Glossary: Collaborative Future-Making

Version 1.0

Edited by Per-Anders Hillgren, Kristina Lindström, Michael Strange, Richard Topgaard, and Hope Witmer.


This publication is partly funded by a grant from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.
# Table of contents

- Introduction ........................................... 4
- Animal autobiography for future-making .................. 5
- Anthropocene as catastrophe ............................ 6
- Bodying as thinking in body-world ecology ................. 7
- Catastrophe and vulnerability ........................... 8
- Catastrophe as a signifying practice ..................... 9
- Collaborative anecdotalization ........................ 10
- Counterfactuality ...................................... 11
- Deep-adaptation ....................................... 12
- Degendering organizational resilience ................. 13
- Design thinging ....................................... 14
- Doing concepts ....................................... 15
- Everyday democracy .................................. 16
- Fableing ............................................. 17
- Hope and grief ....................................... 18
- Imagination and politics .............................. 19
- Infrastructuring worldviews ............................ 20
- Learning from literature ................................ 21
- Many-world world .................................... 22
- Multispecies worlding ................................ 23
- Ontological detouring .................................. 24
- Planetary boundaries .................................. 25
- Politics ............................................... 26
- Prediction ........................................... 27
- Relational accountability .............................. 28
- Relational assets ..................................... 29
- Relational home-making ............................... 30
Time-frames/space-frames 31
Transformational creative practice 32
Un/making 33
What sacrifice could mean 34
Introduction

Collaborative Future-Making is a research platform at the Faculty of Culture and Society at Malmö University that is concerned with how to envision, elaborate and prototype multiple, inclusive, and sustainable futures. The platform gathers around 20 researchers that share a methodological interest in how critical perspectives from the humanities and social sciences can be combined with the constructive and collaborative aspects of making and prototyping in design research.

The research centers around two major themes:

- **Critical imagination**, which focuses on how basic assumptions, norms and structures can be challenged to widen the perspectives on what can constitute socially, culturally, ecologically and economically sustainable and resilient futures.
- **Collaborative engagements**, which focuses on how we can set up more inclusive collaborations to prototype and discuss alternative futures, engaging not only professionals and policy makers but also citizens and civil society.

During 2019 the research group set out to make a shared glossary for collaborative future-making. The glossary is multiple in purpose and exists in several versions. Hopefully there will be more to come. At first, the making and articulation of the glossary was used within the research group as an exercise to share concepts that we found central to collaborative future-making, coming from different disciplines. This published version of the glossary was assembled to be used during a workshop called *Imagining Collaborative Future-Making*, which gathered a group of international researchers from different disciplines.

The collection of concepts reflects the heterogeneous and diverse character of the research group and a strong belief in that plurality regarding ontologies and epistemologies will be crucial to be able to handle the multiple uncertainties and complex challenges we have to face in the future. Some of the concepts are already well established within different research communities, but gain a specific meaning in relation to the research area. Others are more preliminary attempts to advance our understanding or probe into new potential practices within collaborative future-making. In that sense the concepts in the glossary are well situated and grounded in past and ongoing research within this research group, at the same time as they are meant to suggest, propose and point towards practices and approaches yet to come.

The concepts in this glossary are not only meant to be descriptive but also performative. In that sense, assembling and circulating this glossary is part of collaborative future-making. As pointed out by Michelle Westerlaken in her articulation of “Doing Concepts” (see page 15), “…without proposing, critiquing, or working towards a common or uncommon understanding of certain concepts, it becomes impossible to ‘make futures’ in any deliberate fashion.”
Animal autobiography for future-making
Maliheh Ghajargar

Animal autobiographies are life stories that are told by a variety of non-human tellers, but reflected and written by human-authors. Their two main characteristics are:

The narrative structure: Animal autobiographies’ structure consists of a doubled or layered rationality. As Herman (2016) states, that particular layered rationality can be found

“between the human author of the narrative and the nonhuman agent whom the author projects as telling it, and that between the animal narrator and the range of others, human as well as nonhuman, to whom the animal teller, in return, orients in recounting, contextualizing, and explaining or justifying the actions and reactions that make up the story of the teller’s life.”

The politics of narrative representations: There is a shift in power that is created through politics of narrative representations, and that is between “how” events are told by humans, using human language, and those that are told by non-humans. This helps to go beyond communication methods, which rely mainly on human languages.


Anthropocene as catastrophe

Asko Kauppinen and Petra Ragnerstam

Any future-making has to deal with the Anthropocene, demanding an ontological shift, which can be made visible by placing the Anthropocene in proximity to catastrophe.

Catastrophe designates a change that is sudden and exceptional. The Anthropocene designates changes in a geological time scale. This difference in scales makes the (catastrophic) changes within the Anthropocene invisible to us.

