through its capacity to involve viewers by offering very original, unexpected content that intrigues them and allows them to enter a world with a touch of magic. And this is the real challenge, since the problem is not so much to make a good video, but ensure that it will become interesting, engaging, appreciated and seen by many people, in short, that it will go viral.

We know that the viral video phenomenon can not be controlled: it is a truly bottom-up phenomenon that invades the space of the web according to principles that many scholars are currently exploring. For example, not all interesting and beautiful videos become viral: it is often less professional videos that gain high visibility, videos capable of intriguing and fascinating despite the simplicity and spontaneity of their language. What seems to be the driving force is an unconventional creativity that uses simple but catchy language.

This long introduction has been necessary to introduce the subject of storytelling as it now being addressed and discussed in the design community. If the designer is emerging as a cultural mediator, capable of interpreting the needs of communities or individuals, finding solutions that can improve quality of life, it becomes evident the importance of their communicative abilities in terms of both listening skills (a function that is not at all simple, and requires an openness to dialogue that must be gained with the right tools) and their communication skills in the sense of knowing how to construct effective messages, targeted at the groups for which they are intended. In this regard, an effective message is a message that can elicit a change in the person who receives it. It may be a change of perspective, thought or behaviour. It can be the beginning of a new awareness. For example, Wim Wenders' film "Salt of the Earth" on the life of the great Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado tells us and shows us the tragedies of war in Africa with an evocative power that far exceeds the narrative ability of a novel. It is a film that makes the observer think and evokes a feeling of duty, condensing a concentration of information and highly intense emotional narratives into just two hours.

In the field of social innovation, storytelling is assuming an important role as a translator of messages, and also as a catalyst for interests communities can identify with. Not only that, storytelling can

amplify weak signals that would otherwise melt away like snow in the sun. To say that a good video is worth a thousand words is not to say anything new. Storytelling's ability to engage has been amply demonstrated in the marketing industry, which has turned it into a strength. Of course we talk about innovative storytelling that contains a good idea, and today that is worth more than a good budget. Some examples: the video by Blendtec (<https://youtu.be/LBUJcD6Ws6s>) in which the marketing director of a blender company shows the blender's power by pulverising an iPad in a video with an ironic and naive tone that went viral, attracting millions of views and quadrupling sales of the product. Another example is the Green Peace video, which plays on a well-known commercial for Volkswagen. In this case, the well-known car brand takes its cue from a scene from Star Wars and shows a child dressed as Darth Vader trying to use his magic powers on his dad's car. After failing with a series of objects, finally the car turns on its lights and its engine at his command: the child looks at his parents with a puzzled expression, in awe of his new force, while it is revealed that it was in fact the father who started the car's controls. Green Peace appropriates this narrative concept and turns it into a counter melody where the child-Darth Vader (the dark force) is surrounded by the forces of the good as they try to prevent planet Volkswagen from continuing to cause damage to the environment through pollution. This viral video achieved global success by leveraging on the long advertising series by the famous car brand (<https://youtu.be/RFKnMCRwNOI>).

The protagonists in this video are the children we are bequeathing a dilapidated world. The children, or rather their future, represent the tender area, the way to touch the adults' heartstrings. It's what is called "insight" in technical terms, that is the raw nerve of our sensitive areas, that space that draws our attention and drives our actions.

While the storytelling popular with major brands can sometimes be reduced to simple representations of well-being caused by the possession or use of an object (the historic carousel to the large case histories of contemporary advertising), the big spenders are currently making a huge effort to draw attention to products by using storytelling with original narrative schemes that do not mention the product at all, but rather focus on the symbolic function that the product can carry out. A significant example is the Worldstoughestjob video (<http://youtu.be/HB3xM93rXbY>), made by the company Cardstore, which produces personalised cards for different occasions, such as birthdays, anniversaries etc. The narrative ploy develops around the three points of a triangle involving a simple object (the card), a value to be transmitted (affection for a person) and the target audience to be informed. In this instance, a fake recruiting firm puts a notice online looking for a very particular profile: a director of operations. Many young people respond to the ad and an employee begins recruitment interviews. The interviewer says that it is a special job, with no holidays, no breaks at work, you have to stand for up to 20 hours, working on Christmas and Easter, Sundays and holidays, you have to have expertise in medicine, economics, and much more, and above all the job is totally unpaid. The young people are surprised and shocked... until the interviewer tells them that this job exists: it is what all their mothers do. At this point the kids get emotional and, with a few laughs and a few tears, the video ends with a call to action: tell your mother that you are grateful for everything she has done for you, send them a special card (a Cardstore card)! Cardstore identified a very powerful insight, the mother figure, and staged it in an original way far removed from family stereotypes, and without ever showing the object-card.

Being a very powerful insight, the maternal role is often used in brand campaigns, such as in the Kinder cereals campaign #PossoAiutartiMamma_Ti

Prometto (#ICanHelpYouMum, I Promise). It also starts with a staged situation: a (non-existent) production company rounds up some mothers for a (fake) casting session. When the mothers come to read the script they realise they are actually reading letters from their children, containing expressions of love and promises to help in the family home. The approach to by Pampers is more interesting, but still on the same theme (Mom's first birthday: <https://youtu.be/uu3iM1azTj4>): while some mothers are taking their children to the paediatrician as they turn one, a photographic exhibition outside the doctor's office with large photographs depicts the same mothers with their little ones. It's the baby's first year of life, but also the first birthday of the mother who has cared for it with love. The mothers are moved and recognise the centrality of their maternal role through the images. The Pampers brand only appears at the end of the video, marking the partnership with a product that has changed the women's lives. Here, too, the product is never mentioned, only the emotional context and human feelings are evoked. These three examples show how important the sphere of emotions is to the narrative function. They are images with a strong communicative impact that able to touch that raw nerve that links to our deepest emotions. It is a new way to stage a slice of real life, without having to show the products and their performance (which is what has characterised advertising to date), instead constructing a scenario where people's lives are intertwined with the things that have helped to make their lives easier. While human emotions have not changed, the ways to communicate them have, however.

I chose these examples to show how the crisis in advertising has pushed creatives to find new ways to communicate with their audiences. It has been clear from the outset that people are tired of the old models of advertising, and that it was necessary to create new ways of relating to the public to inspire new confidence among audiences. Storytell-

ing is one of these, along with all the techniques of involving the target group primarily made possible by social networks.

Designers, in my opinion, should look carefully at the communicative behaviours of advertising professionals because in that sector investments and energies are much more directed at achieving measurable goals.

Today there are many co-production operations taking place in the field of video for social innovation: documentation on state of the art processes, participatory videos, self-narration, videos for social organisations (documenting the life of the most vulnerable populations, people who don't have access to income, the unemployed, the Roma, etc.), crowdfunding for filmmaking, transmedia storytelling, etc.

We are currently seeing a big effort to document processes and results or to construct scenarios of what is not there yet, but which can be represented with images and thus easier to understand, since it includes the narrative power of images. Now we need to go one step further: to make narrative an engaging, captivating and empowering tool so that the message has a more profound effect on decision makers, politicians and people who, if involved, will participate in the processes of change contemporary society needs with more passion.

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Narratives: a matter for/of design

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ABSTRACT

Narratives matter in design not only because they are one of the most widely used forms of organizing human experience and a common medium of communication, but also because they help agents confront the unknown. For these reasons, they are especially relevant in the design and management of innovation processes: to unlock and harness the potential of agents and of the relationships they have with other agents and with artifacts “populating” a certain zone of the agent-artifact space. Narratives can enable socially sustainable changes, as long as they let/make agents envision and give sense to them.

TAGS

Narrative, Community, Relationships, Uncertainty, Innovation

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1. Introduction

After the narrative turn in social and human sciences at the end of 70s and early 80s, many scholars recognized that “to understand a society or some part of a society, it is important to discover its repertoire of legitimate stories and find out how it evolved” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 5). Indeed, narratives are the “most widely used forms of organizing human experience” (Bruner, 1991, p. 9) and a common medium of communication. Moreover, they perform a relevant sensemaking function (Weick, 1995).

Narratives respond to a narrative logic that allows individuals to make sense out of what is happening around them and to act consistently with their expectations and values. Individuals and organizations, in their ordinary life as well as in exceptional situations, act with reference to stories that derive from their past experience or are shared and embedded within a narrative community to which they belong. This means that people do not simply tell stories, they also enact them. Retrospectively, stories - which instantiate more general, archetypal narratives structures - provide legitimacy and accountability for people’s actions (Czarniawska, 2004). In such a reflexive, iterative and constructive process, narratives do not just relate to, but also explain and constitute, reality (Bruner, 1991).

Given these premises, what will be critically discussed in the following paragraphs is the role narratives play when agents have to confront with unknown, in particular what Lane and Maxfield (2005) call “ontological uncertainty”. The hypothesis proposed here is that narratives are especially

important for innovation processes, which are characterized by ontological uncertainty, but also to unlock and enhance the potential of agents, and of the relationships among agents, artifacts and organizations to foster social change.

2. Narratives and the construction of reality

As Aristotle pointed out, a narrative relates a sequence of events with a beginning, a middle and an end, and consists of a cast of characters, a plot that structures the events temporally, and a denouement in which characters, as well as artifacts and relationships, change from what they were at the beginning. More in particular, “the plot development consists of the characters acting out their identities in contexts that are determined by their previous actions, the actions of the other characters, and events from the world outside – including coincidences and catastrophes (wars, market crashes, floods...) that the narrator and listener regard as ‘normal’, that is consistent with some implicitly agreed-upon natural or social ‘laws’, and beyond the control of the story’s characters” (Lane, 2014).

2.1 Narrative communities

A narrative community is a group of individuals who share understanding of a set of narratives and narrative structures: e.g. in so-called “primitive” societies, folktales and myths constitute the narrative underpinnings for narrative community; in modern societies, print-languages and mass media provide the means to circulate narratives that help construct larger, “imagined communities”, such as nation states, making less and less relevant

physical proximity or even personal acquaintance among members of narrative communities (Anderson, 1983). Even though just a limited number of narrative structures are available to produce the stories that members of a narrative community tell one another, they are the focal pivots upon which individual and collective identities are constructed, actions are fostered and events are interpreted (Anzoi et al., 2015): society and culture “enable and constrain certain kinds of stories” and “meaning making is always embedded in the concepts that are culturally available at a particular time” (Salkind, 2010, p. 871).

We could say that the “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) embedded in narratives, facilitate the understanding of agents’ actions and motivations as well as the way they give meanings to the reality they constantly construct (Bruner, 1991) and make them privileged hermeneutic unit as well as valuable evaluation and analytic tools (Anzoi et al., 2015).

2.2. Facing ontological uncertainty

The narrative theory of action proposed by Lane (2014; 2015) provides an interpretative frame to understand how agents can act and cope with the ontological uncertainty experienced by those agents who cannot even imagine which kind of consequences can derive from their actions, nor even the entities and interaction modalities that will mediate between their own actions and these consequences.

Put it more clearly: ontological uncertainty characterizes innovation processes and the cascades of transformations they induce (Lane, 2005; 2014). For this reason, Lane’s narrative theory of action is strictly intertwined with the complexity-based theory of innovation proposed by himself and Maxfield, which provides a framework to explain how human beings have managed to generate, and sometimes intentionally design, the explosion of artifacts and organizations that constitute our

world, together with the relationships and functionalities they enable and accomplish. The two scholars state that all artifacts - whether they are physical, informational and performative - have a history, as do the organization of the interaction modalities among people in which these artifacts figure. Then, in order for an artifact to be used and thus to proliferate in a system, also other transformations have to happen, and when some agents recognize the opportunity to instantiate these changes, for example through the design and the production of new artifacts, the cycle restarts (Lane et al., 2009) and a new story unfolds. In these complex and unpredictable scenarios, narratives help agents to explain the correlation among events in a process, and to encode different kind of data that are relevant for the envisioning and development of a wide range of artifacts and organizational phenomena (even if their interpretations - i.e. their story and the point of view assumed to tell and enact it - differ from agent to agent), so that “in the same way that surveys contain indicators for the underlying constructs in a variance theory, a narrative text contains indicators for an underlying process theory” (Pentland, 1999, p. 711).

2.3 Unlocking potential: generative relationships and Dynamic Evaluation

Nonetheless, narratives are absolutely non-trivial objects, either to collect and elicit, or to analyze and represent. Indeed, even when they are not explicitly formulated or even deliberately hidden, they play a key role in guiding people’s actions. By making them explicit to themselves and to others, individuals and communities have the possibility to assess the coherence (in the sense of connecting past and present context and contemplated action with desired future directionality) and completeness (in the sense of the capacity to incorporate, without the loss of narrative logic, additional information about relevant events and entities) of the narratives that, directly and indirectly, guide their interactions (Lane, 2014; 2015). Therefore, to succeed

in detecting and making explicit dominant, hidden or emerging narratives, and then “mapping” them, there is a need for approaches adequate to uncover and analyze them to expose the taken-for-granted notions, contested values, and interaction modalities that shape people’s aims and expectations.

