CARING FOR DIVERSITY IN CO-DESIGN WITH YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

DAGNY STUEDAHL

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIASTUDIES,

OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

DAGSTU@OSLOMET.NO

HENRY MAINSAH

CONSUMPTION RESEARCH NORWAY,

OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

HENRYMA@OSLOMET.NO

ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper will ask questions about how we as co-designers and humanitarian designers engage with the outside and will especially be concerned with dialogues, interaction and knowledge production with young immigrants in co-design processes. We also will ask how we connect the questions arising from the histories of societies that participants bring into the co-design situation, how our practice and co-design understanding can handle cases where we cannot really grasp the complexity when religious, ethnical, personal and political experiences build the ground for collaborations. This becomes especially important in situations where complexity may ruin the co-design process and the dialogue between the participants and stakeholders may be shut down.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing awareness about and adoption of critical notions of reflexivity and ethics across different domains of design research and practice. We are increasingly witnessing a transformation in the ways in which designers relate to and engage with the participants in design processes. It is from such premises that design is argued to be a practice of care, a relational practice founded on the relationship between the designer, the people, and the contexts of practice (Vaughan, 2018).

This paper explores the politics of power relationships, cultural identities, and knowledge production in processes of co-design involving people of diverse cultures. The paper draws on experiences and reflections from a co-design process in a Norwegian museum involving youth with different cultural backgrounds that were invited to collaboratively produce sound media narratives about migration and identity.

We build on the understanding of care suggested by Maria Puig de Bellacasa, where care first of all should be understood as "a transformative ethos – we have to ask how to care in each situation" (Bellacasa 2011:100). In co-design this may relate to the people involved as well as the situation that arises in each design-event. Sometimes, "a way of caring here could kill over there" (Bellacasa 2010:100). This is an ambiguous aspect of care and we ask how can we do a caring co-design in circumstances where participants potentially have conflicting experiences? How can we care here - while we know it could kill over there?

Earlier, we have explored the concept of disruptions in design situations that are contested, contingent and contradictory, and have suggested the term "disruption as a way to question our own knowledge construction and research practices in design anthropology and participatory design. We pursue disruption as a political and necessary consciousness when design anthropology meets participatory design" (Akama et al. 2015:132). While disruption was explored as a reflexive concept, given the negative meanings of disturbance, disorder and interruption – we will here focus on how we deal with disruptions that arises when design meets with plurality, heterogeneity and incompatibility that are inherent in cultural and political encounters. How do we care for signifiers of devalued and ordinary experiences of our co-designers in way that get us through the incompatibilities that, for example, are historical situated far beyond the design-space and setting that we are collaborating in?

when for example trauma experiences from a conflict and a war enters the design space?

Bellacasa writes that caring is connected with awareness of oppression and with commitment to neglected experiences that create oppositional standpoints (Bellacasa 2011:96). But how do we go along with our awareness when the neglected experiences and oppression are hard to grasp, or when they require knowledge and competencies that are far beyond our design practice?

The reason for asking these questions is to raise critical questions relevant for co-design in multicultural contexts. We build on our experience with co-designing with a group of immigrant youth in Norway, and we have a specific story to tell that might illuminate the dilemma that a caring co-design might meet and have to solve.

THE CONTEXT IN THE MUSEUM
The co-design process that this situation comes from was related to the exhibition *FOLK – from racial types to DNA sequences* (FOLK), which opened at The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology (NTM) in March 2018.

The exhibition *FOLK* explores historical and contemporary research on human biological diversity through its interactions with society, culture and politics. The curatorial research involved in the exhibition design process was focused on individual and group identities, political and ethical issues of migration, the rise of racist and discriminatory attitudes, or indigenous peoples' rights. The topics of science, identity and belonging were the starting point for the making of a visitor activity. Parallel to the co-design process, the museum exhibition team organized multiple encounters with focus-group workshops, public lectures, and roundtables. All these meetings aimed at fostering dialogue between museum professionals and individuals or social groups outside the museum, and at creating communal spaces on a topic with difficult history and high contemporary societal relevance to Norway and more broadly to Europe. The co-design process with the young immigrants supplied this work

The co-design project involved a group of nine young people 12 to 18 years old from a multi-ethnic suburban area of Oslo. Before coming to the museum, the young people had already been members of Grorud Youth Council, a district advisory body which advises on community issues. The venue place was Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, and the aim of the co-design process was to involve youth with multicultural background in the curatorial process of an exhibition about the science history on race and ethnicity. The co-design process was facilitated by a design team consisting of the museum curator responsible for the exhibition design process, the museum pedagogue and an interaction designer involved in the museum`s exhibition team together with a researcher from a partner university. This co-design team planned the workshops and they collectively facilitated them based on their diverse competences.