Catastrophe is easy to comprehend. It identifies events that are hazardous and exceptional, posing little problem of intelligibility. The Anthropocene, on the other hand, works on a scale beyond our habitual ways of thinking.

Catastrophe signifies events that are representable, even spectacular and verge on the sublime. Anthropocene consists of fragmented and abstract data, which is difficult to hinge upon individual experience. As such, the Anthropocene is unrepresentable.

Catastrophe produces agency. Since catastrophe poses an immediate threat upon individual (and innocent) lives, it generates a will to act. Since the Anthropocene is too abstract, too grand and too slow, it tends to produce denial and paralysis rather than agency.

Catastrophe designates events that are external to the human will, produced by a capricious God or forces of nature. Catastrophes happen. In the Anthropocene, human action and human will are intricately intertwined with the changes that form our planetary future.

Bodying as thinking in body-world ecology

Anna Chronaki

Manning (2016) discusses bodying to capture body and thought in a fluid body-world ecology of affective relations in contrast to a volitional or intentional act. Manning and Massumi (2014) propose the bodying of events as the practice of feeling-and-thinking, thinking-in-the-act and movement-in-thought in choreographic propositions. Such a proposition creates a plane of immanence that co-composes the intervals in-between bodies by stressing how the body remembers, extends its boundaries and becomes otherwise. This process is not about dancing in the classical sense, but it is, rather, for a chorus striving for the creative, sensual and political expression of feeling and thinking-in-movement. This perspective relates to Spinoza’s understanding of bodies and minds, not as separate substances, but as relational modes, in which:

“... a mode is a complex relation of speed and slowness, in the body but also in thought, and it is a capacity for affecting and being affected, pertaining to the body or thought. Concretely, if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change” (Deleuze 2005: 59).

Thought becomes an active contributor in the bodying experience and the starting point for challenging the body-world distinction. Taking thought as complexly aligned across a relational field that includes body, mind and world, Manning (2016) turns to explore ways in which thinking is not subsumed within a conscious cognitive task (e.g. the mathematics of area) but becomes part of an affective bodying in the making. In this, the process of creating a choreography can be the study of thoughts in motion that unfolds the thinking of a concept’s physical and material feel. As such, the thought, including the mathematical thought, can become a kinetic and dynamic part of affective bodying: “To be affected is to go to the limit of what a thought can do” and “… thoughts are activities of relation that take time even as they make time, animated in the process of invention in the activity of living” (Manning 2007: 24).


Catastrophe and vulnerability

Asko Kauppinen and Petra Ragnerstam

Vulnerability is “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard” (Winkel Holm, 2012: 235). Vulnerability is applicable to nations, regions, corporations, organizations and individuals, which makes it a crucial concept for future-making globally and locally.

The idea of vulnerability signifies a shift in how to conceptualize catastrophe. Traditionally, catastrophe is defined as “an event impacting an entire society and ‘preventing essential functions of society’” (ibid.). This definition makes catastrophe external, extraordinary and out of human control. Vulnerability shifts focus from catastrophe’s impact to society’s mechanisms of dealing with it and its contribution to it to begin with.

Catastrophe is not an equalizer of humanity, as often represented, but enforcer of inequalities of class, race, gender, disabilities, opportunity, etc. Catastrophes do not affect populations in equal measure. We do not have a clear understanding of these vulnerabilities.

A hurricane is not only a hurricane. As Sloterdijk has it, we must see ourselves as “atmosphere designers” and “weather co-producers” (Sloterdijk, quoted in Winkel Holm, 2012: 16). This puts focus on our responsibility for catastrophic events. If we continue to build cities in areas threatened by rising sea levels, we must accept responsibility for those actions.

Catastrophe as a signifying practice

Asko Kauppinen and Petra Ragnerstam

As a concept, catastrophe has been quite straight-forward, signifying extraordinary and hazardous events that threaten individual lives as well as entire societies. It has unproblematically pointed to events that are unmistakably real, affecting real people, real societies, and real objects. However, rather than simply referring to real events we should see it as a signifying practice; that is, it contains both “concrete facts and their cultural processing” (Nünning, 2012: 12), where concepts, images and ideas come to frame our understanding of catastrophe.

Thus, catastrophes are not “simply givens that exist ‘out there’”, but particular cultural “ways of worldmaking” (Nünning, 2012: 59), “recurring patterns of imagination” or the “deep grammar” of disaster imagination (Winkel Holm, 2012: 20). Such imaginations do not only reflect the realities of catastrophe, but they are also constitutive; that is, they “function as a script for the social practices before, during and after disasters” (Winkel Holm, 2012: 23). The power of who gets to decide over such catastrophe scripts is under intense debate and of interest to Collaborative Future-Making.