All over the world there is an increasing interest on social innovation, as an important new approach to resolve social problems and meet the changes and challenges of contemporary society; but there does not yet appear to be substantial agreement on what social innovation is (Moulaert et al., 2013). Similar difficulties arise about the appropriate ways to monitor, support and evaluate innovation. The literature shows a range of attempts to find proper approaches, and recently many practitioners have started to include the use of stories and storytelling, but most of them lack a systemic view, more detailed complexity consistent methods (Walton, 2013) and a process ontology (Lane, 2015; Anzoise et al., 2015) that enable “all” social innovation projects’ participants (designers, beneficiaries, stakeholders, etc.) to actively contribute to the process they are engaged in, enhance their reflexivity and capacity to adapt and the evaluator (or a team of evaluators) to dynamically follow the cascades of transformations induced by a project and its participants.

According to Lane and Maxfield (2005), generative relationships among agents are the locus in which new functionalities, agents and attributions arise. Even if ontological uncertainty might make it impossible to predict the consequences induced by a particular relationship, it may still be possible to “measure” and enhance the potential it has for generating system transformations. This potential depends upon: a sufficient level of heterogeneity among agents (i.e. not too much different, otherwise they won’t understand each another, and enough diverse in the perspective they take to look at things); mutual and aligned directedness (i.e. reciprocity and mutual willingness to collaborate

to transform a common zone of the agent-artifact space); permissions structures (which determine what agents can communicate about, with whom, in which modalities); and joint action opportunities to collaborate for achieving common aims. A project team trying to design and foster any kind of transformation to address social change should consider these factors, and be aware that they are not given once and forever, but instead they have to be dynamically monitored and continuously nurtured.

In this respect, Dynamic Evaluation (DE) is an approach to evaluation specifically designed for innovation process (Lane, 2014; 2015; Anzoise & Sardo, 2014; Anzoise et al., 2015). DE has some similarities with Responsive, Empowerment, Developmental and Participatory Evaluation (Abma, 2001; Abma et al., 2009; Wandersman et al., 2005; Patton, 1994; 2000; 2011; Cousins, 2003; 2007; Fetterman, 2001) and Emergent Design Evaluation (Christie et al., 2005). The principal aims of DE are to enhance reflexivity among innovation projects’ participants, and to foster and support adaptive changes and learning through the continuous generation of feedback loops among evaluators, designers and management team, and other project participants. Concerning in particular evaluation and design practices, the DE can be conceptualized as an emerging evaluation (see also Christie, 2005): a process that produces ideas and suggestions for adaptations and improvements, which proceed in an iterative and cumulative way, arising from agent interactions and the contexts and contingencies that the project encounters. In this sense it does not completely adhere to predefined objectives and protocols, but instead it reacts to and elaborates responses based upon the evolution of the project itself, and provides real-time feedback about emerging events, “just in time” to encourage the construction of novel interaction patterns that can give rise to new “generative relationships” or unlock and enhance the “generative potential” of existing ones.

In order to do so, the following are the main tasks of a DE-r (Lane, 2014; 2015; Anzoise & Sardo, 2016):

1. Collect different kind of material (and from different sources) that could be relevant to understand the change processes set in motion by the project;
2. Construct maps of the zones of agent-artifact-attribution space related to the project, to track its dynamics and the change processes stemming from it;
3. Extract and make explicit narratives that describe, from different points of view, how the processes set in motion by the project seem to play out;
4. Alert the project team about divergences as they arise;
5. Provide feedback to project participants and structure consultations among them;
6. Produce project narratives to make retrospective sense out of what happened. These narratives will be used to communicate to others the project experience.

The development of such a methodology has been the result of a feedback process going from the theory to practices and case studies, following both a deductive and inductive approach. At first, the innovation theory by Lane et al. provided the theoretical frame, then the experiences on the field served to design and develop the DE methodology.

3. Conclusion

As closing but not definitive reflection, narratives are powerful tools to unlock the potential of people and of the relationship they have with other indi-

viduals, communities and artifacts, and to structure feedbacks that deal explicitly with the heterogeneity among agents, the alignment (and continuous re-alignment) of different points of view, and the exploitation at the most of all the opportunities of joint action that communities have (e.g. face-to-face or enabled and strengthened by web-based tools). Adopting such a perspective within the design, management and evaluation of a project require these processes to be open and adaptive, characterized by a low level of hierarchy, where all the “usable” (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Schön, 1983; Fareri, 2009) and “situated knowledge” available (Epstein et al., 2014) can be conveyed and activated, and the narratives of participants considered (e.g. collected, coded and compared) in this way divergences among agents can be detected and the cascades of transformations induced by the project’s narratives - which can be designed actions or emerging ones - can be better followed (and eventually steered) over time.

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Narrative Environments and Social Innovation

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces and describes an emerging discipline, the design of narrative environments. It suggests that designers of narrative environments are story listeners, story tellers, and that they also enable others to tell and exchange stories in physical spaces. The text argues that the design of spatial narratives offers distinctive kinds of immersive storytelling experiences that differ from watching a narrative on screen, reading a book or watching a play because audiences literally enter and participate in the spatial storyworld. The article concludes by suggesting, and illustrating through an example, that the active, physical participation of audiences in a narrative can lead to novel and resilient forms of co-creation and social innovation.

TAGS

Narrative, Environment, Active Audience, Participation, Social Innovation

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It could be argued that all spaces tell a story, for example, the seashore tells a story of erosion, a busy high street tells a story of consumerism, or a French village fete tells the story of a rural community. If so, all environments would be narrative environments and this definition would be too broad to be useful in developing the practice and theory of the design of spatial narratives. Therefore it is suggested here that narrative environments be defined as places which have been deliberately designed to tell a story or enable a story to be told. In so far as narrative environments are deliberately designed they correspond to literary stories which are purposely crafted to convey an idea or message (Aristotle, 1989; Bał, 1997; Chatman, 1978; Lodge, 1992; Kermode, 1983; Porter Abbott, 2002; Propp, 1884). In other words, just as stories are not daily life, neither are narrative environments. They are intentionally structured content-rich spaces that communicate particular stories to specific audiences (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998) and induce an emotional impact and/or an inquiring or critical frame of mind in the audience/interpreter. Hence narrative environments may be described as heterotopias (Foucault, 1984) or 'other' spaces that exist outside the everyday.

Narrative environments communicate both explicitly and implicitly. Explicit communications are evident in, for example, exhibitions, heritage sites, churches, temples and designed events that have been created to house and communicate particular content through images, texts, objects and face-to-face dialogue. Implicit communications, expressed through culturally and socially produced codes of form, scale, colour, light, sound, materiality and of

course the behavior of others, could include gardens, playgrounds, markets and shopping zones; public realm where communities of interest may convene; architecture or landscape that deliberately signify political and social values; and city quarters that function as visitor destinations. Whether the spaces communicate explicitly or implicitly or both, they affect us. Spatial narratives can enable learning, prompt interaction, support commerce, shape communal and cultural memory, promote particular values that embody and play on power relations and orders of knowledge (Foucault, 1970; Hooper Greenhill, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991) Hence narrative environments, or, if you like, deliberately designed story spaces, are powerful sites for discursive practice and social innovation.

Many questions arise: what are the intersecting lineages of the practice? How do designers construct spatial narratives? What theories do they rely on? How do narrative environments engage audiences and communicate, or indeed, enable audiences to communicate with each other? In what ways do spatial narratives differ from other narrative mediums? How can spatial narratives be used in social innovation? This article will respond briefly to each of these questions in turn.

Lineages

The last 50 years have seen discussion of the narrative experience of space in several related fields, architecture, cultural criticism, exhibition design, user experience design and service design. In 1970s architect Bernhard Tschumi started to write

a series of reflections on architecture as the 'pleasurable and sometimes violent confrontation of space and activities' (1996). He rejects the view of architecture as static and functional. He proposed a definition of architecture as experiential sequence and disjuncture. In 1990s the narrative architecture movement, NATO, emerged in the UK foregrounding the experiential dimension of architecture (Coates, 2012) and emphasizing that everyday popular culture is key to the experience of architecture. In 2004 cultural critic Norman Klein published a provocative book 'Scripted Spaces from Baroque to Las Vegas to Disney' examining how the spaces can create awe and emotional immersion encouraging audiences to surrender to the script, in other words, encouraging audiences to allow themselves to be swept up into fantasies that play out dominant socio-political discourses and value systems through the physical environment.

In the meantime, in the mid 90s, story-driven exhibition making became established. Multidisciplinary design teams established interpretive design for exhibitions as a commercial industry. There are several high profile companies now working in this way in Europe and America for example Kossmann Dejong in the Netherlands; Atelier Bruckner and Duncan McCauley in Germany; Metaphor, Event Communications and Land Design Studio in the UK; Ralph Appelbaum Associates in the USA. Many of the story-driven techniques and approaches developed in exhibition design have also been taken up by companies designing brand and leisure spaces, for example, the Shangri-La festival experience. More recently user experience design has stimulated research into audience drivers, engagement and interactions. It should also be noted that sequences of user actions are also central to service design. All of the above differ in their specific markets, audiences and intentions but their conflation of story and space is germane to the practice of the design of narrative environments. The designers of narra-

tive environments may practice in many different sectors but there is a discernable trend in the last 5 years showing new design collectives pioneering story-led socially engaged design and innovation. Examples include The Decorators based in London, Daily Tous Les Jours, based in Montreal, and Snark-spacemaking based in Italy. This approach seems to have struck a chord with many design students who are interested in how spatial narratives can address social justice and involve participatory and co-design processes.

The process of construction of spatial narratives

Turning to the question of the construction of socially engaged narrative environments, they don't just appear of their own accord. They are envisaged, discussed, debated, designed, and funded by individuals or communities, companies and governments. It can be argued that narrative environments are produced by an alignment of multiple stakeholders in a complex set of steps that are negotiated in order to transform an environment but also to produce socio-economic and cultural impact. Narrative environments are created by multidisciplinary teams because the design process involves many steps and layers. Teams initially research content, audience, location and context to produce initial propositions. Teams may fold narrative onto space by adapting or developing relatively stable architectural structures and spatial arrangements; they may produce more temporary printed graphics that appear in and around the space; they may include still and moving image in the space; they may use sound and light effects; they may add fast changing digital layers, usually accessed through mobile technologies; but throughout they are anticipating the most fluid and unpredictable dimension, the behavior of people in the space.

It is important to see designers here, not just the aesthetes who put a "face" on others' ideas or stories but as active co-authors with clients and com-

munities contributing to the shaping and articulation of spaces. Indeed the designer of narrative environments, being content driven, is particularly well positioned to engage with societal issues. The example below of E8 Plus Hackney shows how a student, Luca Ponticelli, on MA Narrative Environments at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, responded to social divisions in his local community. He generated his own brief and synthesized spaces and stories and involved a network of people in finding ways to raise awareness and ameliorate the situation.

To sum up this section, the design of narrative environments draws on methods and skills from architecture, urban design, interior design, communication design, interaction design, exhibition design, user experience design and service design but, as will be explained below, the design of narrative environments differs from all of these in that it derives its foundational principles from narrative theory and practice. It uses these principles in conjunction with spatial theory and critical thinking to evolve new design propositions.

The theoretical landscape

The theoretical landscape is broad and rich. The design of narrative environments draws from Aristotle's Poetics and discussions of agon in ancient Greek literature. Dramatic conflict or "friction in the place" is a key driver in developing and telling the story. Greimas's actantial theory contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of stories in space. Mikhail Bakhtin offers a vision of the dialogic space why is key to spatial narratives. Seymour Chatman's theories of story and discourse enable designers to analyse story elements as does Roland Barthes study of narrative structures. Paul Ricoeur's theories of time and narrative remind designers that they are designing not only spaces but also spaces as they unfold over time. David Bordwell's theories of narrative schema are useful in understanding that

audiences recognize particular structures as stories. David Herman's poststructuralist theory of the storyworld and Marie Laure Ryan transmedial narrative theory allow for the theorization of non-linear spatial narratives and a focus on the way narratives fire the imagination and transport the reader/interpreter/visitor to another realm.

In the design of narrative environments narrative theory is aligned with spatial theories of perception, action and political contest. Philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, provides an argument for perception as the primary entry to understanding and acting in the world. Henri Lefebvre provides critical insight into the power relations at play in the construction of physical, social space. Doreen Massey's association of space and temporality, that is the concept of space and place as alive with agency and constantly changing is also pertinent. She makes a case for space not to be seen as static but as constantly evolving, subject to multiple interpretations and contestations, an arena of political collisions and contrasting stories. Another related perspective is provided by Schneider and Till's research that references actor network theory and develops a case for spatial agency.

