RE: SETTINGS
Permissions to Imagine the Future

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Visual Communication 2021, 8459 words

ABSTRACT

Access to knowledge is controlled via marketing algorithms built for commercial purposes rather than knowledge building and understanding. This work investigates whether digital social spaces can become places of empathy, learning and future building through the application of design thinking.

Based on literature and other research sources across speculative futures, technology, sustainable design, education, philosphy, psychology and neuroscience, I examine the relationship between postcapitalist futures, design of digital public spaces, visible/hidden digital identities and the decolonisation of design, asking: Can the public access the knowledge, tools and will to participate in designing sustainable postcapitalist futures through the design of digital public spaces? 'The public' in this context meaning those able to access and contribute to social media, particularly amongst a subaltern population.

I argue that through awareness and acknowledgment of their digital identities and digital public spaces, users can not only access but design and maintain these environments themselves. This allows users access to participate in future building by developing the networked individual's knowledge of the world, its inhabitants, and their own capabilities. Design and the designers' role then shifts to one of support and guidance for all stakeholders within a pluriversal metaverse.

KEYWORDS

Social media, speculative futures, transition design, knowledge, digital identities, sustainable design

CONTENTS

LIST OF
ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

Fuelled by access to smart device applications and just a short time before the financial crash of 2008, social media access grew to enable users to form connections, collaborations and a sense of a global 'We'[1] like never before. These platforms had the potential to share our knowledge of the world and each other, to promote empathy and understanding and provide spaces for users to contribute and collaborate on the construction of new futures.

In response to this potential, I founded an initiative that would use social networking sites to enable creative communities to support and activate ideas through collaboration and creative alliances. This idea manifested itself as a newspaper built via online submissions and a flexible co-working community venue. However, the project collapsed after pressures caused by the financial crash: In effect, this was an event that erased a socially-driven creative project in favour of commercial concerns.

Over a decade later, this collapse could be viewed as a microcosm of the relationship between the crash and the forgotten potential of social media as a space for social change. Governments bailed out the banks, austerity kicked in, and utopian dreams of an open internet were forgotten.. Capitalism stamped its agenda on our digital social structures, continuing the gradual monopolisation of the web.

Trumpism, Corbynism and Brexit became the manifestation of a polarised society, a sharp-edged border between right and left-wing voters. Even personal discussions with family and friends highlighted vastly differing points of view, particularly surrounding the UK general election of 2019. Whereas personal thoughts about Boris Johnsons' mildly comedic antics were depressing at best, I was shocked at how viceral the hatred for Jeremy

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1 Leadbeater, Charles, We-Think: Mass Innovation, Not Mass Production, Main Edition (London: Profile Books, 2009)

Corbyn was within my typically liberal family.

At this point I became concerned with how different users could receive different 'news' (or world knowledge) when sourced from social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Also at this time, I was Project Manager for a website build for a global digital marketing company. This drew my attention to the extent to which the data points we provide to online data collection agencies, of which social media is just a small part, are analysed and manipulated to track and predict our online and offline behaviour. By collecting and analysing hundreds, sometimes thousands of data points across activity including location, weather, health, retail, social, family events, work life and relationships, advertisers can build detailed customer personas to optimise messaging and delivery strategies and predict user behavior behaviour.

Although we have access to vast amounts of data generating vast commercial wealth, we are unable to address the global issues of climate change, forced migration, political and social polarization, lack of access to affordable housing/healthcare/education and many others.[2] Moreover, with a pandemic raging across the planet causing over 4 million deaths worldwide, there is perhaps a more urgent recognition of the inequalities embedded in the social divisions of class, race, sex and education disregarded by those in governance. As Emma Dabiri outlines,

"The same forces that have a disregard for black life, for the lives of the indigenous, for the marginalized, for the lives of women are the same forces who disregard the life of earth itself, individuals who see themselves set apart from other people, who imagine themselves disconnected from the natural world over which they short-sightedly assumed mastery, who see the destruction and degradation of life as a fair exchange for the tightly policed boundaries of ethno-nationalist identities, the pursuit of wealth or the achievement of billionaire

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2 'Transition Design Seminar CMU – Syllabus and Course Schedule for the Transition Design 2 Seminar' <https://transitiondesignseminarcmu.net/> [accessed 7 August 2021]

status."³

There is a sense that we are on the horizon of a fundamental socio-technological shift. In order to breach this horizon, we need to imagine and investigate ways this shift could manifest itself. However, we may need to reassess, reprogram or even reset institutionalised processes and behaviours to get there. In his latest film series 'Can't Get You Out of My Head', Adam Curtis outlines several potential futures, including that of the Chinese Surveillance state and one returning to a previous stability where 'individualism can continue to be managed by a benign elite'. However, he suggests that those in power across the world are devoid of ideas of what a new future could be.⁴

Franco Berardi suggests that the only route to social emancipation is found in our ability to take control of the division of learning that now threatens to subjugate the working class forever.'⁵ As we step carefully into this transitory age, access to knowledge is the real hurdle to imagining better futures.