Collaborative anecdotalization

Alicia Smedberg

While anecdotalization (Michaels, 2012) seeks to activate the notion of anecdotes into a doing, collaborative anecdotalization seeks to emphasize the social and relational aspect of the doing.

An anecdote – generally understood as a short narrative – though widely accepted as an everyday occurrence is not a commonly accepted literary expression (often described as a digression), nor does its presence lend legitimacy to scientific reasoning (van Manen, 1989). But nonetheless anecdotes continue to be shared both within academia and elsewhere. It is a vessel for information and impressions, perspectives and perplexities. Mike Michaels (2012) has suggested that the concept of anecdotalization emphasizes a reflexive relationship between the narrator and the listener which the anecdote activates, as it not only affects the listener but also the person doing the telling.

The retelling of an anecdote then becomes less of a digression and more of a relation in/of a situation. The anecdote offers a point of view to a previously faceless account, as well as a way to include multiple voices. This is a performative action through the way “prior events come to enact the storyteller” (Michaels, 2012: 26), and it in equal parts enables analysis and idea generation. Here, the emphasis collaborative seeks to suggest that the relationship-building aspect of the anecdotalization – through being passed from one person to another like a gift – is where the anecdote becomes a potent tool for future-making. Through this act of gift giving, the anecdote is kept alive: as long as it keeps moving it remains performative. To maintain this momentum requires a listener, a reader or an interpreter and it is therefore impossible to detach the anecdote from its social nature. As such, collaborative anecdotalization is not a practice guided so much by the question what are you saying as it is guided by the to whom are you speaking.


Counterfactuality

Ann Light

The counterfactual process outlined here was inspired by science fiction author Philip K. Dick’s novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and derived from the novel’s premise that the Axis, not the Allies, won World War Two. Dick said, in good science fiction, the idea depicted sets “off a chain-reaction of ramification-ideas in the mind” unlocking the reader to create worlds alongside the author (Dick 2010: 153). Dick’s work (including *Bladerunner* and *Total Recall*’s original plots) portrayed fantastical technologies, but his ideas persist because he dwelt on the societal consequences of the technical developments he envisaged.

In counter-factual workshops, we enact worlds, their values and tools, working from alternative presents that are co-created by participants from a simple alternative scenario and pursuing a managed process going from imaging other realities to making things to represent them. This is to use the technique of making unfamiliar through counterfactuality to give us space to design different ways-of-being. This space allows for new ‘ramification-ideas’, as Dick puts it, and we use these to develop the creative relations between design, systems and the designed-therefore-designable state of the world (Light 2011; 2019).

This work deliberately avoids “The Future” as a projected state, creating awareness of possibilities that derive from forks in the past and path dependencies that ran differently. This acknowledges the difficulty that many people have in imagining the future (Light et al., 2009). Also, there is some evidence that future-gazing calls on a vaguer and more optimistic mode of thought (D’Argembeau and Van der Linden, 2004).


Deep-adaptation

Sara Gottschalk

Anthropocene calls for adaptation. In geological time, humans are just a species for which adaptation is the prerequisite for not to perish. It reminds us of our animality and creates resistance in how we act on this fact. Jem Bendall (2018) argued for deep adaptation, a mental approach to adaptation. His point of view departures from the assumption that we will not solve climate change. Despite critique for this assumption he lifts forward new strategies for entering and making in an unknown future of climate and environmental changes:

**Resilience** (How do we keep what we really want to keep?) which means to overcome a tragedy by letting the event change our perspectives, norms and values, rather than a recovery to what once was.

**Relinquishment** (What do we let go of in order not to make matters worse?) – to ‘let go’ of that which consolidates the destructive aspect of status quo. This means to identify what needs to be left behind and to accept the act of letting go, which connects it to grief and risk-taking.

**Restoration** (What can we bring back to help us with the coming difficulties?) mirrors relinquishment, the ability to restore and regenerate lost important components from pre-industrial societies.

Degendering organizational resilience
Hope Witmer

“In a storm, the Willow bent and survived but the Oak could not and was felled. Despite this, the Oak thought s/he won with an honorable death.” (The parable of the willow and the oak, Aesop’s fables.)

Like the oak and the willow in the parable, many organizations must adapt to the winds of the unexpected. As winds of societal change increase in intensity, organizations require both the flexibility of the willow and the strength of the oak to survive and thrive. Unlike the fable, degendering organizational resilience is not about winning and losing but about dismantling gendered assumptions that influence organizational power structures and organizations’ capacity to survive and thrive. In its place what is offered is a process for degendering practices of resilience and unifying qualities of both, the flexible willow and the stable oak, toward inclusive practices, processes, and collaborative future-making.