Environmental psychologist J.J. Gibson provides theories about how people 'read' spatial narratives. Psychologist Jerome Bruner links narrative and identity and shows the foundational nature of narrative in human thought and action. A wealth of theories on performativity (Parsons, 2009) consider how environments invite, offer, regulate and discipline audiences as they play out a narrative and prompt discussions of how interaction between people, places, objects and images produce, reproduce, maintain or shift, critique or undermine identity. From these perspectives spatial narratives envisage space a vibrant, fluid and active medium for communication of content rather than an immobile and inert setting.

Story and Telling

Story or content can revolve around any topic of theme that the author(s) consider important and/or appropriate to the brief. However a topic is not strictly a story. A topic could be a straightforward description or fact. A story has a particular dynamic structure. Literary theory has a great deal to offer in terms of unpacking the structure of story (Porter-Abbott, 2002) suggesting that a story comprises of at minimum two elements, firstly characters or entities and secondly events. Characters tend to be people and entities are non-human phenomena that cause change, for example, a storm that drives a ship onto rocks. In the design of narrative environments, characters and entities can be substituted by cultures and values and be given form as buildings, objects, images, sounds, text or indeed the visitors and inhabitants, and all or any of these “perform” the story.

Story enables us to envisage design content as dynamic, comprising of elements that contrast, provoke and play off each other over time, creating some sort of change and transformation. If this dynamic aspect of story is mapped onto a space, different characteristics of the material world, objects and images in that space can act as the characters and events and be used as counterpoints, changes can literally be embodied by physical change and/or change to the behaviour of people gathered in the space.

From content we move to telling, the process of giving form to the story. Telling comprises of constructing the storyworld, enthralling the physical senses of visitors, devising evocative metaphors and embodying one of many of narrative devices, for example, framing, concealing and revealing, sequencing, substitution, and amplification. This is the “magic” process of interpretation, invention and communication that is typically associated with design. Telling is not, however, just a question of how to give form or voice to ideas, the form will always express the author/designer’s value system.

Thus the form of the structures, images, sequences can be read at multiple levels for their immediate message but also for their underlying assumptions and belief systems.

Engaging and activating audiences

Spatial narratives differ from other narrative mediums. While immersed in watching the screen or reading a book, you are, in many senses, always ‘outside’ the story. By contrast, you can walk right into a narrative environment, becoming physically, emotionally and intellectually immersed in narrative space. The argument here is that space as a narrative medium differs from the narrative medium of literature, film and theatre. Spatial narratives are distinctive because whole body immersion in spatialised stories heightens the sensory dimensions of narrative and simultaneously reduces fixed linear sequence expressed from a single viewpoint. In practice narrative environments transport visitors into a storyworld and prompt experiences that trigger new thoughts, emotional changes and even bodily changes to heart rate and breathing. However because of the nature of spatial behaviour visitors/audiences/inhabitants/users will tend to go where they like and construct their own narrative threads from the overall framing narrative.

Theorist David Herman suggests even literary stories do not achieve their power simply through a linear sequence of events but through the construction, by the audience, of a storyworld based on cues provided by the author showing the who, what, where, when, how, why framework of the story.

...it would be difficult to account for the for the immersive potential of stories by appeal to the structuralist notions of story, that is, strictly in terms of events and existents arranged into a plot.....Interpreters of narrative do not merely

reconstruct a set of events and existents but imaginatively (emotionally and viscerally) inhabit a world in which, besides happening and existing, things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief... (Herman, 2004, pp.16)

In narrative environments cues, states and events take the form of buildings, objects, sounds, images, digital information and other people's behavior and they meld together into the story and story-world. The visitor who enters this story world is not conceived of as passive receiver but as an active participant actively moving, interpreting, speaking and producing their own experience in mental space, physical space, social space and across social media in virtual space.

Narratologists may argue that narratives are secondary imaginary worlds separate from the here and now and as such cannot be experienced bodily. The argument in this article is that the design of the environment does indeed create another world, different from daily life, that the audience will anticipate this experience and knowingly enter the space and will treat the space as a temporary separate world or heterotopia. So, for example, museums take visitors temporarily to a different world where time or events are compressed, ordered and communicated in order to assert or critique particular socio-cultural or political discourses.

Case study

Now let us address the final question, how can spatial narratives be used in social innovation? The case study below E8 Plus Hackney devised by Luca Ponticelli in 2014 has been chosen to address and unpack this question.

Ponticelli undertook this project while he was a student on MA Narrative Environments at Cen-

tral Saint Martins. He researched and co-designed a hyper-local experiment in community cohesion, which aimed to challenge stereotypes of homelessness through art, design and storytelling. He co-produced a pop-up exhibition as a hub for interaction between diverse audiences and prompted visitors to see the local area through the eyes of the homeless community.



Luca Ponticelli and one of the co-creators of the exhibition @Benjamin Mallek

The six month project was initially inspired by Ponticelli's by first hand observations. Having rented a flat in Hackney, East London, E8, he began to notice how different communities inhabited the same space but lived very different lives. In particular the incoming community of young artists and designers were living in stark contrast to the community of local homeless people. The youngsters were a sign of the gentrification of the area while the homeless community had lived there for many years. Ponticelli developed an initial research question: 'Can art and design be a catalyst to create interaction between the growing numbers of young artists/designers and homeless people of E8?'

Ponticelli had read about homelessness and poverty but was struck by the reality of people's lives in Hackney. He started volunteering at the Hackney Winter Shelter, a dormitory for homeless people, cooking breakfast every Saturday morning, and he gradually got to know the community there. He

soon discovered the Soup Kitchen on Mare Street, Hackney where he introduced himself and his main collaborator Sead Baliu, a video maker, and they joined the Soup Kitchen distributing food, and clothes. Thus Ponticelli and Baliu were able to further develop dialogue with the homeless community and establish trust.



The Soup Kitchen @Luca Ponticelli

Ponticelli then started to develop a strategy to link the homeless community and the art and design community. He asked for volunteers from each community to create eight mixed pairs. Each young artist/designer met with their homeless partner to listen to their story and find visual ways to express their partner's history and perspective on the local environment. The pairs in the project are named as Audrey and Brian, Freya and Mark, Joli and Monica, Blue and John, Kenny and Lisa, Zabou and Mike, Carl and Kevin, Alice and Sherief. Over the following months, the pairs met in a public square by the Saturday Soup Kitchen and co-created a series of art pieces.



Alice and Sherief meeting @Benjamin Mallek

Ponticelli sought a space to exhibit the work and create a hub for the two communities to come together as a group. He found a pop-up space the 'Hackney Shop' in Morning Lane, owned by the council that was being made available for free to encourage local artists and designers to showcase or sell their work to the general public. The gallery was in the heart of the area occupied by the homeless community not far from the soup kitchen.



The Hackney Shop @Benjamin Mallek

Ponticelli and Baliu then started to plan the exhibition. They enlisted the support among their network to help with the design of the exhibition, the related events and communications. Several people came forward including two spatial designers, Soumya Basnet and Manasi Pophali; a photographer, Benjamin Mallek; and a web designer, Gigi Hung. The exhibition was called, 'A Journey through Mare Street'. It showed the artworks produced by the eight pairs of volunteers and a map of Mare Street locating the environments that were important in the stories and inviting visitors to 'see through the eyes' of the homeless partners in the pairs. The gallery layout and display also used concept of the map as an organising principle for the space. The exhibition aimed to both celebrate the stories of the homeless people and stimulate a critical perspective on social inequities in the rapidly area undergoing rapid gentrification.



The map of Mare Street designed to show the perspective of homeless people @Benjamin Mallek



The exhibition opening May 2014 @Benjamin Mallek



Kenny next to his portrait @Benjamin Mallek



Luca Ponticelli and Sead Baliu and Val Stevenson, one of the organisers of the Soup Kitchen @Benjamin Mallek

The exhibition was promoted by Ponticelli and Baliu across various social media including Instagram and Facebook. Three local newspapers The Hackney Gazette, The Voice and Hackney Today covered the exhibition. QR codes were placed in the key locations in Mare Street so passers by could download and see the artworks and stories in situ. On the exhibition's opening night, a silent auction was held for the art pieces. The proceeds went to the Saturday Soup Kitchen to help them become a registered charity and improve their activities for the benefit of the local homeless community.

The case study shows how spatial narrative can be used as both an inclusive creative tool, and a critical tool. It exemplifies the role of the designer as researcher, as co-author, as a story listener and a story teller, as a creator of space but also of interactions, as a designer of systems, as politically aware and socially motivated, and, design as active intervention.

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Links

Atelier Brückner <http://www.atelier-brueckner.de>

Daily Tous les Jours <http://www.dailytouslesjours.com>

Duncan McCauley <http://www.duncanmccauley.com>

Event Communications <http://www.eventcomm.com>

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Land Design Studio <http://www.landdesignstudio.co.uk>

Metaphor <http://www.metaphor.eu>

Ralph Appelbaum Associates <http://www.raany.com>

Shangri-la experience <http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/shangri-la>

Snark-spacemaking <http://snarkive.eu>

The Decorators <http://www.the-decorators.net>

MA Narrative Environments <http://www.narrative-environments.com>

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ABSTRACT

Stories fulfil key roles in our human existence. They help us relate to our context, to those around us and eventually to ourselves. As we tell and listen to stories, they often prove to be a means of transportation into another reality. In foresight and design, they embody future changes we would like to see become reality, improvements to our context. As such, storytelling helps to trigger and guide processes of change. Change is not neutral however. It has a direction and stimulating the imagination through storytelling is what can inspire such direction. Zooming in on experiences of storytelling in foresight and design, in particular also design for social innovation, this contribution highlights three valuable enabling characteristics of storytelling, i.e. that of shaping, weaving and generating.

TAGS

Storytelling, Foresight, Design, Social Innovation

UNIVERSITY/DESIS LAB:

LUCA School of Arts & Pantopicon

CITY/COUNTRY:

Antwerpen, Belgium

PROJECT WEBSITE/BLOG:

www.pantopicon.be

"We are gathered here today to commemorate Stanislaw, the founding father of our house, 'The Neological Institute'. We are here to perpetuate his legacy, the deep belief that new vocabularies and linguistics give birth to new times. Like the imagination precedes the image, new words breed new logics, language brings forth new futures. This is why we are here: to celebrate our role in the continuous becoming of our world."

from "NF036 - The Neological Institute"
(Baerten, 2014)

Like any word, the term 'story' brings with it a series of connotations and assumptions. To most people it will look something like this: stories are written, they are written by an author, they are consumed by an audience. Yet, assumptions are there to be questioned, default connotations to be challenged. Stories don't always exist in written form. They aren't always created by a single person. Their audience is not always a group of passive consumers.

The multitude of things that stories can be, of roles that they can fulfil, is particularly true when one considers them in the context of foresight and design, two fields which have much in common. For one, they both deal with bridging the gap between 'what is' and 'what could be'. Herbert Simon famously described designing as "devising courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon, 1969). In foresight, both the exploration of plausible future scenarios and the envisioning of preferable futures pose a similar challenge. In both design and foresight, stories

play an important role, especially when their activities take place in a participatory or collaborative setting. The powerful ways in which stories can contextualise, create meaning and allow people to make sense of things are well recognised. Ezio Manzini puts it as follows: "[storytelling] enables us to communicate the complex ideas and values that today's co-designing processes must often deal with" (Manzini, 2015).

Indeed, stories allow one to contextualise and connect disparate elements in a meaningful way so that complexity can be managed. Yet, the value of storytelling goes much further. Within the foresight and design context, one could consider stories multi-tools, more versatile than Swiss Army knives. They can be at once a means of transportation, moving people from one reality into another and a lens, giving insight into people's hearts and minds, rendering tangible their underlying worldviews. Stories can be a well around which people gather to discuss. Together they can form a mirror palace reflecting different perspectives on an issue. Stories can be a bridge, allowing groups of people to discover and cultivate new common ground. They can be at once engine and fuel, catalysing change by moving people in a given direction. Stories can be all of this and so much more ...

Zooming in on experiences in storytelling in foresight and design, in particular also design for social innovation, three valuable characteristics are worth highlighting, i.e. that of shaping, weaving and generating.

shaping

Stories are shapers of context, stage-setters for the mind. They shape the way we see and make sense of the world around us and also give direction to the way we shape it. They shape one's sense of time, place and eventually also one's behaviour. Storytelling shapes time in various ways. For one, it alters people's perception of time. A split second can cover a lifetime of events. By means of just a handful of elements, the scaffolding of a storyline can be drafted. Our minds - memory and imagination - do the rest of the heavy lifting. They fill in the gaps and turn the whole into a smooth experience. This shows that story-listening is an active, rather than a passive activity. This way of 'condensing time' is particularly useful for example when helping people to imagine a certain future. In recounting a storyline connecting a present situation to an envisaged future in a stepwise manner, the future is brought within reach. The story bridges the gap between the two by providing a logical sequence of events connecting both. Hence even a distant future which at first might seem unattainable or hard to image from becoming reality when seen from the present perspective, is brought within reach. For example, storylines can be used to describe how local inhabitants could play a role in and benefit from a local skill-sharing system based upon alternative currencies in the future. A few simple story elements touching upon ways in which already today people around us share things, or use other ways of exchanging value than through financial means, can help bring this future within reach.