The co-design process lasted for a period of a year and included eight workshops. The data collected in the process were recorded during the workshops by the design team and the external researcher. Both the groupwork and the presentation and discussion in plenary session of the workshops was video recorded. The group work was recorded with small Go-pro cameras that the group members could control by themselves, depending on their physical activities and in relation to the space they were working in. The young people were aware that their participation was an issue both for the curatorial work with the exhibition, and for research on audience involvement, ie., the co-design process. The video- and audio files, alongside reflection notes and written diaries were shared within the design team. The design team had decided to focus on sensory media during the co-design process, and to work with the youth on sensitizing sound perception and audio drama because it would make it easier with personal data protection when the designed product was implemented in the exhibition.

Between the workshops, the team communicated with the participants on a closed FB group to share the plans for each workshop as well as for sharing tips for sound-databases, editing tools et

CARE AND DISRUPTION
The situation we are thinking about happened in the third workshop. On the third workshop the young participants were asked to make soundscapes illustrating their conceptions of identity and belonging. This task was a follow up of a session on sensitizing to audio and to produce narratives with only audio on second workshop. The young participants therefore had been working individually with recording and editing audio. In this third workshop the participants were asked to produce the soundscapes in groups, and to use sounds that they had recorded and collected themselves during and between the earlier co-design workshops. The youth went into three groups and worked for one hour. Thereafter the young participants and the curators met in plenary session listening to the produced soundscapes together, and discussing the topic in relation to the productions.

One group consisted of three boys, whereof two of them had participated in the two former workshops, and one of them had joined the project recently. It was two Albanian brothers, the younger one bringing his elder brother for the first time, and a friend that attended the first two workshops, also Albanian.

The soundscape they presented in plenary was a dramatic story starting with a lively discussion between men in a private sphere. The discussion was engaged, involved at least 5 different voices and went in Italian, and you could recognize Berlusconi mentioned several times. The sequence of discussion is then interrupted with dramatic classical music, and then a long war-scene with machine

guns shooting, ambulances, snipers, airplanes and people screaming. Then there was silence.

Figure 1: The group of three Albanian boys decided to focus on conflict between two ethnic groups within one family.

In the plenary presentation the boys presented their soundscape as a situation where a family consisting of two ethnic groups is discussing and are having a conflict, and everything is normal – and then the conflict develops into war and suddenly everything changes and comes out of control. They concluded that war is not the solution.

In the plenary the soundscape was received by a discussion of how they produced the story, how they used pausing, and how they built up the dramaturgy. No one asked why they made the choice to present their identity and ethnicity with this political statement on war, or what war meant to their identity as Albanian- immigrants. Which is sensational. Why did nobody in the co-design group, neither young participants nor curators, mention this rather obvious articulation? What kind of signifier of their personal experience of identity did we encounter here – without giving it attention?

Reflecting on what happened, we memorize that our immediate reaction to the soundscape was bewilderment with how this story was connected to their identity, and then a feeling of touching a ground that was so entwined with complex history and ethnicity conflicts that we did not have good enough understanding of. We did not even know if the boys in the group were Kosovo-Albanians or not. And we did not understand why the boys had used Italian speaking archive recordings to signify the intense discussion and conflict of a family consisting of two ethnic groups.

Our lack of knowledge of the history of Albanian civil war was a real handicap in being able to show care for the meaning of their soundscape. We were aware that the boys took the opportunity to make a statement, and a standpoint from where their identity could be discussed, but how could we grasp the deeper political and cultural meaning of this without having a deeper understanding of Albanians, or of Kosovo-Albanians, or the various perspectives on the civil-war and the intervention by UN? And how was it with the Serbians during that war, where they involved…or not? In the situation at the workshop all these thoughts raced the mind, and there was not time to google into a full enough understanding to be able to respond to the boys soundscape in a proper , caring and respectful way.

The soundscape was a voice from a small and marginalized group, that staged and mediated a standpoint and a vision that the boys brought fore to take advantage of having an audience and a Norwegian institution that for once would listen to them. But how was the other participants put together, did we have any Serbian-related young people in the group, was the soundscape provoking anybody, did it touch into deep feelings, could the presentation disrupt the co-design process and the trust we had built up in the groups. How should we handle this? How should we care?