Degendering organizational resilience challenges current and dominant conceptualizations of organizational resilience by revealing gendered organizational constructs that influence power structures language and practices of everyday organizational life that limit inclusive theory and practices of organizational resilience (Witmer, 2019) – ‘organizational resilience’ here defined as the agile capacity to rebound, learn and transform when impacted by disruptive events (Linnenluecke, 2015; Zolli and Healy, 2013; Witmer, 2019). The focus is not on the individual but on the organizational processes and practices that are embedded in patriarchal, bureaucratic philosophies that continue to elevate a certain type of structure and leadership practices both individually and structurally. These practices/processes emulate and elevate normative masculine constructions that are characteristics of command and control styles of leadership and decision making to the exclusion of inclusive processes and practices.

Practices of collaboration, dialogue and inclusion tend to be gender coded as feminine organizational processes and thereby given less value. Unless these systems are challenged on a systemic level the organizational processes and structures will continue to subordinate practices that lead to democratic, inclusive processes of collaborative future-making. Degendering organizational resilience takes the best of masculine coded and feminine coded practices without the socially constructed gendered distinctions to create inclusive, democratic spaces for innovation and learning (Lorber, 2005; Witmer, 2019).


Design thinging

Pelle Ehn

Design thinging may be understood as a performative fluid and flickering design figuration (Law and Mol, 2001) and practice for democratic and collaborative future-making. This design figuration and practice is a flickering between processes of collective decision making and collaborative material making, between ‘parliamentary’ and ‘laboratory’ practices, between engagements with objects of worry as ‘matters of concern’ (Latour, 1999) and the transformation of objective matter as ‘circulating references’ (ibid.), forging strategies and tactics of participation and representation across these practices. This performative figuration also changes over time as a flickering between gathering assemblies and appropriating objects. The challenge concerns the legitimacy and the skills of codesign to draw these things together, the ‘parliamentary legitimacy’ of assembling the assemblies (of drawing them together) as well as the ‘drawing skills’ of making collaborative designing take place (Binder et al., 2015).


Doing concepts

Michelle Westerlaken

In their 1991 text “What is Philosophy?”, Deleuze and Guattari set out to define the complementary nature of philosophy, art, and science as three creative modes of thought. Philosophy, they claim, is about “forming, inventing and fabricating concepts” (1994: 2). This does not imply that philosophers come up with singular definitions, but by inventing concepts, they bring something into being. Concepts do not have a fixed meaning, but only a becoming; their only identity lies in their experimentations, constraints, renewals, and mutations (ibid.: 8).

This has three consequences: (1) the creations carry the signatures of their creators (they are always ‘someone’s’ concept); (2) artists are as much ‘thinkers’ as are philosophers (thinking can be done through materials/senses); and (3) neither art (or science) nor philosophy has any priority over the other (they are always in exchange with each other) (ibid.).

The negotiation of possible futures happens through processes of dialogue, exchange, and the creation of material or immaterial proposals. A significant part of this process is involved with the making and unmaking of concepts. So, without proposing, critiquing, or working towards a common or uncommon understanding of certain concepts, it becomes impossible to “make futures” in any deliberate fashion.

Everyday democracy

Michael Strange

It is only the weakest and most unstable democracies that can be defined simply in terms of regimes that hold a regular election. Democratic regimes that survive can only do so through upholding certain rights, as well as fostering social institutions – such as schools and public-service media – that encourage democratic values within society.

We propose the term ‘everyday democracy’, drawing upon the growth in literature that uses ‘everyday’ to denote the agency of weaker actors, as well as non-elite social spaces, within politics (e.g. Hobson and Seabrooke, 2009). Everyday democracy considers where non-elite persons experience being part of a democracy, meaning part of the demos that shapes a community or society. Schools, for example, are not only a way to learn the importance of government or how to vote, but also directly experience what it is to enact power and shape one’s social environment, as well as be part of a public good.

Democracy takes place in an everyday realm, and for many, experiencing being part of a society that values them through guaranteeing their healthcare, as another example, provides a much more real experience of democracy than the politicians’ voices they hear on TV.

Fableing

Per Linde

Crucially, notions of design narratives have been focused either at understanding current socio-material practices or imagining desirable future states in different ways. But the collective imagining of the future needs a variety of diverse starting points to explore.

Using the ‘fable’ as organizing metaphor, one can inhabit a shadowlands between fiction and documentary as the site of mapping strategies and counter-strategies for highlighting critical (as in urgency and critique) phenomena in contemporary computerized, digitized, and quantified proceduralized contexts.