Another way in which stories can be used to alter people's perception of time is by presenting the future as if it had already arrived; for example, by having fictional companies showcase fictional yet plausible products and services in a contemporary context (as we did during the Biennale Interieur in 2014) such as in a booth on a trade fair. By doing so, upon revelation of their fictional nature, people

start to reflect not only upon possibly unmet needs in their lives, the way these products and services would cater to them or the way in which these businesses would disrupt the market or change society. They would also question why the future isn't here yet, ask what it is that separates us from it? Multiple moments in time presented as if they were one, creates a friction which generates dialogue.

Besides time, stories also shape spaces. Even the greyest, most dull and derelict areas of a neighbourhood can come to life, when we look at them through the lens of a story describing the magnificent happenings which once took place there or the marvellous ways in which tomorrow it could become a vibrant meeting place for young and old. Hence, stories help to switch modes in our minds, to shift our focus from that which is to that which could be. There are myriad ways of telling these stories. One of them could be through physical interventions in the space, such as chalk outlines on floors and walls, depicting future places, window stickers overlaying an empty shop window with the image of a new juice bar running on local produce, etc. They are simple ways in which stories about the space can be made tangible and transcend their linear reading in the space. Rather than any dedicated audience, the curiosity of any passer by may be awakened and by consequence people's behaviour within the space will alter the space itself. As such these interventions can serve as catalysts for placemaking activities.

Also the very act of storytelling itself impacts our sense of space in that it draws people together in real space or mindspace. We gather to listen to stories. Our postures, our expressions, our behaviours change. We form mental images of what it is that other people are describing to us. Stories enable the use of our imagination as an extension of our sensory apparatus and sense making skills. This allows us to walk around in and question the creations or envisionings of others before they even exist.

With storytelling comes story-listening. Especially within the context of design for social innovation, this is a crucial capability. After all, the stories told by stakeholders are indispensable sources of understanding and design inspiration regarding the local context. Stimulating and enabling others to tell their stories then becomes a design challenge in its own right. Tools such as blackboards against a brick wall in the street with phrases on them for passers-by to complete using chalk, card sorting games with building blocks for stories, video-diaries, etc. are all examples of simple ways in which designers can engage in story-listening, by providing triggers and tools to stakeholders to tell their stories. These will inform designers and their designs. As such, story-listening does not follow but precedes storytelling.

In later phases, once design concepts have been formed, designers are likely to make these tangible through storyboards, prototypes, scale-models, videos, etc. Yet, from a storytelling perspective, the challenge becomes to shape not only the ideas, or the methods used to render them tangible, but also to shape the setting in which to share them with stakeholders. Setting the stage for the design concepts to be shared through storytelling, in a maximally stimulating and inviting way, benefits the attraction and involvement of stakeholders to give feedback on design concepts and engage in co-design or co-production. This links to a performative aspect of storytelling: the use of scenes (e.g. a curiosity cabinet of ideas, a theatre stage, a sales-booth, ...), props (uniforms, gadgets, ...), etc. all help to shape an engaging experience, to invite and draw people in. The poetics of a space (Bachelard, 1994) equally influence storytelling experiences.

Hence, storytelling shapes people's behaviour, yet not only through stage setting. In a way, one could assert that storytelling is always a collaborative event; every story contains gaps, which implicitly invite story-listeners to join in the storytelling ac-

tivity using their imagination. Stories are by nature catalysts for the imagination. Think of 'What if ... ? / Imagine that ...' games, for example, and how they trigger people's imagination and engage them in formulating new narratives. "What if in 10 years this industrial wasteland would become a park in the city?", "What if local entrepreneurs and/or inhabitants would each invest 25€/month in a neighbourhood innovation fund?", "What if you could decide on which project to spend 10% of your yearly municipal taxes?", ...

By merely raising these questions, by planting the seeds for new narratives to unfold, people are challenged to question their assumptions, to question their present context and imagine alternatives, futures. By questioning their role, their position, and imagine new ones, they ultimately step off the beaten path, out of their comfort zones. The insights to which this leads, make this mental shift a point of no return. As a client once said after having discussed a set of future scenarios: "Now I can no longer deny what I have seen, heard and imagined. These images will play a role in the decisions I will be asked to make, whether I like it or not. I cannot un-think them."

Stephen Denning puts it as follows: "Storytelling gets inside the minds of the individuals who collectively make up the organization and affects how they think, worry, wonder, agonise, and dream about themselves and in the process create - and re-create - their organization. Storytelling enables the individuals in an organization to see themselves and the organization in a different light, and accordingly take decisions and change their behavior in accordance with these new perceptions, insights and identities" (Denning, 2001).

Throughout the years, in our design and foresight activities at Pantopicon, we have experimented with everything from written stories, spoken word, film, animation, exhibitions, models, theatre, pup-

poetry, ... not only to tell stories or to evoke future worlds, but also to engage people in exploring them, in reflecting upon them through their own stories, to enable others to share their viewpoints.

The shapes stories themselves take on, the range of media by means of which they can be told is limitless. Whereas film and theatre are likely to be considered straightforward alternatives to the book as key media for storytelling, in a recent interview the architect Renzo Piano for example, stresses that even our physical environments, buildings and cities can be considered a means of storytelling. Each medium brings with it contextual requirements, possibilities and impossibilities. It depends on the goal and context which one is most appropriate to use.

It is worth noting in this context, that each and every endeavour in design for social innovation is imbued with values, coloured by culture. This ought to encourage the field - and all others it touches - to explore further the full range and wealth of different cultural expressions of storytelling (e.g. dance, theatre, etc.).

weaving

By their very nature, stories weave together disparate elements into an organic, integral whole. People, places, events, causes and effects find meaning in the way that connections are woven. In an increasingly complex world, stories provide an invaluable way of sense-making. They allow us to grasp and manage complexity, rendering understandable that to which through other means it is hard to relate. There where immediate feedback on behaviour is lacking for example, stories can provide a way to relate distant causes and effects. For instance, the ecological effects of our consumption patterns need stories in order to relate the impact of the electronics we buy and throw away, to environmental and health issues in Africa or Asia. Design can provide the next step in translating these

stories into experiences in which they are 'told' so that behavioural change is more likely to occur.

Not only contents or contexts are woven together through storytelling, also the people and their interpretations, viewpoints and reflections are. Every single story gives rise to a kaleidoscope of different interpretations and meanings in the eye of its beholder, the ear of its listener. Hence storytelling is not only a way to convey existing information, but also to elicit new information. It is a conversation starter enabling the exchange and reciprocal assessment of different viewpoints, a catalyst for dialogue. Through dialogue, stories aid in creating mutual understanding for different or similar viewpoints, in building empathy and common ground. As such they nurture (the establishment of) relationships between people and engagement with respect to issues or projects. For example, stories about the future of a neighbourhood do not only carry the invitation for local inhabitants to simply agree or disagree with the viewpoint of the storyteller or the vision conveyed, but also to formulate further details or their personal alternatives.

In the particular case of visions, they can be considered stories aimed at exploring and/or providing directions of collaborative action. In case of the first, they allow us to question whether this is the direction we wish to take. In the latter case, they become a framework for directing people and efforts in a common direction. In both cases it is through the story and the 'multi-logue' this triggers, that common ground is created, both in the now as well as in (view of) the future. Thus, groups and individuals can take position and take up their roles in realising the vision. As such, social tissue, relationships are woven in view of a common goal, a shared vision.

Beyond the scale of any particular project, taking into consideration society as a whole, the dynamic discourse nurtured by a diversity of viewpoints is

key. This is especially the case in light of the complexity and 'liquid' nature of today's society, as repeatedly emphasised also by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who stresses contemporary society's need for enduring openness and dialogue, shaped by a plurality of viewpoints and perspectives (Bauman & Mauro, 2015).

The very name of our studio - 'Pantopicon' - embodies this notion of addressing things from a multitude of perspectives, to 'prelect' and anticipate upon different times possibly ahead, in or beyond our control. By weaving an ecology of viewpoints on futures, new options are created and capacity for experimentation and/or directed action is built. In design for social innovation this interactive process becomes apparent in the way that it enhances the dynamics of communities as a whole - formally and informally - as well as their systemic relationship with their physical, social, economic, political, etc. environment, consequently driving change.

generating

Most - if not all - of us will remember moments in our childhood in which we gathered around a story - by the knees of a family member at home or a teacher in kindergarten - our gazes fixed on the storyteller, our mouths open in awe and expectation, our minds so engaged in the story that we were oblivious to our surroundings. We were transported into another world, in part described by the story, in part shaped by our own imagination. Through language - whether verbal, visual, ... - we can express, render tangible ideas which would otherwise be confined to our minds. Once 'uttered', these ideas evoke new worlds.

Stories have the power not merely to recount of different worlds, but to call them into being, to generate them. Through words, images and the meanings to which they give rise, our imagination sets to work.

On a more metaphorical level, the notion of stories and storytellers having the ability to generate new realities through the sheer power of language or writing, of telling the story, is recurrent. In a way it represents the desire to attain the biblical, God-like creative ability to materialise the worlds embedded in words and images through simple utterance.

Jorge Luis Borges' magician in "Circular ruins"¹ 'dreams' a human into being. Atrus, the key protagonist in the "Myst"² series of computer games, generates worlds through writing. In his works "The Boy from Mars" and "CHZ, Continuously Habitable Zones", the French artist Philippe Parreno creates a setting in which an image or film produces architecture or life, hence representation creates reality. All use some kind of language in order to 'describe' or 'design'. Language shapes the lenses through which we look at and act in reality. Besides shaping reality in the now, it is generative in the sense that it equally has the power to generate plausible imaginaries for tomorrow. In this context it is worth noting that the majority of our words carry the burden of our collective histories. In a way - especially when confronted with the future - they manifest themselves as remains, down-cyclings, revisitations of or variations on meanings stemming from bygone times. They come attached with threads linking them to contexts and logics, connotations often distant from today's - let alone - visions of tomorrow's realities.

From a storytelling perspective, this can often lead to misinterpretations of stories - especially about the future - because of the wordings used and the meanings with which they have become associated most commonly. This can become problematic in multiple ways. Think for example about the way in which sharing services have wrongfully been perceived as variations on themes of a commu-

1. Published in his famous collection of fantastic tales entitled "Fictions" (Borges, 1998).

2. See <http://www.cyanworlds.com> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myst>

nist era. Yet also, consider the way in which certain players in the platform economy currently use the same terms of the sharing economy, yet function according to a winner-takes-all kind of logic. They are very different stories recounted using the same vocabularies. This points to the need to find new carriers for new meanings. In describing future contexts, particular power lies in the use of neologisms. They generate curiosity and invite to creativity. In an abstract sense, they are placeholders for new meanings to be filled in, only loosely connected to the world as we know it. They are tools to describe emerging phenomena or places yet to come. Hence, they are pregnant with potentialities.

Neologisms as new words, create space for new meanings to emerge, to generate new imaginaries to be explored, aiding in naming and thus collaboratively anticipating potential realities to come. They are the ultimate examples of the generative power of language and stories to inspire imaginaries which lead to the reshaping of realities, futures which lead to re-assessments and re-orientations of today.

on a final note ...

Storytelling and the collaborative processes they are able to trigger and guide, are antidotes to societal fragmentation, cross-fertilisers for ideas much needed in an era seemingly pregnant with change, yet simultaneously starving for imagination. Change is not neutral however. It has a direction and imagination is what can inspire such direction. Storytelling is a key process in supporting this.

Within the realm of design for social innovation, designers are challenged to become beach combers, pearl divers, weavers of tapestries of stories and people. This requires new capabilities or even the rediscovery, appropriation and further development of seemingly timeless ones. Many of them are based upon sensitivities, such as for example the role of nuance and pace in the languages we

use to tell our stories. The Dutch writer Hella Haasse repeatedly expressed her firm belief that many of the world's problems or the difficulty of finding solutions for them, could be traced back to people's poor use of language, vocabulary, and lack of nuance and linguistic empathy. Another key capability is that to enchant. Vladimir Nabokov once noted: "There are three points of view from which a writer can be considered: he may be considered as a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter. A major writer combines these three – storyteller, teacher, enchanter – but it is the enchanter in him that predominates and makes him a major writer ...". We could say that if - as designers - we want to be agents of positive change in society, we should cultivate our ability to enchant, to evoke worlds so others can inhabit them. Allowing others to pre-experience them, embrace or refute the ideas and values underpinning them, helps to anticipate our building of the worlds and societies we wish to live in, however big or small. There is a world out there of stories waiting to be told, to be listened to, a world of worlds out there to be lived. There is a world out there in need of agents *évoqueurs*.