Acknowledging that social media platforms have enabled successful social activism and community-driven projects around the world, it is possible to argue that the public use of mainstream social media platforms is a leading cause of the compartmentalisation of our knowledge. It is not that information is inaccessible; it is that we only see manipulated information designed to generate profit for advertisers. From within this context I intend to investigate social media as a potential space for knowledge building, which in turn could allow the networked individual better access to participate in defining the systems, social spaces, and personal capabilities that may actualise a postcapitalist world.

3 Dabiri, Emma, What White People Can Do next: From Allyship to Coalition, 2021
4 Can't Get You Out of My Head - Series 1: 6. Part Six - Are We Pigeon? Or Are We Dancer? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p093x1c1/cant-get-you-out-of-my-head-series-1-6-part-six-are-we-pigeon-or-are-we-dancer> [accessed 21 July 2021]
5 Berardi, Franco and Verso, Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility (London; New York: Verso, 2019)

I will explore if the public can access design thinking to provoke their participation in building more sustainable and socially focused futures via digital public spaces, rather than passively responding to spaces and futures built and controlled by neo-liberal agendas.

I intend to do this by examining access to imagining postcapitalist futures, social media control of knowledge, new digital public spaces, personhood within the platform, engaging public will, democratisation of design tools and decolonialism of design.

This dissertation responds to a personal quest to uncover underlying causes of the division of knowledge and presents a public guide of sorts. A way of making sense of the division, confusion, and, even before the pandemic, isolation driven by the use of mainstream social media platforms, presenting potential paths to access and agency through new digital public spaces.

1. SYSTEM SETTINGS

Access to Futures

We are living through a period of great change, caught between the surplus of the 20th Century and the scarcity of the 21st. It could be said that the political, economic, and educational infrastructures embedded in the last Century are very quickly becoming unfit for purpose for a connected, networked global population.

From this viewpoint, if one can ignore the stubborn ache of Capitalist Realism, we attempt to imagine alternatives to our hyper-individualised consumer-focused lives.

In the 2017 Sonic Acts Festival catalogue, Nina Power outlines three potential theoretical routes to usurp capitalist social structures - Anticapitalism, Postcapitalism, and Decapitalism. Anticapitalism is the opposition of the state and its reliance on capitalist agendas through demonstration and protest in the present day. Postcapitalism imagines potential social systems after capitalism, a structure where an individual can be emancipated from a life of labour and servitude to capitalism, focusing on repurposing the technology of capitalism for universal emancipation rather than the accumulation of wealth. Finally, Decapitalism reimagines a suitably revolutionary act of removing the head, that is, the system, by force.[6]

With the Anticapitalist Occupy movement of 2011-2012 short-lived and the removal of capitalism by force an unlikely scenario, we should perhaps focus our attention on Postcapitalist solutions, that is, a society that uses the technology and power of capitalism but repurposes it for non-neoliberalist agendas.

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6 Belina, Mirna, Sonic Acts: The Noise of Being (Amsterdam: Sonic Acts Press, 2018)

As with the first and second industrial revolutions, it was difficult to see the path ahead during the transitions. The tectonic plates of the old and the new caused such friction, disruption, and dissonance that those who lived through this period must have felt extreme confusion at the strange world emerging before them. In 2021 we find ourselves on the edge of another great transition.[7]

In his 2018 book 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism, A Manifesto', Aaron Bastiani proposes a solution to what he outlines as the five major concerns of our Century - climate change, resource scarcity, societal ageing, the surplus of global poor, and automation of the workforce.