THE FRAMING OF CARE

Bellacasa states that care is connected with awareness of oppression and with commitment to neglected experiences that create oppositional standpoints (Bellacasa 2011:96). In the situation described above, we did have awareness to the oppression of that the three Albanian boys may have experienced to the story they could tell about their home country. But we as co-designers and researchers did not have enough knowledge about the Albanian civil war, the different groups involved and the relation to Italians, o be able to grasp how their experiences created or may have created oppositional standpoints. We clearly did not have the full understanding of what in fact was going on. Because we had too little knowledge of the historical facts, the different version of the ethnic groups involved, we also became reluctant of the potential disruption of the identity-discussions that had been going on in the group since the start of the project, and that might have damaged the co-design process. We could not commit to the neglected experiences that the boys clearly put fore in the soundscape.

We did not have enough understanding to identify whether the boy`s story was produced to make a critical standpoint with the goal to make an opposition or provocation - or to "create a relationship through that critique" (Stengers 1993 in Bellacasa 2011:97, Hamington 2010 and 2017). To fully grasp their intentions of this war story, we would need to understand not only the conflict between Albanian groups in the war, but also between segments of Albanians and Kosovo-Albanian immigrants in Norway. Who`s version of the war were they telling, and who were their opponents and enemies towards this story? To be able to design with care, well aware that "a way of caring here could kill over there", we would have needed this knowledge and the competency in conflict handling of humanitarian dialogues.

To practice a relational ethics, Bellacasa refers to Donna Haraway`s work with interspecies intimacy, and suggests to create relations in the heart of asymmetrical relationalities (Bellacasa 2011:98). This is a kind of affective engagement that focuses on co-transformation. Doing this in a co-design situation, we encounter different types of groups gathered, where each of the groups bring with them different histories of war,

immigration and refugee experiences, different personal and family histories, and different experiences of integration in Norwegian society. This also involves different understanding of the conflicts in their home country that they flew from. These aspects do bring up a series of historical, psychological and social questions and are aspects that the co-designer may need to be aware of to be able to facilitate this affective engagement, co-transformation and care in the group.

We would like to engage in a discussion of what kind of knowledge does a co-designer need to identify how different actors are positioned and consequently how they position themselves in a co-design situation? How can the design of co-design activities take care of these asymmetrical relationalities, and foster caring relations in the midst of complex conflicts that they do not fully understand? How could the ethics of care be understood in co-design situations where the participants possibly could be in conflict with each other because of the history and religious beliefs that they bring into the design space?

CARE, CULTURE AND RESISTANCE

Ethics in design is acting in the 'between-ness' among entities that are coming together to discover and reflect upon who 'we' are, and question, converse about and propose how 'we become' with one another (Akama, 2012). In reflecting upon this co-design process afterwards, we realize that we had to put enough emphasis on who `we` are, and the identity and positions of the group of people that we were bringing together. We did not compose the group with awareness to their ethnic belonging, neither on their immigration histories, identities and experiences.

This is important, because if we had been aware of the composition and the historical background of each of the groups of immigrant youth that we brought together, we would have been able to de-code the deeper meaning of the soundscape that the three Albanian boys produced. We wondered why they used a recording of an italian family discussing in the beginning of the soundscape. How could we understand the violent war scene that was played out in sound in front of us? And how was this related to the assignment they were supposed to work on, which was about identity and belonging?

Laurene Vaughan argues that we have to understand the notion of culture to be able to design with care. Culture, she argues, is dynamic, variant, and practiced and only by understanding how this happens, we will be able to expand our understanding of how we "design with care or for care". We argue that we also have to understand culture as a source of conflict, resistance and revenge.

In this exploratory paper we would like to suggest that the co-designer, in addition to be competent on co-design processes in heterogeneous groups also needs some additional competencies when working with culturally diverse groups. In addition to understand culture as dynamic, variant and practiced to be able to design with care, we also argue that the co-designer would have to understand the history of the people we involve and the conflicts they bring into our space. In addition to ask the question who we are or how we become - we also have to ask the question of what histories do we bring into the co-design space.

What are the different histories of conflict and harmony that meet in co-design settings when we compose multicultural groups and how can we care for them all? What histories of conflict, war, trauma, displacement and settlement are we putting together and how can we relate these histories to each other without disrupting our collaboration? How do we design processes that enable these historical related experiences to be properly articulated and "cared for" without killing the other versions?

REFERENCES

Akama, Y., (2012). A 'way of being 'in design practice: zen and the art of being a human-centred practitioner. Design Philosophy Papers, (1), pp.1-10.

Hamington, M., (2010). The will to care: Performance, expectation, and imagination. *Hypatia*, 25(3), pp.675-695.

Hamington, M. (2017). Integrating care ethics and design thinking. Journal of Business Ethics, 1-13.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. Matters of care in technoscience: Assembling neglected things. *Social Studies of Science*, 2011. 41(1):85-106.

Vaughan, L. (ed.) (2018). Designing cultures of care. London: Bloomsbury.