About the Author

Nik Baerten was trained as a knowledge engineer. For several years he was active as a multidisciplinary researcher at the Digital Culture Department of the Maastricht McLuhan Institute (NL). In 2004 he co-founded Pantopicon, a foresight and design studio based in Antwerp (Belgium) with a satellite office in Toronto (Canada). The studio crafts provocative futures in order to stimulate debate regarding tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. It supports both public and private organisations in exploring the long term, in building visions and strategies, in designing concepts for new products, services and experiences.

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IL Montaggio, the assembling issue

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ways in which communication design creates meaning when enacting processes of selection, such as film editing. This, by assessing the implications of value that exchangeable assemblages of “things” embed (matters of concern in Bruno Latour’s terms) when intangible artefacts are delivered.

TAGS

Representatation, Ping, Assembly, Demons, Demos

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1. Introduction

Along its process of creation, storytelling needs to confer order and rhythm to the plot by emphasizing, highlighting and giving value to the different elements portrayed, this is, by editing.

When editing we choose and in that line on a plain technical definition, what editing does is to manipulate images and sound to create a result, not necessarily a meaning, not in the sense that Design for social innovation understands it. Henceforth, ethical propositions emerge when the artifact is thought to deliver meaning.

The outcome of an editing process could initially seem to be a mere communicative artifact to, for instance, sell a product, but meaning in the realm of communication for social innovation and sustainability has different implications because its premises do not fit into the formats of the mainstream market.

Now, I would like to change the word manipulation for assembling, since it is what we are ultimately referring to here as the montage and has a more neutral, if not positive, connotation.

Likewise, I'd prefer to use the word montage instead of editing, because the former one refers to a whole understanding of the "creating-meaning-process" a rather abstract activity assisted by technical means on the subsequent phases in the editing room, meaning the editing process is rather mechanical and based on the ideas and views of the "Montatore"¹.

Now, if montage is about choosing, about decisions, what one has to observe then is the intention of each decision hence decisions regards not only technical but also ethical aspects.

1.2 Time and change as a constant: Il Montaggio.

Assembling, as I am exposing it here has as foundation the factor of Time.

'The cut', this is the line of images assembled in a certain way to create a narrative, moves along time. Narrating indeed, is defined in terms of time, but it is a time that can be rearranged, readjusted, relocated.

Now, does truth, when read in a framework of time, have an ever-changing dimension? Which is 'the truth' of design for social innovation and sustainability? Has it changed in time?. There are certain topics, prohibitions, ideologies that have changed their truth in time, such as the discovery of the true nature of ordinary matter (the atom), or issues regarding human rights (women and black people becoming citizens being able to vote, freedom, borders, etc.) but there are other matters of general concern that have gone beyond mere barriers of knowledge evolving, without changing their very intrinsic existence, this is without passing from being true to be false (because of its essential nature), as in the case of initiatives that are involved in the so-called paradigmatic change, such as those moving to the basics, to decentralized jobs, to alternative ways of commuting, eating, working and all those practices that hopefully will support the systemic change (Manzini, 2003)².

1 Montaggista, Italian for editor. Not exact translation in English.

2 Manzini, E., & Jégou, F. (2003). Sustainable Everyday: Scenarios of Urban Life. Milan: Edizione Ambiente.

The meaning-making of cinema enacted in the 'montaggio', this is, in the process of building up 'the cut', comes from the times of Eisenstein and his Montage Theory (1929³) which states that: "two or more images edited together create a 'tertium quid' (third things) which makes the whole greater than the sum of its individual parts", referring to the intangibles, pieces that ultimately deliver meaning. In other words, by assembling images and voices, design selects virtuous practices of communities interested in the systemic shift.

1.2.1 Now, what, for design, does it mean to represent?

Design, to start with, should be a political act. Political in the Greek politikos sense, this is from politēs which stands for 'citizens, design, given the actual situation of the world, shall then "represent" citizens.

To develop this 'political' representations, Bruno Latour, takes us back in time to year 930 AD in Iceland, were the world's oldest existing parliament, the Alþingi (Althing) located at a place called the Þingvellir or Thingvellir (thing standing for: assembly, Fig.1). Many of the most momentous events in Icelandic history took place at Thingvellir, it was there where the Icelandic nation agreed to adopt Christianity in the year 1000, and where the modern republic was founded (944). *"For 868 years every summer, chieftains, bishops, landed farmers and ordinary men and women from all parts of Iceland left their homes and villages and headed towards Thingvellir for the annual fortnight long meeting which would start on the first Thursday in the eleventh week of each summer. The trip on horseback could take up to 17 days from the eastern part of the country. Upon arrival, people set up camp and temporary booths to hold meetings, exchange news, trade and hold games and feasts. The assembly set laws, seen as a covenant between free men, and settled disputes. Religious appointments were made, outlaws*

*banished; marriages were arranged, contracts negotiated, matters of honour decided, sometimes by duels. The plains of Thingvellir turned into a bustling open-air meeting place with huge crowds milling about among tents, booths, rocks, sheep and horses."*⁴

All those were "things" examined, discussed, assembled and disassembled at this outdoor space surrounded by the magnificent Icelandic nature. In that very geographical point is also where the two tectonic plates of the so-called Mid-Atlantic ridge are located, a place where the continents change.

That place, the Þingvellir, can be seen as an instance of how isolated people, initiatives and scattered ideas (on social innovation and sustainability in our case) can share a common ground. The Assembly thus, in our case is not only an assembly of people but an assembly of images of people's practices displayed as "reels", our montages are assemblies. The montages on social innovation are spaces to narrate the non-fixed processes of the Small, Local, Open and Connected (SLOC, Manzini).

1.2.2 The Ping

In Catalogue of the Exhibition Making Things Public, Atmospheres of Democracy (2005)⁵ Bruno Latour redefines politics as operating in the realm of things. Now, what if, instead of politics we read his statement under the key of design?:

"Politics is not just an arena, a profession, or a system, but a concern for things brought to the attention of the fluid and expansive constituency of the public. But how are things made public? What, we might ask, is a republic, a res publica, a public thing, if we do not know how to make things public? There are many other kinds of assemblies, which are not political in the usual sense, that gather a public around things—scientific laboratories, supermarkets, churches, and

³ Eisenstein, S. (2009c) Beyond the Shot (1929). In: Taylor, R., ed., The Eisenstein Reader.

⁴ In <http://www.icelandontheweb.com/articles-on-iceland/nature/national-parks/thingvellir>

⁵ <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/96-MTP-DING.pdf> pages 4-30

disputes involving natural resources like rivers, landscapes, and air.”⁶

Here, I'm interested in exploring possibilities for what they refer as being the: *“atmospheric conditions—technologies, interfaces, platforms, networks, and mediations that allow things to be made public”*, accordingly, I would like to understand how communication design, specially films and videos (as techniques of representation) shall play a role taking them from the assembling (montage) view point.

1.2.2 Micro assemblies

Nowadays, it seems that narrations produced in “forums”, ancient agoras or assemblies, are some of the few stories that can be trusted. So is the case of news transmitted via Facebook, Youtube or Twitter in countries that have recently felt the pressure of censorship to public media. Social media is so immediate that it cannot be “edited”.

And just the same is happening with the growing topic of social innovation, meaning, it is well known that currently, at a microscopic level citizens are permeating the mainstream of normal politics, economy and welfare, and thus instead of waiting for the system to provide them what it is needed, they have become providers of a whole range of ways to fulfill everyday needs redefining the act of solving. Their “small” initiatives (community gardens, community based tourism, books/clothes/ideas exchange, co-housing, car-sharing, food-sharing, etc.) are new ways to bring people together (creative communities), they are forming new forums, new assemblies, but also, their myriad of solutions can be seen and understood, as a complex artefacts.

Now, how to give visibility to these growing and rapidly spreading new “assemblies”?

And from there, how to build up more efficient communicative artefacts that give account of their complexity? How, in short, to represent what they represent?

In assessing these questions, the different meanings of the word representation based on the approaches of Latour were assessed: *“two different meanings of the word representation that have been kept separated in theory although they have remained mingled in the practice. The first one, so well known in schools of law and political science, designates the ways to gather the legitimate people around some issue. In this case, a representation is said to be faithful if the right procedures have been followed. The second one, well known in science and technology, presents or rather represents what is the object of concern to the eyes and ears of those who have been assembled around it. In this case, a representation is said to be good if the matters at hand have been accurately portrayed. Realism implies that the same degree of attention be given to the two aspects of what it is to represent an issue. The first question draws a sort of place, sometimes a circle, which might be called an assembly, a gathering, a meeting, a council; the second question brings into this newly created locus a topic, a concern, an issue, a topos. But the two have to be taken together: Who is to be concerned; What is to be considered? [...] A third meaning of this ambiguous and ubiquitous word “representation,” the one with which artists are most familiar, had to be called for to solve, this time visually, the problem of the composition of the “Body Politik”.*⁷

I would like to explore the last definition and see if it brings significance to design.

1.3 The ethical implications of the Assemblage

“In the stream of media hacktivism we de-constructed the authority of media truthfulness, surfing the internet [...]”

⁶ 2005 Latour Bruno, Wibel Peter. Making Things Public, atmospheres of democracy. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. Page 6.

⁷ <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/96-MTP-DING.pdf> page 6

Even if we failed in the ideology, as designers we are now representing visions of alternative futures, and shaping the stories of the preferable future in which they're a successful model."

Francesca Valsecchi, Ph.D.

If we examine the term ethics, it comes from the Greek word ἠθικός ethikos from ἦθος ethos, which means "custom, habit", so what is it that we as designers customize project-wise based, what are we used to deliver?, and what is it that our 'users' are used to consume upon the messages they receive? Which are, ultimately, the audiovisual products that we are all used to produce/consume? Could we change those habits?

Ethics goes in hand with aesthetics, axiological studies (the study of value), embrace communicational issues, but what happens when we introduce the dimension of change?

In order to assemble audiovisual artefacts (montages) that that keep ethical and aesthetical premises, we shall deliver montages able to adapt to change, or as Andrés Burbano Valdéz⁸, one of the participants of the DESIS in the Mirror project, from Los Andes University in Colombia stated:

"The interesting thing of documentation is that you are dealing with reality, and reality changes and it's not asking you permission to change, [...] The key elements of doing any kind of documentation is the negotiation between plan and intuition. [...] So the ability of reading a reality that is changing, adapt your plan to that, or even transform radically your originally plan, is the key point to have a good audiovisual output at the end."

Now, to edit is to give meaning. For this, in many cases we have to cut off what disturbs such meaning. We cut off to emphasize, the beauty.

When editing we choose, we decide (we design) what fits in the story, nothing is there for free, we edit, we are the "raconteur" and we choose based on communication objectives, a defined concept, and so on. Like that, when editing, are we telling a partial truth, or an absolute one?

Francesca Valsecchi Professor at Tongi University, was also with us at DESIS in the Mirror, during the presentation in Dublin, via Skype. She shared her viewpoints on the ethics of storytelling and the relevance, as Burbano highlighted, to do not neglect the communities involved but rather to adapt. Valsecchi:

"During the Rural-Urban Philosophy Talk in Shanghai different speakers converge on the idea that the time of crisis we are living (that Chinese define as "time of change") will require the rise of a new philosophy. Chinese perceive "philosophy" as an evolution of "ideology", and the ground for the common aesthetic. The idea of quality and beauty that is depicted in the ancient forms of Chinese traditional society (tied with the environment, moderately populated, artistic, and peaceful) is nevertheless insufficient for the contemporary aesthetic, and what has changed in the subject, but not in the representation yet, is the presence of the people, that are not represented in classical arts and traditional visual imaginary but in a either bucolic, iconographic, or propaganda ways (let's say, all of them out of the real).

By including the people in our (of design) central representation scope, are we contributing to an aesthetic of the communities? In the confused but systematic recall of the ancient, flourishing past, in Chinese rhetoric there is no space of representation and stories about communities, and there is no ground for a common identity. The past identity is fragmented in the memories of individual, whilst the potential of the future one is in the stories where groups, collectives, and communities exist."

⁸ Andrés Burbano Valdéz. Associated Professor. Department of Design. Los Andes University, Colombia. Participant at the DESIS in the Mirror interviews/Project.

1.3.1 The Low-Fi Emerging Aesthetics

To “cherish the low-fi” and favorite its non-sharp and perfect virtues is something that for those pursuing perfection in the moving images field is hard to value or understand, especially in aesthetical terms. But as Saint Agustine said: *“This is the very perfection of a man, to find out his own imperfections”*.