In order to address these concerns he proposes a social structure based around an abundance brought about by technological development in multiple industries over the coming decades - an abundance of information, energy, resources, food and labour, and he proposes that these things will be found in *such* abundance that they will be free to all.[8]

Expanded automation and mass unemployment are perhaps guaranteed features of our future societies. Like Bastiani, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams call for the end of work, demanding automation of production and Universal Basic Income. They discuss a shift to using neoliberal strategies to accomplish leftist agendas and invoking imagination to build a 'not for profit' future[9]

The installation 2038 shown at the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale from 22nd May to 21st November 2021 comprehensively imagines a speculative future of a 'New Serenity' where "the global ecological, social

7 Bastani, Aaron, Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto (London ; New York: Verso, 2019)

8 Bastani, Aaron, Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto (London ; New York: Verso, 2019)

9 Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams, Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work, Revised and updated edition (London New York: Verso, 2016)

and economic disasters of the 2020s brought people, states, institutions and companies together."[10]   The project realistically imagines new approaches and reasoning after a global resetting of fundamental rights, systems and frameworks across a decentralised model of co-existing,[11] albeit from a pre-pandemic perspective. *(Fig 2)*

Accessing these idealistic realities may be challenging to imagine within a social structure dominated by neoliberal narratives. Although these scenarios could seem possible, they are perhaps so far beyond the imagination of the 'common intellect'[12] that they could be considered mere academic fantasies, impotent within and unable to escape their intellectual echo chambers.

Access to Knowledge

If these futures are to become realities, educational institutions may have to radically alter traditional pedagogic infrastructures to manage better what is a) considered education and b) who can access it.

The university is traditionally seen as a place of development, nurturing the next generation of thinkers, inventors and creators. However, the university could be considered as much of a commercial enterprise as Google or Facebook. Students pay for a particular service to access knowledge while leadership decides how and whom to deliver the curriculum based on the market rather than "the furthering of knowledge and the development of knowers."[13]

From within this context, David J. Staley argues that modern universities

10 '2038' <https://space-time.tv/> [accessed 27 July 2021]

11 Ibid

12 Crehan, Kate A. F., Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)

13 McKenna, Sioux, 'Here Are Five Signs That Universities Are Turning into Corporations', The Conversation <http://theconversation.com/here-are-five-signs-that-universities-are-turning-into-corporations-93100> [accessed 27 July 2021]

suffer from a "poverty of imagination about how to reinvent themselves."[14] In 'Alternative Universities: Speculative Design for Innovation in Higher Education', he proposes ten innovative structures that expand our perception of a university's role in society and radically reassesses the education workers may need access to in the future. Categorising new types of universities with titles such as Platform (connecting producers and consumers) Beauty (truth-seeking), Nomad (short term projects), Technology (designers, builders and users) Play (imagining what does not exist) and Future (speculating on and instigating the future) he invites us to consider that there is not solely one way to form an educational environment. That multiplicity and plurality of learning requires any new pedagogy to take many forms, and that "innovative institutions are those that explore the existential possibilities of the university."[15]

Really Useful Knowledge

From 29th October 2014 to 9th February 2015, Madrid's Reina Sofia Museum presented an exhibition entitled 'Really Useful Knowledge' *(Fig 3)* which examined "diverse procedural, non-academic, anti-hierarchical, grass-root, heterodox educational situations primarily occupied with the transformative potentials of art." The catalogue's introduction outlined,

"The notion of "really useful knowledge" originated in workers' awareness of the need for self-education in the early 19th Century. In the 1820s and 1830s, workers' organizations in the United Kingdom introduced this concept to describe a body of knowledge that encompassed various 'unpractical' disciplines such as politics, economics and philosophy, as opposed to "useful knowledge"... It is a collective, emancipatory, theoretical, emotional, informative and practical quest that starts from acknowledging what we do not yet know."[16]

14 Staley, David J., Alternative Universities: Speculative Design for Innovation in Higher Education (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019)

15 Staley, David J., Alternative Universities: Speculative Design for Innovation in Higher Education (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019)

16 Rodríguez, Mafalda, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, eds., Really Useful Knowledge: October 28, 2014-February 9, 2015 (presented at the Exhibition Really Useful Knowledge, Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2014)

The fact that the workers themselves instigated an initiative to discover what they did not know is a striking outcome of their acknowledgement of self-awareness, potentiality and the potency of knowledge at a time of great social transition.