The fable as fiction – from the latin *fabula*, story, discourse, narrative – could, in this respect, be central. But rather than a fiction intended to deceive or fool, it is meant to convey a lesson, share a short story, give insight into a person or a place. The fables of futures are made up of layers of stories – truthful and false.

We suggest that collaboratively imagining futures can be understood as a heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981), made up of hybrid utterances, traces and influences. As the ‘fableing’ name suggests, fictionalised storytelling forms a vehicle of representation and as a possible agent for awareness in public settings. This understanding of publics highlights knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and agency in a similar way as design labs.

Hope and grief

Li Jönsson and Kristina Lindström

Climate change has many narratives. One is dark, bringing into being ‘eco-anxiety’. Another one is more optimistic, where technological fixes such as biogas are assumed to be remedies for our futures and requires minimal changes in our everyday lives.

Clearly, moving towards sustainable societies requires more than a technological transition, such as changes in everyday practices, values, imaginaries and world views. In some cases, this transition will also involve loss. Not only loss in terms of resources, things, mobilities and species, but also loss of a hopeful future (Head, 2016).

A transition thereby represents a fundamental break with core modernist concepts, where the future has been rendered as a place of possibilities, innovation and promises of better lives. This requires that we do not only deal with the optimistic end of the spectrum, but also become attentive to practices and tensions that deal with both denial, grief and hope (ibid.). Grief is here conceived not as a de-empowering process of mourning, but as a potential active and conscious process that can engender collective capacities and imaginaries. And hope is conceived as fuel for the imagination as well as a set of practices to be exercised and experienced.

Imagination and politics

Michael Strange

Imagination is central to politics. Imagination is there not only in the cultural fictions we create about the past and future of politics, but provides the conceptual vocabulary through which we conduct and make politics possible. Myths around money or community identities are ever-present in the institutions through which we organise human society, how bodies are positioned, and the struggle over the formation of political subjectivities to contest that process.

Asking about the role of imagination in politics requires thinking about how we order and change, including the power of imagining alternatives. It is about, also, the distance between what is happening and what we perceive. It is about the importance of shared myths, those recognised as unreal, but that play a key part in shaping the real. And how imagination allows us to see alternatives, whilst also seeing the present as imagined enables us to see that it can be changed (e.g. Cooper, 2013).

Infrastructuring worldviews

Per-Anders Hillgren

Infrastructuring is an established concept within participatory design (Karasti, 2014). It brings attention into how value can be explored and produced by carefully crafting and continuously interweaving contexts, processes, material elements and diverse groups of people including their needs, curiosities and competences. Infrastructuring is relevant for collaborative future-making because it allows marginalized actors to become central parts of the value production, but also because it strives for long-term collaborative engagement that leave room for value to emerge along the way, rather than short projects with predefined goals and agendas (Hillgren, Seravalli and Emilson, 2011).

As a practice it focuses on different levels of commitment. Some relate to practical, “hands-on” issues and others deal with contextual difficulties. However one of the most central aspects regards how to articulate and produce mutual learning about the different worldviews that are in play among the members of the process (Star and Ruhler, 1996). These worldviews can include norms and beliefs about life and the world as well as assumptions concerning ontologies and epistemologies that are taken for granted, but that have a strong impact on what processes and values to prioritize.

Infrastructuring with a focus on worldviews brings together philosophical exercises, collaborative engagement and designerly making in close proximity. When it's successful it nurtures more plural, diversified and humble understandings of the different worlds people live in. Such understandings can provide a fertile and open foundation for collaboration where different actors can enter into joint ventures on more equal conditions.


Learning from literature

Magnus Nilsson

In most contemporary societies, literature constitutes a relatively autonomous site (or a set of sites) with an ideological profile (or profiles) that can be different from that hegemonic in other parts of society. For example, beauty can be given priority over profit, or compassion over competition. This makes it possible to use literature as a platform for the development and dissemination of alternative and oppositional ideas. One historical example of this is the cultivation of Enlightenment ideals in literature before the bourgeois revolutions.

Literary forms can differ from those dominating in for example political discourse. Therefore, they can make problems appear in a different light, which, in turn, can contribute to the emergence of new perspectives. This has been consciously exploited by many authors, who have developed aesthetic ideas about using literature to ‘estrange’ the conventional and everyday, thereby making visible and critiquing dominant ideology.

Recently it has also been argued that literature – especially prose-fiction – might contribute to making readers more emphatic.
Many-world world

Michelle Westerlaken

A one-world world is understood through rationality and reason; here, the world is seen as a universal entity that is metaphysically self-contained (Law, 2011: 128). This world has fixed boundaries and places ‘truth’ at its center.

Critics argue that this idea of universal truth is naïve and euro-centric. Instead, a many-world world is much more diverse, chaotic, and ungraspable. Everything takes continuous effort, worlds have to be re-enacted through a process that knows that nothing is fixed and no closure is available (ibid: 132). Worlds are a process of negotiation that can only be settled for the time being (ibid: 128).


(Illustrations by Michelle Westerlaken)
Multispecies worlding

Michelle Westerlaken

Beavers make world by re-shaping streams; plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks; and bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere while plants maintain it (Tsing, 2015: 22). The notion of ‘world’ only works if we allow nonhumans to have it too (Morton, 2017: 91). Worlds are not something rigid, solid, complete, or something that requires a conscious understanding, but they are always perforated, overlapping, broken, and shared (ibid.: 91–93).

The notion of ‘multispecies worlding’ is coined by Haraway as a practice of articulating the partial connections between all kinds of living entities; who relate, know, and tell stories with/through each other (2016: 105). Aligning with posthumanism, she insists that humans cannot be separated from their environments. Our symbiotic entanglements make it impossible to say where one species starts and another one ends: microbes, bacterial symbionts, and complex ecosystems are always in exchange with each other. For Collaborative Future-Making, this implies that we need to engage in responses to all worlds, not only human ones.


(Illustration by Michelle Westerlaken)
Ontological detouring

Per-Anders Hillgren

Ontological detourings are practices that in different ways challenge ‘what is’ on a more profound level. They create ‘ontological quakes’ and temporarily shake up stable arrangements. The purpose is to train and prepare people for that the world is not necessarily what they think it is; that it can be more, that it can be rich and multiple, that it’s actually not one world, but many (Law, 2015).

Why, then, is this relevant for Collaborative Future-Making? Opening up the idea of multiplicity can provide a more multifaceted and enriched building material for the world. In line with how Dunne and Raby (2013) argue about the role of design fiction, an increased awareness about multiplicity could potentially “make the world more malleable”. If “what if” questions are central to design, they are also inevitably connected to questions of “what is”, and if the latter start to shiver and vibrate, new possibilities might be opened up for what we can imagine. It can also widen the repertoire for what is seen as legitimate and help us prepare for uncertain futures.

Is this a matter of concern only for academics? No, all kinds of citizens and professionals need new building material. Ontological detouring can be used to set the stage for design workshops or preferably longer collaborative engagements to create ontological emancipation. The term detouring suggests that people can go back to their truths if they would prefer, but that they are required to temporarily abandon them. Resources for the detouring can come from many places, though one rich asset is empirical accounts from indigenous communities that exemplify alternative ontology (Verran, 1998) and that can be retold in diverse formats that make them available for non-academics.

In a post-truth world, however, it’s important to remember that not everything is real or that reality construction is arbitrary – it’s always hard work and difficult negotiations to settle things and to unsettle them again. Still, ontological detours might be the first step to help us learn how to live well and ethically with ontological multiplicity, balancing stability and flux through constant reconfigurations.

Planetary boundaries
Sara Gottschalk

Figure: Nine life-supporting, ecological planetary systems identified, measured and risk-assessed. The planetary boundaries, updated version, Stockholm Resilience Center, 2015 (Illustration by Sara Gottschalk).

The article “A safe operating space for humanity” (Rockström et al., 2009) presented the Planetary Boundaries framework, illustrated by a spider diagram, visualizing risk-assessments of each system (see figure). The intention of the research group was not just to present a representation of the condition of the global ecosystems; they also indicated a quantitative limit to human activity (globally and collectively) – a “safe operating space”.

I see several reasons for the Planetary Boundaries to be an influential factor for making of the future: (1) The timing: The Anthropocene is on the horizon. (2) Its directness, scientific-ness and measurability speaks the language of the hegemony of the economics of our time: It is quantitative, measurable and assess-able, hence hard to neglect for e.g. policymakers. (3) The collectiveness of global space, which raises questions about resources, allocation and justice. (4) The collection of data, which plays great importance for clarification (Biermann, 2012). (5) The concept of a limit to human activity expressed in ecological systems.


Politics

Michael Strange

The most commonly used definition of ‘politics’ sees it as a decision-making process over the allocation of values in a society, typically in which institutions are the privileged means (Easton, 1965). Yet, this rests on two questionable assumptions: (1) that interests and identities pre-exist politics, and (2) that the identification and demarcation of values on differing sides of a debate is pre-given, external to that politics.

However, what if binaries like ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ are not pre-given, but are only given meaning – as well as new meaning – within politics? Politics is therefore not just the allocation of values within a society, but the constant (re)articulation of values through which a society is constituted and in which interests and identities are just different types of values which have no pre-political ownership of other values.

Our task is to ask after the political formation of the grand value-sets (ideologies, hegemonic horizons, etc.) organising society, and ask after the multifaceted ways in which politics takes place as an ecosystem of values that includes actor identities and interests, and the role those values play in enabling and constraining political agency and change.