Over a period of 3 years (2010-2013) questions started to raise within the DESIS network), we were slowly tracing the activity of self-organized communities and the designers working with them under an audio-visual reading key. What was persistent and thus identifiable, was a will, a certain desire, a fascination to be as real as possible and this was then expressed in plastic terms by the “low-fi” approach, meaning by imperfect, blurry, unsteady, pixelated images. This imperfect aesthetic was appealing at a certain extent, notwithstanding the will to improve and work along with professional filmmakers grew. Our colleagues expressed the will to work with professional filmmakers. Along the process of DESIS in the Mirror⁹ and after that, by conducting a series of shootings/montages based on interviews of social innovators in Berlin and South Africa.

I have realized that evidently all good practices and examples on them are just scattered audiovisual pieces of good intentions with average videos, but, once you put them together, the global picture starts making sense. What has to be taken into consideration then, are the axiomatic issues of ethics-aesthetics.

We found out that many of the projects of Social Innovation are not finished, are works-in-progress and thus represented like that, but as here we are considering the factor change, we think that the alliance design-filmmaking can upgrade and enrich representations.

Nowadays we are slowly moving in that direction thanks to the interdisciplinary teamwork among disciplines.

1.3.2 Demons or Demos?

In his text *“From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik”*¹⁰ Bruno Latour also elaborates the implications of the pieces, the assemblage of those pieces, the arena in which those pieces are assembled, etc., and highlights what can be read as Il Montaggio when talks about getting ‘things’ together. Latour:

“Through some amazing quirk of etymology, it just happens that the same root has given birth to those twin brothers: the Demon and the Demos – and those two are more at war with each other than Eteocles and Polynices ever were.¹¹ The word “demos” that makes half of the much vaunted word “demo-crazy” is haunted by the demon, yes, the devil, because they share the same Indo-European root da- to divide¹². If the demon is such a terrible threat, it’s because it divides in two. If the demos is such a welcome solution, it’s because it also divides in two. A paradox? No, it’s because we ourselves are so divided by so many contradictory attachments that we have to assemble.

We might be familiar with Jesus’ admonition against Satan’s power,¹³ [... Holy Bible, Matthew 12: 25-26 “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”...]”

The challenge is precisely there, in re-conciliating the pieces that form the wide narrative canvas of this systemic change; in avoiding confrontation and separation of disciplines or métiers (e.g. design and

9 <http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it/>

10 <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/96-MTP-DING.pdf>

11 Detienne Marcel (Ed.), 2003 *Qui veut prendre la parole?*, Le Seuil, Paris.

12 Pierre Lévêque, 1993. “Repartition et démocratie à propos de la racine da-”, in: *Esprit*, 12, 1993, pp 34-39.

13 Holy Bible, Matthew 12: 25-26 “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”.

cinema) and also in re-conciliating the scattered pieces of truth and build up a global rhythm to tell.

1.3.3 Rhythm

The person in charge of 'the cut', the *Montaggista* deals with the rhythm of the story. Are we then, as designers, called to be Montage experts? To trace the rhythm of the innovations? To make them viral? To use the media? To use Cinema? Can we build up knowledge from there?

For this, we shall ask ourselves if as communication designers we can deal with other's subjectivities and trues. Böhnke: *"From a philosophical point of view, truth and reality can not be seen as ontological, eternal and immutable. Most of the time unconsciously, we lean to take a « transcendental » position as a subject which gives us the illusion that there could be a global reality, independent from us, who observe it. Since the works of Gödel as mathematician and Wittgenstein as philosopher, we could not refer to a truth that is not contextual. We can also refer to the works of the Palo Alto school. Reality is a mental and social construction. Unfortunately, the last developments of epistemology bring us to the point where a « true » knowledge appears impossible to achieve".¹⁴*

Creative Communities and Social Innovations are real, are 'true' because they follow their own rhythm. So maybe a true global knowledge cannot be achieved but a myriad of these truths can be collected, selected, assembled and shown, not just for the sake of sharing but willing to inspire and hopefully replicate these myriads.

Ultimately, the initial question brings us to the issue of truth. Are we manipulating the truth while making decisions during the montage? Which stories are we telling when we talk about Social Innovation?

There is always the risk to get confused by the word social, Manzini¹⁵: *"The notion of design for social innovation is frequently considered similar, if not coincident, with the one of social design. In my view, to do that is an error: the two expressions refer to different activities and have very different implications. [...]"*

The problem begins with the double meaning commonly attributed to the adjective "social". One of them, that is also the one used in the expression design for social innovation, indicates that we refer to something concerning social forms. That is, concerning the way in which a society is built. The other one, instead, indicates the existence of particularly problematic situations (such as extreme poverty, illness or exclusion, and circumstances after catastrophic events) to which both the market and the state fail in finding solutions. In other words, when used in this way, "social" becomes a synonym for "very problematic condition", which poses (or should pose) the need for urgent intervention, outside normal market or public service modalities. It is with this meaning that this adjective made its entrance into the design debate several decades ago, generating the expression: social design."

Rather than denying that there are other issues or realities not so romantic, unlike the initiatives we tell, what we are doing is selecting positive examples, inspiring ones that could overcome the Demons by working on, and for, the Demos.

2. Conclusion

2.1. This article started by inquiring if, when assembling a film, as a 'Montatore', one is manipulating the truth. Then, we introduced the dimension of time (and the change of things in time) and started examining the assemblage of images (in the timeline or 'the cut', of a film). This led us to talk about the *Assembling Issue* as understood and explained

¹⁴ Bönke, Isabelle, Ph.D. Interview. Berlin 2013.

¹⁵ <http://desis-network.org/content/design-social-innovation-vs-social-design>

by Bruno Latour who elaborates the Assemble as the gather around *a matter of concern* that he calls 'the Thing'.

For the purpose of this article, we imagined, graphically, the assembly (the cut's time-line) as a rather round gathering and exposed the assessment done by Latour on the nature of 'the Thing' by taking us back to the form of primal political assemblies.

Then, we proposed to examine those assemblies replacing the role of politics for the role of design. So instead of placing every single individual or representative of a parliament we will have images (produced by communication design).

At the center of the round gathering, we will have our matter of concern, which in our case is social innovation and sustainability.

Now, if the efforts done by the initiatives we place on 'the cut' are true, then the whole artifact around those is also true, by its intrinsic nature regardless the order in which we place them along the time-line during the montage.

Or better, moving the elements of 'the cut' in the time-line does not change the intrinsic value and truthful qualities exposed in the narrative.

2.2. When pursuing the truth it is necessary to: simplify. Assembling images on a time-line, is about the conjugation of that very verb, as it is for those fostering innovative practices, designing maps of knowledge, conceptualizing and enacting improvements for the common well-being, assembling all this is simplifying, once and again.

About the Author

Ph.D in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication from Politecnico di Milano (2008) with a dissertation on primal creativity as pivotal element of sustainability.

Nature's devoted and former advertiser with studies in marine biology, photography, psychoanalysis and semiotics. Has taught at bachelor and Master levels. Previous experience as copywriter and editor for Radio and TV. Freelance researcher and empirical practice on environmental issues developed in various regions of the world. At present working on documentaries.

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Figure 1. [Þingvellir]

New Refinement

Thomas Pausz

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ABSTRACT

This text is a reflection on two projects: the Willow Project, a series of open ended experiments with the Icelandic willow tree carried out by third years product design students at the Iceland Academy of The Arts in 2015; secondly Dandelion Full-Use, a research project by Thomas Pausz Studio with the Icelandic Dandelion in 2015. Putting these design experiments in the historical and philosophical context of matter transformations, the text reflects on the tensions between objectification and the potential social impact of a more experimental approach in design practice.

TAGS

Material Cycles, Phenomenology, Reification

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1. Introduction

*'A refinement based on all the matter that has been discarded by the technological ideal seems to be taking place'*¹

Environmental science tells us that everything we put out into the world will sooner or later decompose and become sediment returned into the crust of the Earth, crystallised in the ice of the Antarctic, or ingested by some future life form. We feel the urgency to minimise waste and to separate the contaminated matter into toxic and non toxic elements. This responsibility has a huge impact on all fields of human activity, from industry to philosophy, and design. It also gives a new aura to the practices of decomposing matter.

2. The Raw and the Refined

In the receding industrial paradigm, we excavated the earth strata to find minerals and metals. We mined the land and sea for oil and coal. We refined and purified this raw matter with the help of technological tools such as smelters to separate pure and impure elements, and chemistry to synthesise new compounds. The outcome of these processes became building materials and energy sources for our cities and material productions. This industrial refinement process has established an invisible hierarchy within matter: raw/refined, pure/impure, resources/waste.

'the refined paints of the studio, the refined metals of the laboratory exist within an ideal system.'

*Such enclosed pure systems make it impossible to perceive any other kinds of processes than the ones of differentiated technology.'*²

To reverse this hidden hierarchy of materials, artist Robert Smithson started exhibiting raw minerals collected from industrial quarries in New Jersey. In his Non-Sites installations, he brought limestone rocks, pools of tar and gravel, sandstone and dead trees in their raw state back into our field of aesthetic experience. However, turning away from industrial materials and processes does not imply that matter should not be transformed. On the contrary, Smithson calls for a radical poetics of decomposition:

*'Oxidation, hydration, carbonisation, and solution (the major processes of rock and mineral disintegration) are four methods that could be turned towards the making of art.'*³

To what end could designers apply this *artistic refinement* to the willow tree today? What are the resulting fragments of material telling us? In his personal essay *Was ist Los?*, Seth Price describes a piece of 'petrified lightning' exhibited in a museum vitrine: *'The exhibit (of the fragment) stands for the operation in which a scientific process is mystified, replaced by a ruin under glass, making a fetish of waste.'* This critic of fetishisation applies to museum simulacra. Its reach could be extended to a growing trend in contemporary design projects, where uncommon materials and scientific processes are 'mystified' to create more exclusive objects.

1 A Sedimentation of The Mind: Earth Projects, Robert Smithson, 1968.

2 A Sedimentation of The Mind: Earth Projects, Robert Smithson, 1968.

3 Idem



Fig. 1: Willow-Salt

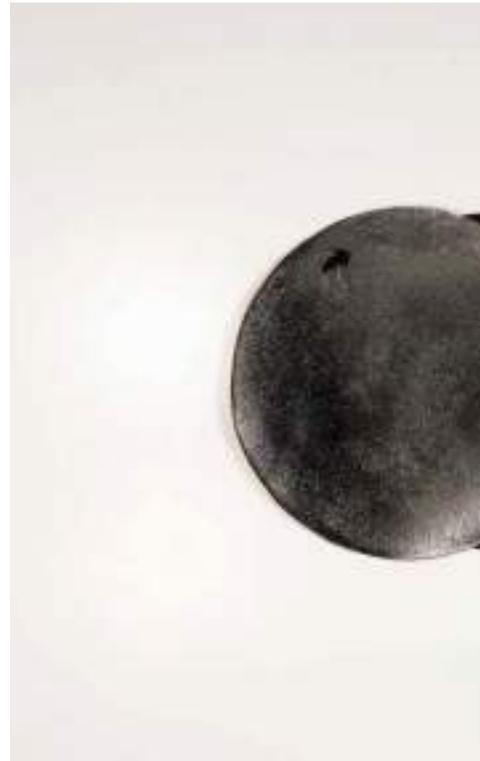


Fig.2: Dried Willow Water with Pigments, The Willow Project.

The resistance to a final objectification of the processes used in the *Willow Project* invites us to other modes of appreciation, and points to different poetics of design work. In the series of materials created from willow, everything is presented as equally valuable and nothing is awarded higher status of refinement. What do we perceive? There are more or less granular compounds; the cellulose fibres of the paper vary in density depending on the bark layers, similar patterns of veins and cracks run through the coal as through the condensed water. In noticing these minute similarities and differences, we create our own dialogue with the materials. All our senses are mobilised to organise this obscure alphabet of textures, colours, and essences. Experiencing journeys of material processes, like encountering a work of Land Art, connects us back to the geological time streams, the time of slow sedimentation and material cycles. This experience refines our own perception of matter and time.

3. Plant Blindness

In epistemological terms, the observational (quasi-obsessive) approach of the *Dandelion Full Use project* to its material bares many similarities to 19th century natural sciences methods⁴. In an epic effort to catalogue natural processes, natural scientists were inventing new ways to observe matter and turning their gaze onto new phenomena.

The idea of dedicating a book to one single plant species for example can be dated back to the work of botanist Alfred Russel Wallace. *Palm Tree of the Amazons and Their Uses*, published by Wallace in 1853, is the first monography ever written about one single species of tree. The scientist confessed that the greatest difficulty in the process of making this book was his own incapacity to distinguish between the thirty-six different types of palm spe-

⁴ The following examples of scientific works by Alfred Russel Wallace and Christian Gottfried Ehrenberg are transcribed fully in the collection of texts *Grain, Vapor, Ray, Textures of the Anthropocene*, The MIT Press, 2015.



Fig. 3. Dandelion Dissection, Dandelion Full-Use project, Thomas Pausz studio.

cies growing at the time in the Amazon. To overcome this 'plant blindness', the scientist turned to the traditional knowledge of the local people. Having used these trees for centuries, their eyes were refined enough to see the small differences within one species.