However, with access to 'really useful knowledge' a distant memory, and traditional forms of alternative and open source learning such as libraries becoming increasingly limited (almost a fifth of UK libraries closed between 2010 and 2020),[17] social media and search engines are now perceived as primary sources of knowledge. In this context, social media platforms could be considered an hollow modern manifestation of 'Really Useful Knowledge', particularly within subaltern parts of society. Indeed the 2021 report from Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University discovered: 'The use of social media for news remains strong, especially with younger people and those with lower levels of education.'[18]

The networked individual has access to an abundance of information but cannot distinguish fact from fiction, or marketing from meaning. The early potential of the social platform for developing knowledge and understanding was suppressed in favour of routing users through labyrinthine sales funnels. This suppression causes a skewed user perception of the validity of the knowledge they build through these environments: their purpose is to optimise purchases not understanding.

If the primary access point to world view building is now via social media platforms, can new alliances reassess and reinvent digital social spaces to focus on knowledge gathering, learning and discourse, in the process enabling users access to agency and autonomy within those spaces?

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17 'Britain Has Closed Almost 800 Libraries since 2010, Figures Show', The Guardian, 2019 http://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/06/britain-has-closed-almost-800-libraries-since-2010-figures-show> [accessed 4 August 2021]

18 'Overview and Key Findings of the 2021 Digital News Report', Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/dnr-executive-summary> [accessed 2 August 2021]

Fig.1: Sonic Acts Festival 23-26 February 2017
Source: https://www.therodina.com/sonic-acts-2017/

Fig.2: 2038 The New Serenity, German Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition –La Biennale di Venezia
Source: https://space-time.tv/

Fig.3: Really Useful Knowledge, October 29, 2014 - February 9, 2015
Source: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/really-useful-knowledge

2. SOCIAL SETTINGS

Manipulating Knowledge

With a shift towards social media as a primary source of news, the knowledge that users can 'search for' becomes restricted. Although we have access to limitless information, knowledge is controlled and optimised by the platforms for commercial purposes rather than the dissemination and development of knowledge. News pieces are at best confused with ill-informed opinions, marketing messages and location-specific stories, and at worst, repurposed and retargeted for commercial and political gain through powerful algorithms, predictive technology, multiple data set analysis and dopamine hits.[19] More than that, Richard Ovenden suggests,

"The influence wielded by today's tech giants has been compared to the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, both having an abundance of resources teamed with the power, the wealth and the delivery system to control what we know and when we know it."[20]

A further distortion to 'what we know' is the evidence that Russian hackers, most notably the group Fancy Bears, infiltrated and manipulated social media stories around the US election campaign of 2016 to direct and influence voter action. Of most concern is that rather than through any back door hacking techniques this was achieved by doing what Facebook was and is designed to do: connect people with shared interests using Facebook's tools to build and reach specific target audiences. They were used for the exact job they were designed to do. For this reason during

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19 Orlowski, Jeff, The Social Dilemma (Netflix, 2020) <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81254224?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C5e67f3dfd0117fb2077856c9004b59c70438f5c8%3A25453a3d449e39ea9fb36e22a1a14bfee24170c7%2C5e67f3dfd0117f-b2077856c9004b59c70438f5c8%3A25453a3d449e39ea9fb36e22a1a14bfee24170c7%-2Cunknown%2C%3E%20[accessed%2029%20July%202021>
20 Ovenden, Richard, Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge under Attack (London: John Murray, 2020)

2016 "the Russian hackers had essentially become the world's most powerful news editors."[21]

No Responsibility

The storming of Capitol Hill in January of 2021 was perhaps an inevitable but shocking real-world manifestation of Trump's tactics to divide and misinform the American public. That the President's behaviour provoked these extreme events via his obsessive use of Twitter wasn't a particular surprise. What was surprising was that Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms did not accept any level of responsibility as a guardian of news sources. They were exempt from legislation other media providers had been subject to for decades, protected by the US policy Section 23 that determines social media and online platforms as outside of the remit of the laws and jurisdictions of traditional media outlets.

However, during the aftermath of the violence, and with President Trump's tweets first being removed and then his account suspended, it begged the question why wasn't this done sooner? Maybe even more noteworthy was that the social media platforms had the power to exclude Trump from a public arena, illustrating that in reality the platforms had more power than an incumbent US president.