Prediction

Bo Reimer

How should we act when the future cannot be predicted? A prediction is a statement about something happening in the future. Within the academic field of futures studies, it is a questioned but still vital concept (van der Duin, 2009).

A critical reflection on the concept is given by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in the book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2007). The book is about the limits to how previous experience can guide us in understanding the future.

The unthinkable and improbable happens much more often than we think, and especially when it concerns events of the utmost importance. Think of the first world war, 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2007/2008. As Taleb reminds us, these are all events that came out of the blue.

Is it possible to learn how to predict the unpredictable? 9/11 came as a surprise for the American military and for the president of the United States. But it did not for the terrorists involved. There is a relationship between predictability/unpredictability and power/information.

For collaborative future-making researchers, critical analyses of power and information are crucial. But we will leave predictions of the future to others.


Relational accountability

Michael Strange

All political relationships rely on a sense of accountability by which to make actors trust one another, whether understood as a direct sanction (e.g. loss of electoral votes, financial penalty) or indirect (e.g. reputational damage, market uncertainty). We speak of accountability as if it is clear that we can rely on institutions by which to apply these sanctions if actors entrusted with authority abuse that privilege. Where there are failures, it is often assumed that it is caused by poor institutional design (e.g. a lack of checks and balances), or a cultural tendency to ignore institutional demands in favour of personal material gain (e.g. corruption).

Development programmes intended to enhance the political stability of developing states focus on these goals to somehow improve institutional design and alter the cultural perceptions of the governing class. However, this ignores the more creative and everyday dimensions that are key to understanding how accountability functions. In particular, to hold decision-makers to account requires the formation and maintenance of a political community, making accountability a discursive process. This underlines the relational basis of accountability as a practical mechanism for maintaining society and ensuring good governance, demanding creative ways of thinking that allow us to reconstruct accountability relationships.

Relational assets

Ann Light

Relational assets are the social benefits that emerge over time from local sharing initiatives, making further initiatives more likely to succeed (Light and Miskelly, 2015).

Relational assets are place-based rather than individual. This distinguishes them from concepts like ‘social capital’ that pertain to individuals. They have a relation to trust: they exist between people, like trust in trust (Luhmann, 1979), they embody a virtuous cycle: like trust, they need trust.

They support the ontological security that allows new initiatives and joint ventures to flourish and, on some level, to constitute the character of the neighbourhood in which they emerge.

Pretty much invisible to the people generating them, they nonetheless accrue over time, perceptible in levels of activity across the neighbourhood.

Although not intrinsically segregated, there is still a tendency for them to amass among people with more confidence and opportunity. This, however, is not a foregone conclusion and some of the great sharing initiatives to have been developed in the ‘mesh’ that relational assets provide, are aimed at including the full diversity of people in a locale. Coined in response to work in Brockley and Brixton, south London, this diversity is a key element.


Relational home-making

Juliana Restrepo

Relations of thinking and knowing require care and affect how we care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), facilitate and open opportunities for reflection and re-orientation of priorities in our domestic environments, and the creation of change(s) within the current ecological situation.

Relational home-making brings forward the small everyday practices and processes which together and in different ways continuously create, sustain and develop home(s) and feeling of home(s) with particular attention towards care and relationality. Further, it challenges the notion of home in relation to uncanny* experiences and futures. Domestic processes are dynamic and always susceptible to change. Home-makers develop resilience through small or significant changes, and the uncertainty within their everyday living – caused e.g. by time, social encounters, health issues, political trends, and economic change. All those challenges create the necessity of developing new skills and knowledge in order to cope and work towards individual and collective adaption.

*“Uncanny is frightened precisely because it is not known and familiar”, in Freud, S. (1997). Writings on Art and Literature. Palo Alto, United States.


Time-frames/space-frames
Sara Gottschalk

Figure. IPAT (Impact = Population worldwide x Affluence in global GDP x Technology in patent applications) (Chertow, 2000) is a quantitative visualization of the physical impact of human activity on Earth, also known as The Great Acceleration. The visualization was published in an article by Dennis Dimick in National Geographic 2011. This illustration is made after the National Geographic image, by Sara Gottschalk.

The endeavor of creating a better life for your children is to many the definition of the meaning of life. This relation between (at least) two generations creates a time-frame embracing human activities of today and the future conditions for life, emphasized in e.g. “Our Common future” (UN, 1987). This generational time-world has been replaced by ever shrinking time-frames by the western, modern and heavily economically influenced global culture that dominates our time (Schmidt and Orr, 2016). The same modernity project has, invisibly, changed our relation to space, too. For those who can afford the lifestyle: a rapid increase in the ecological footprint – an expansion in space (see figure).