4. Quiet Catastrophes

Dust and soil are the ultimate state of matter decomposition. In dust, elements are recombined through wind and pressure before slowly turning back into sediment, or enriching the soil for plant growth. Dust or soil is what this willow tree would have become, if its destiny had not been diverged into a design project. We can imagine that fungi and other micro-organisms would eventually have decomposed the tree, and the wind carried some its particulars to other shores.

Microscopist Christian Gottfried Ehrenberg (1795-1876), dedicated a great part of his life to studying the composition of a particular 'red dust' deposit found after Sirocco wind storms in the Mediterranean area. Working against the preconception that dust was composed of random elements, the microbiologist made a detailed examination of the corpuscles and minerals in his samples of the red dust. He isolated seventy-three types of corpuscles, which origins could be traced back to sea organisms, the seed of plant migrating, and even to some micro-fragments of meteoric events. Crystals of salts from an Icelandic willow could have found their way into this dust, as he also traced some volcanic extracts from the Laki eruption of 1783 in Iceland.

Closer to home, the documentary film *Ice and the Sky*, directed by Luc Jaquet, follows the scientific process of the discovery of climate change, one of

the greatest challenges of our times. Glaciologist Claude Lorius conducted scientific expeditions to the Antarctic to develop processes of analysis of the continent's layers of ice. One day, while sipping a glass of whisky on the rocks, Lorius noticed small air bubbles escaping from the ice cubes. Being a diligent scientist, he quickly made a link between this phenomenon and the 'Ice cores' he was extracting to date the ice sheets: by counting the molecules of carbon entrapped in air bubbles in the ice of the Antarctic, Lorius could prove that their numbers had been growing exponentially since the Industrial Revolution. Staring at an ice cube led to explanation of climate change.

Ice and the Sky also shows the long-standing denial of a society unable to understand that something so invisible and abstract, something so very small as carbon molecules, could be the sign of a global disaster. The public only finally reacted when the melting of the ice caps and the recession of the glaciers became visible to the naked eye.

5. Conclusion

Caring for the small changes in matter, transforming raw resources through non-industrial processes, and reading into the micro-stories of its elements, is a pathway to deepen our understanding of the environment in general. In its study of unstable fragments and volatile essences, the *Willow Project* assumes this scientific ethos.

As narrative design work, it echoes with the myth of *Faust*⁵: Designers want to know how to shape the elements of matter itself, to reach to essence of the tree. This endless quest for knowledge and process making defines new territories for design, and a new aesthetic experience. The materials emerging from this *New Refinement* also invite us to imagine different forming processes perhaps closer to the

slow way insects or mushrooms shape their environment and recombine matter into sophisticated and ephemeral architectures.

"Objects are new from moment to moment so that one can never touch the same object twice; each object must dissolve and be generated continually momentarily. An object is a harmony between a building up and a tearing down."

- Heraclites, Fragments

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The Forestry Association of Iceland.

About the Author

Thomas Pausz is a designer and writer. His work focuses on the environmental aura of design and production processes. His critical design practice reflects on pressing contemporary topics such as locality, diversity and the impact of technologies. This cross-disciplinary research is communicated through product editions, exhibitions, publications and public workshops. He currently works between Berlin and Reykjavik, where he teaches at the Iceland Academy of The Arts. Thomas received a Fellowship from the Akademie Schloß Solitude in 2011-2013, and was selected for a residency at Delfina Foundation in 2016.

⁵ Faust is a legendary character, who made a pact with the devil to access unlimited scientific knowledge in exchange for his life.

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Wallace, A. R. (1853). *Palm Trees of the Amazons and Their Uses*. London, UK: John Van Voorst.



video-statement 06 | UK calling Italy

David Parkinson sent us a video-statement for the DESIS Philosophy Talk taking that took place at the School of Design - Politecnico di Milano (Milan, May 2014)

To view the full video:

<https://youtu.be/yRNs6ycGmwQ>

A designer's unique perspective is always revealed in a story they tell during a design pitch, simply because the subject matter is a concept they have devised.

[...] I also believe that certain storytelling techniques can lead themselves to encouraging an audience to evolve their own meanings and consider things that perhaps they hadn't consider before



Video-statement 07 | Portugal calling Italy

Video-statement from Joana Casaca Lemos for the DESIS Philosophy Talk at the School of Design - Politecnico di Milano (Milan, May 2014)

To view the full video:

<https://youtu.be/EFDowCLXMwI>

I think designers can learn a lot from different ways to communicate from what is on the margins, from those who don't communicate in the most conventional ways, from those who abandoned the rules of storytelling and make their own.





video-statement 08

| The Himalayas calling Italy

Andrea Mendoza sent a video-statement for the DESIS Philosophy Talk that took place in Milan on June 2015 during the Cumulus Conference.

To view the full video:

https://youtu.be/YsL82_wLlHM

*My question is:
do we, as
communication
designers, manipulate
the truth when we
tell the stories of
social innovation and
sustainability?*



DESIS Philosophy Tales

Donatella Mancini

School of Design, Politecnico di Milano, MSc in Product Service System Design (PSSD)

ABSTRACT

By asking, observing and listening, this experimentation aimed at collecting from its participants their personal takeaways from the Philosophy Talks' journey. How shall stories of/for social innovation be told? As designers, can we build and tell one another stories able to nurture our social innovation practice?

DESIS Philosophy Tales is a master's thesis project, developed in collaboration with Elisa Bertolotti, Francesca Piredda and Virginia Tassinari. In particular, the project builds on Philosophy Talk's aim of nurturing a virtuous cycle between theory and practice. The analysis of this cycle, flourishing in the encounter between philosophical reflection and design practice, showed interesting opportunities for implementation in the return to practice phase. How to make the Talks' reflections more tangible and accessible for its network? How to inspire a focused action from its social innovators?

Here, the thematic focus on the use of storytelling in social design proved to be a special, fertile ground of experimentation.

TAGS

Back to Practice, Mapping, Impressions, Nutshells

UNIVERSITY/DESIS LAB:

Politecnico di Milano,
Scuola del Design

CITY/COUNTRY:

Milan, Italy

PROJECT WEBSITE/BLOG:

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Prototyping Notes and Stories for a Design Manifesto, hosted by Cumulus 2015, articulated as a quasi-spontaneous interaction with its participants, encouraged to share a tangible track of:

- their personal takeaway/best-tip for the use of storytelling in design for social innovation;
- a sketch or a worthwhile sharing story, as inspiring/informative for social design practice.

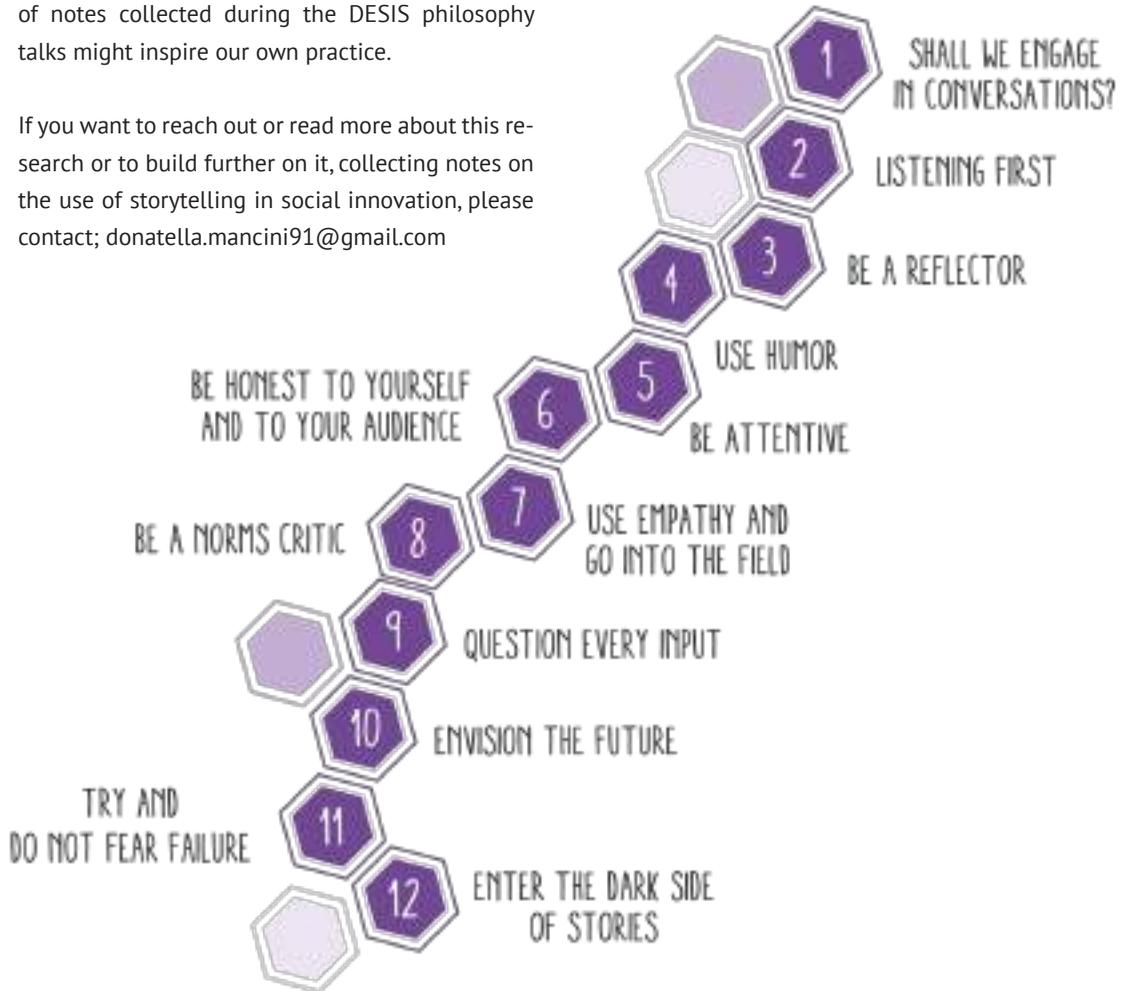
Writing and drawing tools were provided, along with a relaxed space to rest and think.

The process of gathering and weaving together the precious fragments of a collective engagement open the question whether it is possible to build - during the DESIS philosophy talks - an open, collaborative, fallible and open-ended 'notes for a Manifesto' intended as a reference for telling stories in social design practice. During the DESIS

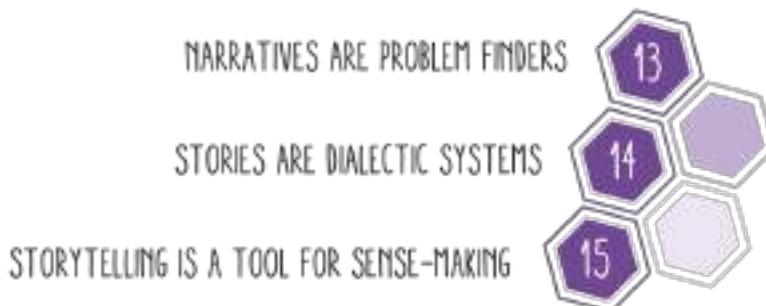
From the first notes collected, the master student evidenced some common paths and threads. This synthesis is an attempt to think at how the series of notes collected during the DESIS philosophy talks might inspire our own practice.