Legislation to dilute big tech's power is arriving slowly but surely. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) initiative and UK's Online Safety Bill (Published on 12th May 2021) has introduced regulation for how tech monopolies can operate. In addition, the UK government has tasked a Digital Markets Unit (DMU) with investigating antitrust concerns and published its pro-competition regime for digital markets, the latest step in the establishment of a new regulatory body.[22] However, rather than change systemic inadequacies, big tech companies

21 Frenkel, Sheera, and Cecilia Kang, An Ugly Truth: Inside Facebook's Battle for Domination, 2021
22 'Digital Markets Unit', GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/digital-markets-unit> [accessed 27 July 2021]

tend to sidestep rather than adhere to any new rules; for example Facebook are porting user agreements to the US post-Brexit, now that the UK is no longer under the jurisdiction of GDPR.[23]

Direct Marketing

Without legislation, big tech companies are free to apply unregulated behavioural manipulation strategies to their users, as Shoshana Zuboff illustrates,

"Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data... Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from these trading operations, for many companies are willing to lay bets on our future behaviour."[24]

However, these platforms could just be considered, as the writer and activist Cory Doctorow points out, just oversized direct marketing companies. He outlines the four ways social media targets its users for advertising purposes - segmenting demographics, deception techniques in order to manipulate 'buying' behaviour, domination of access points and bypassing our ability to act rationally.[25]

Social media feeds present content that fits our digital persona to keep us engaged enough to click on an advert. The like button sets a user's preferences as does the websites they visit, the cookies they accept and the searches they make. Facebook Ads Manager provides targeting options to build a particular audience for a particular purpose. For instance, with location you can target people through country, state, province, city,

23 'Facebook to Shift UK Users under US Terms to Bypass EU's Stringent Privacy Rules', The Tech Portal, 2020 <https://thetechportal.com/2020/12/17/facebook-uk-users-us-terms-eu-privacy-rules/> [accessed 27 July 2021]

24 The Age of Surveillance Capitalism <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/The-Age-of-Surveillance-Capitalism-Audiobook/1478947276> [accessed 27 October 2020]

25 Doctorow, Cory, 'How to Destroy "Surveillance Capitalism"', Medium, 2020 <https://onezero.medium.com/how-to-destroy-surveillance-capitalism-8135e6744d59> [accessed 5 December 2020]

congressional district, zip and postcodes and worldwide settings."[26]

However there is evidence that this advertising model is losing its ability to maintain influence for social platforms. Possibly because, from a traditional advertising perspective, sales success ratio through social media selling is very low. As Tim Hwang explains,

"Targeted advertising is significantly more expensive than nontargeted advertising... the cost of these ads may make their overall return negative because they rely on a foundation of shoddy and inaccurate data that fail to have any significant influence on sales."[27]

With a limited lifespan for the advertising model and legislation increasingly hampering mainstream social media companies' commercial activity, there is an opportunity for other platforms to take their place. But what do we want from these digital public spaces?

Performative Politics

It could be argued that inhabiting spaces that encourage discourse and the refinement of ideas is central to human civilization. From the campfire to language, rituals, traditions and formalities human interaction in physical spaces has been refined over millennia. In comparison we are only just beginning to construct our digital public spaces and the civil duties we are obligated to perform within them.

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26 'About Reaching New Audiences', Facebook Business Help Centre <https://en-gb.facebook.com/business/help/717368264947302> [accessed 2 August 2021]

27 Hwang, Tim, Subprime Attention Crisis: Advertising and the Time Bomb at the Heart of the Internet (FSG Originals, 2020)

Hannah Arendt's definition of political action as one of collaboration between citizens to build their worlds from a position of plurality and equality through public debate, one she insisted is an obligation of every social individual is largely absent within social platforms.[28] In these online environments our visible actions could be considered hollow performative gestures, signalling alliances to a small number of users without any commitment to action of any significance. As Emma Dabiri puts it, "we seem to have replaced doing anything with saying something where the word 'conversation' has achieved an obscenely inflated importance as a substitute for action."[29]

Today, rather than direct action, we perform increasingly meaningless actions via a like, share or a profile image filter update, *(Fig 4)* satisfying our small sense of obligation to participate in a civic sphere. With performances only seen within our own comparatively small online networks (a Google search shows average followers across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to number around 250 with just a fraction seeing your content).[30]

We should perhaps question whether existing social media platforms enable publicly moderated discourse, debate and assessment. Only then can we refine and align social consensus in building our futures, in the process transmitting an urgent need for each of us to assume responsibility for our political lives.