Social dilemmas (Hardin, 1969) serve to illustrate consequences of unsustainable time- and space-frames, favoring the individual over the collective (social traps), the ‘mine’ over the common (spatial traps) and the now over the future (temporal traps) (Schmuck and Schultz, 2012). Social dilemmas add up over time; hence they are at the very heart of the environmental crisis we are facing today.


Transformational creative practice

Ann Light

It is clear that the transition to a climate-changed world and sustainable society will not be achieved simply by doing what we currently do more efficiently with lower carbon emissions. We need a radically changed relation to consumption and living with uncertainty in society and values and practices that sustain and pursue those changes.

Such a transition to sustainability will require a challenging but exciting transformation in our institutions as well as in what communities do. Such a transformation is not well understood and will not be achieved simply by accelerating or increasing current efforts. Something different is required (Fazey et al., 2018).

Employing creative practice can provide that difference – a set of understandings, techniques, skills and knowledge to introduce to this area of work. The broad term ‘creative practice’ is used here to include all professional and non-professional work which uses personal and/or collective craft skills and ingenuity to make something new, renew or reinterpret some aspect of the world: from writing, art and theatre to designing repair cafes and data hackathons; from community development to storytelling to participative citizen science (such as making and using community air monitoring kits and experimentation of many kinds).

Creative practice can manifest in different modes: Illustrative: created to show relations, explain a theory, make attractive or other instrumental adoption of a creative medium for communication purposes. Responsive: created in reaction to a feeling or stimulus, to express an affective state and share a mood or opinion. Practical: created to change a set of materials into a more useful form. Transformative: created to have a significant affective, political or spiritual impact on self, others and/or institutions, to a stated end but not always articulated.

Transformative creative practice brings an experiential quality to projects, which, at best, enables collaborators to learn together and provides them with the opportunity to see differently. Such interventions can lead to new ways of feeling and being as well as knowing. Research (Light et al., 2018; 2019) shows that components involving collaboration, reflection, engagement in making and imagining (not just responding to others’ ideas) and starting from individuals’ and groups’ sense of meaning are key aspects of the transformational practices involved.


Un/making
Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl

Design is figured as a particular mode of future-making “... aimed at changing existing conditions into preferred ones” (Simon, 1996) through making new things, services, and systems. Design however not only solve problems or make futures. It also participates in unmaking futures and generating problems. Through the objective of making the future through making new things, other things and alternative futures are replaced, left behind, and closed off. This destructive aspect of design has however to a large extent been overshadowed by the creative side of design, which in turn has participated in generating urgent environmental damage.

In order to rework how design is practiced and imagined we propose a turn towards un/making, which invites for hesitation regarding the assumption that the solution to problems always “... require the application of more design” (McNamara et al, 2019) and that design has the capacity to provide relevant responses to all kinds of problems. Drawing on an understanding of design as both creative and destructive (Fry, 2009), un/making suggests that we approach future-making not only through making new things, but also through unmaking unsustainable materialities, practices, and imaginaries. Un/making should however not be understood as an attempt to travel back in time or to restore entire life worlds but rather as a diffractive practice that seeks to “undestroy” sustainable aspects of what has previously been deemed unpreferable and to adjust them to present circumstances (Tonkinwise, 2019; Shove 2012). Through this process we might also come to realise that the practices that we seek to restore were never fully unmade, but are still in use, but in different scales (Shove, 2012), or in other parts of the world (Mazé, 2019).

What sacrifice could mean

Staffan Schmidt

Sacrifice as a concept and attitude towards life is not only associated with moral demands and acceptance, but also with introspection and reorientation. Changes will occur in lifestyle expectations. Either democratically, backed up by rules and regulations, or enforced, sacrifice will become reality. Sacrifice may help to generate meaning while stepping down from, and rethinking, the repressed global externalities and inequities of urban consumerist desires. The “wealthy high-consumption and misery-exporting regions” (Haraway, 2015: 164) will catch us up. Meaningful sacrifice could break this cycle.

I link sacrifice to cities out of a love for urban life, and distrust in its imaginary. Sacrifice, in an embodied relation with climate change, could help to emotionally guide planetary coexistence.

Sacrifice is a relation to life as sacred. Not because of a metaphysical command, but facing life through actions and consequences. Taking an oath needs a living, receiving end. Breaking it means becoming expunged from time, and renewal. An overdeveloped West must sacrifice; reset concepts of economy, the individual, of knowledge. Sacrifice becomes a hope that “measures what is sustainable and provides the limit to growth” (Cairns and Martinet, 2014). Individual sacrifice supplies political justification to structural transition, policy shift, caring institutionalized agendas and law.
