Imagining collaborative future-making

In this curated session we invite to a conversation around practices of *collaborative future-making* and how it might connect to the theme of anticipation. More specifically we will address the role and interplay between 'critical imagination' and 'collaborative engagements' in future-making processes. This interplay has bearing on several of the conference questions such as: What role can design have in future making? How can we critique through making? How can collaborative work for the future be realized in anticipatory actions in the present?

We are a group of researchers exploring the theme of collaborative future-making that draws upon critical perspectives from the humanities and social sciences combined with the constructive and collaborative aspects of making in design research. This proposal should be understood as a shift from engaging with the future through forecasting, to a concern with (1) How we through critical imagination can challenge basic assumptions, norms and structures to widen the perspectives on what can constitute socially, culturally, ecologically and economically sustainable futures; and, (2) 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. Seen together these two strands might offer some possibilities that are argued for within the emerging discipline of anticipation, namely to prepare for the unknown and to be able to make sense of novelty (Poli 2010, Miller et al 2013)

Critical Imagination

In recent decades it has been argued within a number of disciplines that our ability to imagine historical change has come to an end (Unger 1987; Harvey 2000; Kiersy 2013). Anthropologist David Graeber (2011, 393–394) even speaks of a collapse of imagination, while literary/cultural critic Fredric Jameson (2003, 76) argues that today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Parallel to this there are also calls for the need to reinvigorate our imaginative capacities, both in order to challenge hegemonic political ideals, and petrified academic positions (Srnicek & Williams 2015; Harvey 2000). Political scientists have begun to turn to literary and media studies as a way to rethink the present and openly use imagination as a tool amongst their more traditional approaches (e.g. Kirsey 2013). Using critical imagination to break out of (imagined) political and scholarly deadlocks is an important theme within collaborative future making. Imagination should not be confused, however, with an abstract practice. Instead, critical imagination links directly to forms of participation and engagement, as described next.

Collaborative Engagements

Design research has always been concerned with the future and the active construction of the not yet existing; often more focused on the near future, although areas such as design fiction (Bleeker, 2009) and speculative design (Dunne and Raby 2013) have expanded the temporal scope. However what we see as especially relevant within this frame is the area of participatory design (Schuler and Namioka 1993, Simonsen and Robertson 2012). This field explores opportunities and challenges in collaborations, basically how we can work together. At the center is an ethos to democratize processes of change, that is, to

acknowledge people's skills and rights to influence their everyday environments independently if it regards workplace changes or community development (ibid.). With inspiration from science and technology studies and feminist technoscience the field also pays close attention to how both material and social aspects influence agency and processes of change. This brings forward questions such as: What is possible to change or not and why? Who can change what and how? How can socio- material networks be opened up and be more inclusive?

Curator:
Per-Anders Hillgren is a scholar in the research field of participatory design and is passionate about exploring opportunities for how to democratize processes of change. At present he is an associate professor at the School of Art and Communication and coordinates the research platform Collaborative Future Making at Malmö University.

Contributors:
Kristina Lindström
Michael Strange
Anna Seravalli
Bo Reimer
Magnus Nilsson
Per-Anders Hillgren
Li Jönsson
Sara Bjärstorp
Hope Wittmer

Format:
The session is divided into four phases:

1. The curator introduces the theme of collaborative future-making. (10 minutes)

2. The interdisciplinary panel of contributors will share a series of statements or speculations (images, objects and quotes) that engage with the role and interplay between 'critical imagination' and 'collaborative engagements' in future-making processes. (30 minutes)

3. Gatherings in smaller groups, where the audience is invited to add or rearticulate statements and speculations, and discuss the interplay between them. The conversation invites to collectively imagine what collaborative future-making can become as well as how it relates to the theme of anticipation (30 minutes)

4. A plenary discussion to share reflections. (20 minutes)

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