If you want to reach out or read more about this research or to build further on it, collecting notes on the use of storytelling in social innovation, please contact; donatella.mancini91@gmail.com

Designer



Stories



Workshops 01 + 02 | Reflexive practice

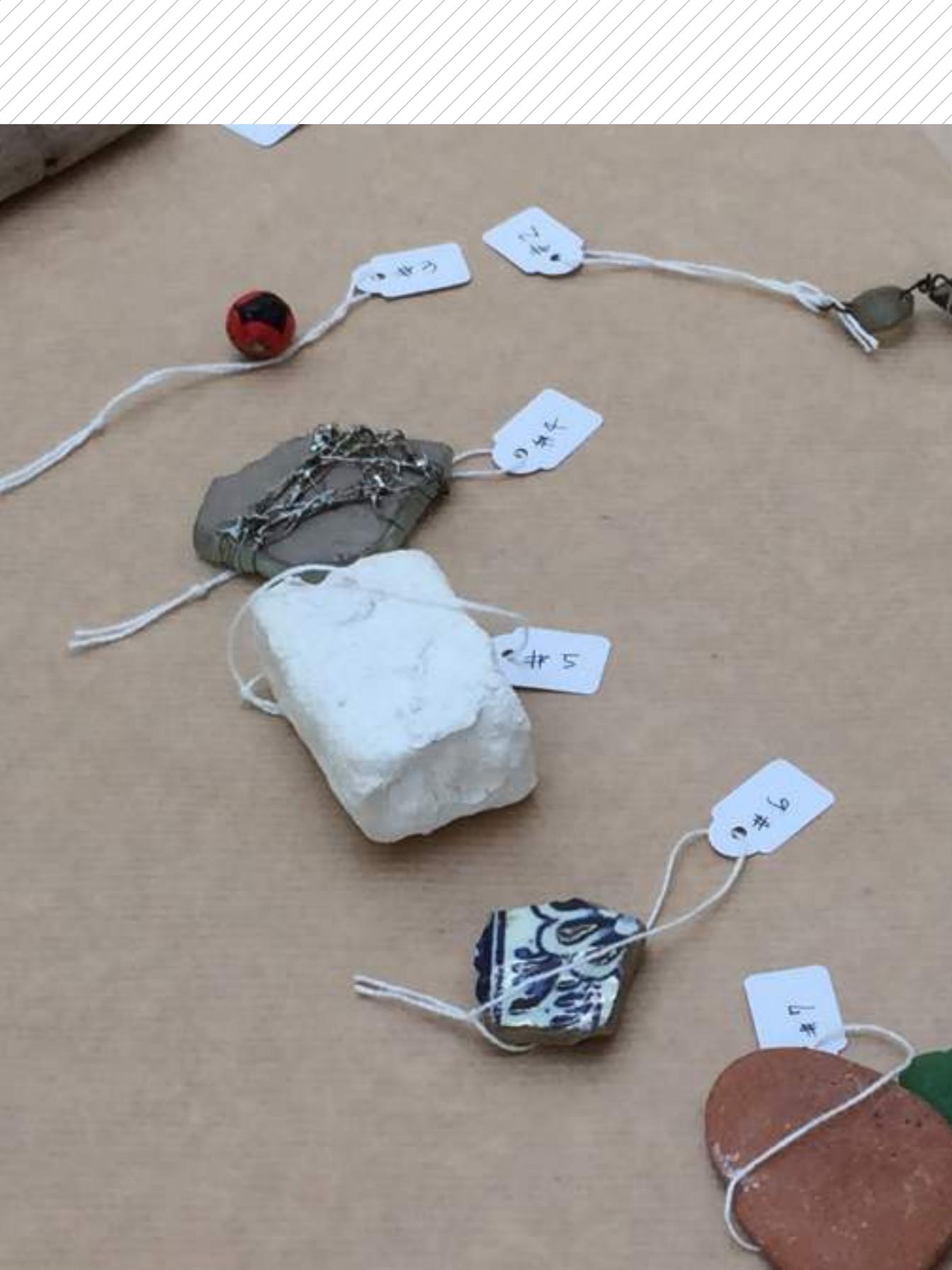
Pictures from the workshops:

2016 - E. Bertolotti, S. Yelavich, V. Tassinari,
Design and storytelling: on weaving fragments
- DRS2016 - Design Research Society - Future
Focused Thinking, University of Brighton (UK) /
www.drds2016.org

2015 - E. Bertolotti, H. Daam, F. Piredda,
V. Tassinari, Stories from fragments. Design as a
political agent. Nordes 2015: Design Ecologies,
Challenging anthropocentrism in the design
of sustainable futures / Konstfack, Stockholm
(Sweden) / www.nordes.org

Shells, crystals, pollen, down
are the parents / fragments
carriers, may
may crawling
may grasping
In trees
shakes gently
to touch trees become
edges
on a tree, ~~to~~ ^{then} ~~the~~ ^{edge}
Next step
they are all literally forest
stones. ~~As~~ ^{how}
evidence to how we live





1 # 1

2 # 2

3 # 3

4 # 4

5 # 5

6 # 6



#1 LIGHTEN TO TO
#2 BUT TO OF
#3 EVEN TALK
#4 YOU WOULD
BUT AS
#5 PRO
A
#



The study of (C)

C.1 7 ♀
 C.2 ♀ in a jar (in a jar/green city)
 C.3 ♀ in a wooden ring.
 C.4 ☐ - ring
 C.5 ☐ - a little bag

How was a man able
 to be always ♀
 and he gave them to
 the people he was walking
 with, to make them
 love. (C)

And then, was able to
 work with the wood,
 and he made ☐ for the
 beautiful women to put
 it over a very long assembly
 to make a person ☐
 and he was to live in a
 place, whether the woman.

Left with ☐ without
 realizing that there was
 a woman just for her,
 almost ready in the hand.
 He tried better to do wooden
 rings, but he never gave
 them to anybody, because
 he didn't like the symbol
 of them. (C)

Finally, he stopped to work
 on wood and he stayed
 under a tree, reading books.

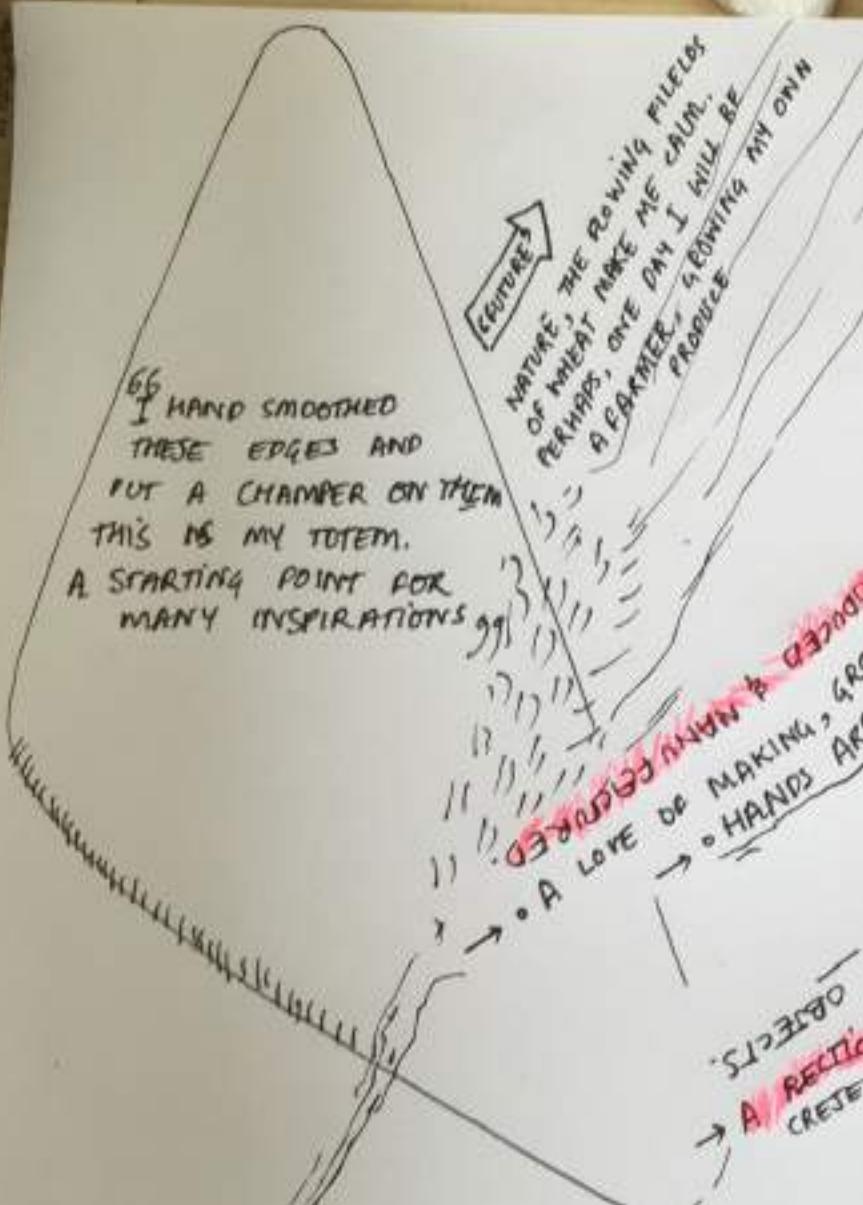
When he died, a woman
 with long hair, dressed
 in a long white dress, and
 she was crying. (C)

She had wooden rings,
 and put them in a little bag. (C)





THAT WITH MEMORY AS JUST
WHAT YOU WANT A THAT OUT WAS

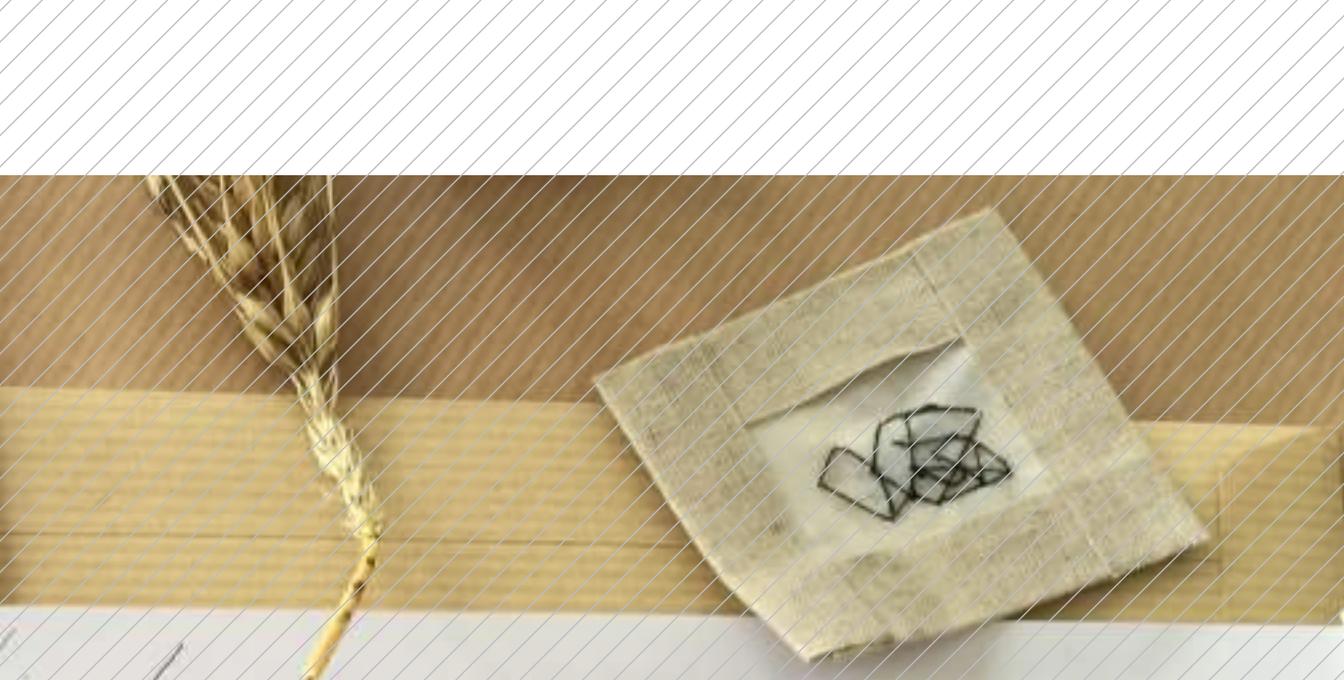


66 I HAND SMOOTHED
THESE EDGES AND
PUT A CHAMFER ON THEM
THIS IS MY TOTEM.
A STARTING POINT FOR
MANY INSPIRATIONS 69

CULTURE
NATURE, THE ROWING FIELDS
OF WHEAT MAKE ME CALM.
PERHAPS, ONE DAY I WILL BE
A FARMER, GROWING MY OWN
PRODUCE

~~PRODUCED & REDUCED~~
~~A LOT OF MAKING, GROWING~~
A LOT OF MAKING, GROWING
HANDS
HANDS ARE

OBJECTS.
A RECTA
CRETE



I HAVE A LOVE FOR
TYPE SETTING,
I AM TRAINED TO
BE A GRAPHIC DESIGNER.



ORGANIC
MATERIALS, TEXTURES
AND CRAFT ARE
CLOSE TO MY HEART
THIS IS A SAMPLE FROM
MY COLLECTION OF WINE
JAPANESE WINE DIVIDERS.

WHICH ARE MASS
WHITING, WHITLING, TEXTURES, DETAIL
FOR CREATING & NOT FOR
DESTRUCTION
NATURAL, HAND MADE CRAFT
NOT A MASS PRODUCED
NATURAL, HAND MADE CRAFT
NOT A MASS PRODUCED
NATURAL, HAND MADE CRAFT



AN ANTI-INSPIRATION
A REMINDER OF WHAT
TO NOT BE INSPIRED
BY









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Virginia Tassinari has a background in philosophy. She is researcher & educator in design and philosophy at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium), where she also founded the DESIS Lab. Virginia is a member of the International Coordination Committee of DESIS (Design for Social Innovation & Sustainability), an international network within which she is also co-initiator of the DESIS Philosophy Talks, a series of discussions in which design for social innovation and philosophy are brought into dialogue with one another.





**DESIS PHILOSOPHY TALKS:
STORYTELLING & DESIGN
FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION**