THE FORMING OF DESIGN THINGS: RECONCILING OPENNESS WITH THE URGE FOR COMPLETION

ABSTRACT

The proposal introduces my Ph.d project *Rehearsing and Forming the Future* with attention on notions of form and completion. Exploring the designers' role when designing the openness of evocative design while striving for collective completion when forming design Things. It raises the tension of reconciling the openness of Participatory Design (PD) with the urge for completion of classical design training.

INTRODUCTION

Designers of today have entered many fields and new disciplines have emerged such as design anthropology, service design and social design. The designer is often co-designing in interdisciplinary constellations. My interest concerns the role of the designer, her skills, tools and processes when co-visualising, co-forming and co-representing these intangible design outcomes in PD.

There was a certain silence; I noticed I was holding my breath. We waited a couple of seconds. Joachim lowered the video camera and Michael looked back at us, as if he suddenly noticed that we were watching, and we began clapping. I am not sure why we clapped yet, but I would like to understand this better. What had happened? Did we just perform an act? Did our clapping mark the success of this act? The completion of the act! Would I have found myself clapping, if I had been making a scenario with my design colleagues in a design studio? I guess not, so something extraordinary happened that morning in a shopping centre, with a diverse group of participants dreaming up, rehearsing and performing a future scenario. If I am applying a performance perspective when analysing the manifestation of forming a "design Thing" (Telier 2010), what can I learn then?

ENTERING PARTICIPATORY DESIGN WITH A CLASSICAL DESIGN TRAINING

Much work in the PD tradition concerns how to open up and engage new stakeholders in the design process. Ehn(1988) suggests to see PD as a meeting of language games, and Brandt et al.(2008) build on this perspective as they propose the formatting of design dialogues as design games deliberately crafted to facilitate co-creation. Prototyping and scenario building has also played a prominent role in PD since the early works in the Scandinavian tradition, (Ehn & Kyng, 1991) yet the ownership and origin of those formats has often been uneasily resolved (tying the prototype to the professional designer and the scenario to the non-designer). Müller(2007) argues that participatory design is neither the enrolment of non-designers in the professional work of designers, nor the embedding of designers in the everyday practice of users. Instead Müller suggests that the participatory design process stages a third space in which something genuinely new is performed. The intermingling of process and product is taken up by Halse(2008) as he suggests that the participants in participatory design are prototyping new practices. Halse has developed this perspective further with reference to the performance theory of Turner and Schechner(1985) by suggesting that participatory design events such as scenario building workshops can be conceived as the rehearsal of future practices equally engaging for stakeholders across the design/use distinction. My own work draws heavily on the work of Halse as I will come back to, but as is evident also in the work of Brodersen et al.(2008) discussing anchoring and transcendence at co-design workshops, the work cited here indicates an inclination towards the evocative and divergent, which leaves the issue of completion and accomplishment somewhat in the dark. Broadly speaking participatory design makes fabulous workshops and experiments but co-designers are often not very good at collaboratively enclosing and anchoring the experiences, keeping them alive or passing them on.

Here PD can learn from the designer's skills on form. Designers in co-design need to get hold of the form and formats that can enclose these fabulous completions of magic moments. Bruno Latour have addressed this issue by asking designers "where are the visualization tools that allow the contradictory and controversial nature of matters of concern to be represented?" And he later continues, "What I am pressing for is a means for drawing *things* together" (Latour 2008, p. 13).

'Drawing things together', 'giving form' and visualizing are some of the classical designer's most important skills. As an industrial designer I am trained to shape, synthesise and make visual and tangible the outcome of

my design processes. Traditional designers are the authors of the form and we have developed our skills striving to deliver one clearly communicated and finalised design concept. When we sketch, we form ideas and develop formats of communication objects as models that help us explain the concepts. The outcome embraces the core concept and makes them durable.

But being a classically trained designer within co-design seems to create some kind of tension when designing form collaboratively. We as designers have to let go of this authorship and practice, of delivering complete and finished design materials. The design materials and formats needs to be open and evocative to ensure that participants can make the materials their own, to evoke new shared stories (Foverskov & Dam 2010)

But still the form cannot be too open or too loose. Especially in co-design the need for original formats and form are highly important since participants do not share professional genres or languages of form. The form has to support and structure stabilization that make participants able to grasp and hold a shared language.

REFURBISHING THE CLASSICAL DESIGNER TOOLBOX FOR CO-DESIGN

In a broader perspective my Ph.D. project hold the working title *Rehearsing and Forming the Future - PERFORMANCE, INTERVENTION AND DIALOGUE.* It asks how to apply the designer's classical toolbox but within co-design to engage stakeholders as actors? Performative frameworks inspired from drama and theatre are employed to embrace the social processes taking place when scenarios are enacted and performed, yet enabling a concern for form both in the evoking of the new and in the performance and completion of the design Things.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My overall question regards PERFORMANCE; **the process as drama:** *how can the design process be recognized as drama?* Looking at the overall organization of the change processes, but also recursively - when focusing on the same drama structures within a single event or prototyping session.
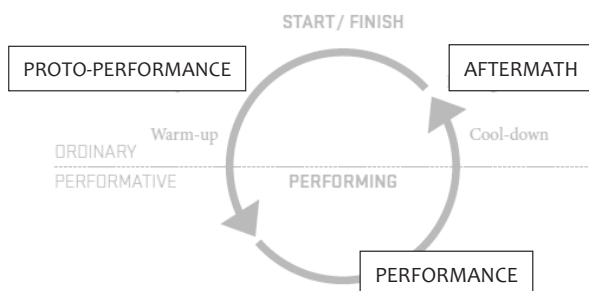
Figure 1: The performance process by Richard Schechner (1985)

My second question concerns INTERVENTION and staging the space of acting: *How do I as a designer, design for and form completion?* When the 'design material' of the design process is a social matter, how do I then form and congeal completion? How can designers be able to express the tacit knowledge and discuss more nuanced about designed completed social forms, which until now mainly have been described as "magic moments" and "Design Things"?

Figure 2: Staging the space of acting:

The third question regards DIALOGUE: design tools in new roles as e.g. sketching and prototyping, and asks: *How can well-known tools, play a role as props earlier and for longer parts of the processes of knowledge production?* Both how design proposals can initiate the explorative phases earlier than they do today, but also how they can have a longer lifespan and play a greater role for improvisation as well as reflection in a sequentially extended flow?
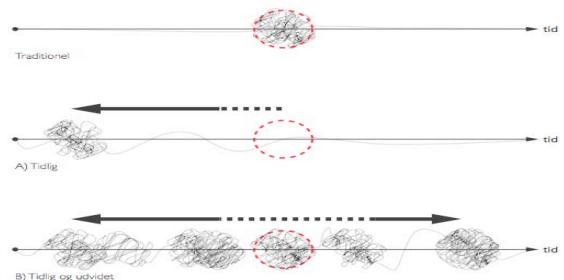
Figure 3: Design tools in new roles

METHODS

My project is based on a series of experiments concerning performance, interventions and dialogues, where I strive to follow an experiment by analysing, reflecting and applying or defining a theoretical framework, before again refining the experiment and asking new questions. My goal is asking questions through design, inspired by the approach to research through design (Gaver et al. 99)

My empirical examples are grounded in my own active participation in co-design projects, as a *design-*researcher. I have explored different formats of forming design proposals. One example of a format that have come into play have been doll scenarios acted out as simple stories, based on dramaturgical structures e.g. of three backdrops. The scenography is collaged of images from the participants' own context, and props are build when the story needs support. Later scenarios are re-enacted in the participants real setting. I have used

interaction analysis (Jordan & Henderson 1995) and applied a performative framework, which has made me able to discover and talk about dramatic elements.

Figure 4: evocative doll-scenario and full-scale enactment congealing completion

My case Senior Interaction is about developing and maintaining communities around shared activities for senior citizens. I have recently worked with the staging-tools; props as probes. The concept introduces design proposals as simple props of technological possibilities. The openness evokes dialogue and enactments that makes the diverse group of participants able to share future stories.

Figure 5: Props as probes: the story about "the Super Dots"

Another example of a format that deals with both completion and openness is a box with inspirational design and communication materials. The deliverable for reporting, communicating and sharing project findings. When developing formats we focused on how to continuously make the material open for co-construction and appropriation to existing work practices, but still easy to navigate by leaning on established communication formats.

Figure 6: the completion of the DAIM Box with evocate materials.

REFLECTIONS
PD has well developed practices on openings of design explorations. A growing awareness rising from my own background, have made me realise how my training have sharpened my attention to compile and the desire to make enclosed "things". This has caused some conflicts but also interesting tension between the fields of opening up and my urge of putting enclosed thing at display.

PD can benefit from this attention to enclosure that classical educated designers have. A preference from form, details and a wish of putting the outcome of the process on display, combined with a strive for completion, as the drama natural posses, will maybe add to the co-design process and ease the magic moments becoming a thing.
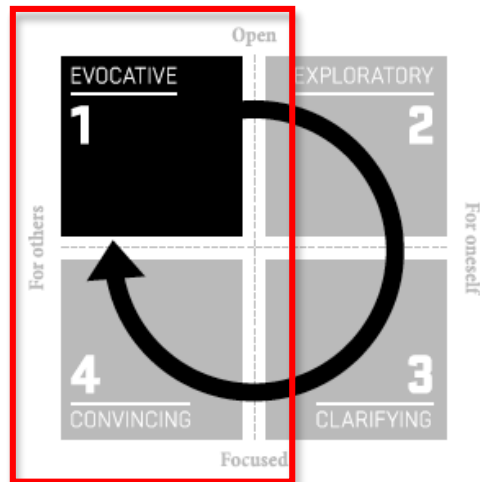

Figure 7: Designers sketching process. Foverskov & Dam 2010. Highlighting my interest span from open to focused but aiming at involving others.

CAN THE NOTION OF FORM RAISE THE AWARENESS OF COMPLETION?
At the doctoral consortium I hope I will be given the possibility to share my view and discuss issues of relevance on the forming of design things within the PD community. I would like to unfold one or two cases thoroughly and based on this discussion present my most recent findings. By sharing my story about form and completion, and by bringing the designers toolbox into the field of PD, I hope I can both contribute to an interesting discussion of an untouched but fruitful landscape, and nurture an interesting opening of my Ph.D. project.

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