

STORIES FROM FRAGMENTS

WORKSHOP OF THE DESIS PHILOSOPHY TALK - DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND STORYTELLING

DESIGN AND ITS WILD CARDS

Organisers: Elisa Bertolotti, Heather Daam, Francesca Piredda, Virginia Tassinari

Web link: www.desis-philosophytalks.org

ABSTRACT

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt speaks of storytelling as the act to collect the fragments of the destruction of the mainstream and wave them together in a narration. Arendt believes this act of telling stories is the real political action of opening up the common realm. This workshop aims at exploring the role for storytelling, as described by Arendt, in design for social innovation. Grassroots social innovation are examples of alternatives to the mainstream which are emerging in our society. They require new forms of narratives in order to be fully understood and amplified. Participants in this workshop are triggered to weave together tangible fragments, alternative to the mainstream of our consumeristic society, and create new narrations that imbed their political and poetical value, and opening up new possibilities for societal change. Together we will reflect on the implications of storytelling and story-listening in our daily design practice.

WORKSHOP BACKGROUND

Nowadays we are encountering many different ways in which designers are telling stories of social innovation. This phenomena encouraged us to start a reflection on the philosophical value of storytelling, and see whether this can be somehow helpful in feeding our practice as designers. In the past years we have been exploring how to tell these stories through a series of philosophical

conversations with designers, philosophers, as well as practitioners and theorists from many different fields through the the DESIS Philosophy Talk series. Specifically over the last two years we have been researching several issues: the multiple possible definitions of storytelling, ethical issues connected to it, the poetic value of telling stories as means of empowering of the public realm, the idea of storyteller as story-listener, and the value and meaning of time in telling stories.

A peculiar attention has been paid to the value of fragments resulting from the destruction of the ego-centric big narratives characterising Western 20th century society. This destruction is something that we are witnessing on a daily basis. The consumeristic ways of thinking that have been produced by contemporary Western society are manifesting themselves as a failure. However, sustainable behaviours such as grassroot ideas of production and consumption - which are nowadays rising on a global scale - are examples of alternatives to the mainstream which are emerging in our society. These fragments can be considered as signals of a positive change.

WORKSHOP PURPOSE

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt speaks of storytelling as the act to collect the fragments of the destruction of the mainstream and wave them together in a narration. She believes that storytelling is in essence the act to recognise the potentiality that is hiding behind the mainstream, and be able to read this potentiality, to translate it, to tell its story. This act of telling stories is what she recognises as the real political action that opens up the idea of public space, where everybody is invited to take part in the discussion of which the decisions upon the polis, in the common realm, are made together. This act of telling stories brings together the act of telling and the one of making, as it used to be in the Greek world “poiesis”, or poetry. Storytelling is to Arendt poetry: an action that takes place through words.

Through storytelling the potentialities of the past, what was already there and not yet manifested because of not belonging to the mainstream, finally has the chance to become actual, to show its richness. When we tell stories of social innovation, we also look at what is already present in society, but did not have the chance yet to make explicit. The act of telling the stories of emerging sustainable behaviours makes them visible, tangible, and allows existing initiatives to grow and further develop and for new ones to take shape. It is, in its essence, a political and poetical act.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Within this workshop we explore what this reflection could represent for our daily design practice. We will undertake a poetic-explorative action of finding fragments—those that risk to pass unseen—to collect them and to construct new stories by means of them. Each participant will come with six to ten fragments collected in her/his journey (professional, personal, metaphorical, physical), bringing the fragments from her/his own world. The fragments will be brought to the workshop together with a story about them closed in an envelope.

During the workshop, each participant will be asked to give her/his own fragments to another participant, who will be triggered to create a story connecting them together. Each participant will then tell the stories created (using the media she/he wishes). We will then open the envelope, revealing the other story related to the fragments. As a last exploration, we will try to imagine together possible worlds from all the fragments collected. At the end of the workshop, we will all reflect together upon the value and meaning of the stories narrated, of the role of the fragments in the daily practice of design, the balance of storytelling and story-listening, and their political-poetical value towards our contemporary society.

The workshop process will be documented through video, audio recording and photos. The outcomes will be integrated in the ongoing research project of the DESIS Philosophy Talks on storytelling and social innovation. We hope to be able to use them in a possible publication/exposition.

PROGRAMME (full day)

10.00 - 10.15 Workshop Introduction

10:15 - 10.45 Sharing fragments from the journeys

10.45 - 13.00 Creating stories, weaving fragments

13.00 - 13.45 Lunch break

13.45 - 17.00 Sharing stories (the one in the envelopes and the new ones) / Building collective story-worlds

17.00 - 18.00 Group reflections

PRE-TASK

We ask to each participants to arrive to the workshop with fragments (artefacts/objects) and a story about them. Fragments are brought in a little sack (or bag) and the story in an envelope. Participants should bring 6 to 10 fragments that are both physical and portable. Those fragments need to be collected from each participant's journey (professional, personal, metaphorical, physical) and represent or be evidence of collective behaviour or coming together.

The story has to be a short written/drawn story (max. 250 words, half a page). The story can be, for instance, about how those fragments have been found, about how they dialogue between each other, a collection of micro-stories of each fragment, etc...

At the workshop

Participants can come with their little bag of fragment and their stories, with a notebook, pencils, pens, videocameras, video-phones, computers...anything they typically use when they sketch and design.

PARTICIPANTS APPLICATION

Interested participants can sign up for the workshop by sending us a e-mail [elisa.bertolotti@polimi.it] with a very short description about her/his own research, a short bio and describing the motivation to join the workshop.

Max 12 participants.

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