New Digital Public Spaces

Technologist Eli Pariser presents this problem as "What obligations do tech platforms have to us in exchange for the power they hold over our discourse?" He asks if society could benefit from digital spaces that

28 Bernstein, Richard J., Why Read Hannah Arendt Now (Cambridge ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018)

29 Dabiri, Emma, What White People Can Do next: From Allyship to Coalition, 2021

30 Google search by the author, 19th July 2021

replicate public realms such as parks, libraries and cities, that is, for well-being, education and plurality. What would these digital public spaces look like, and how would they work?[31]

This question is catalysed through New Public, an initiative co-founded by Pariser and populated by a growing community of technologists, designers and academics . Using knowledge of existing social spaces such as the city, urban planning and community spaces they look for new ways to improve social relationships and interaction online.[32]

January 12th to 14th 2021 saw the first New_Public Festival, *(Fig 5)* conducted completely online through three days of lectures, workshops and discussions based around a 2020 report from the Center of Media engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, an extensive two year research period across five continents and 200,000 participants.[33] The report revealed that that "users liked that social media allowed them to connect with their communities and friends, to help those in need, and to learn new skills and information." Even so, the report indicated that social media could still waste their time, look for validation, exacerbate tensions and cause distress, in the process compromising privacy and data. [34]

In response to this report, New Public proposes four building blocks or 'civic signals' they outline that might form the foundation of our future digital public spaces.

Welcome: Invite everyone to participate, ensure people's safety, encourage the humanization of others, keep people's information secure.

31 'New_ Public - For Better Digital Public Spaces', Civic-Signals <https://newpublic.org> [accessed 6 August 2021]

32 'New Public Festival | Jan 12 > 14 2021', Civic-Signals <https://newpublic.org/festival> [accessed 12 January 2021]

33 'New Public Festival | Jan 12 > 14 2021', Civic-Signals <https://newpublic.org/festival> [accessed 12 January 2021]

34 'Social Media: The Good, The Bad, and How Platforms Can Do Better - Center for Media Engagement - Center for Media Engagement' <https://mediaengagement.org/research/social-media-how-platforms-can-do-better/> [accessed 21 July 2021]

Connect: Cultivate belonging, build bridges between groups, strengthen local ties, make power accessible.
Understand: Elevate shared concerns, show reliable information, build civic competence, promote thoughtful conversation.
Act: Boost community resilience, support civic action.[35]

Digital urban planners and designers may need to respond to these signals to build digital public spaces we want to inhabit in the future. Rather than relentless information feeds built for campaign engagement that disseminates information, the design process could focus on that of relationship building for a plurality of users within these spaces, building trust in the content, ethos, responsibility and safeguarding standards of the platform.

When choosing a platform, mainstream users tend to congregate where their friends are or where the crowd is. The result is that breaking away from popular platforms is potentially difficult and isolating.[36] Of course, many alternatives to the mainstream social networks exist, including Discord, Slack, Mozilla hubs, Scuttlebutt and Mastodon, but these tend to be populated by more tech literate early adopters informed about and choosing to bypass the use of the surveillance advertising and behavioural manipulation tools.

Authentic Spaces

In these new environments, communication and community is key, as is enjoyment, safety and security. The emphasis is on smaller, context-driven spaces where authentic interaction is of primary importance. Sara Wilson, dubbed these spaces 'Digital Campfires', comprised of three categories - Private Messaging, Micro-Community and Shared

35'New_ Public - For Better Digital Public Spaces', Civic-Signals <https://newpublic.org> [accessed 6 August 2021]

36 'Can't Delete: Why We Stay on Social Media | Psychology Today' <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-networked-relationship/201912/cant-delete-why-we-stay-social-media> [accessed 7 August 2021]

Experience.[37]

Although not necessarily designed for social interaction and collaboration, it is noticeable that gaming platforms have progressively become primary social spaces for the younger generation. The Fortnite phenomenon is a prime example of how gaming platforms are transforming online social spaces, enabling an experience where users can be their 'true authentic selves.' *(Fig 6)* As Jon Penn, CEO of National Research Group (NRG) in the US, explains:

"it's an immersive experience centred around lasting social connection; it's a playground to be anybody, yet it's where we can be our true authentic selves... Fortnite presents a more hopeful Metaverse where community, inclusivity, creativity and authentic relationships can thrive."[38]

Animal Crossing also allows participation in a multi-species social space, governed by the inhabitants rather than any hierarchical structure. "Animals have the freedom to pursue their interests, provide communal services, or consolidate wealth. Those who do consolidate wealth tend to invest much of that profit back into the community. It's a system that works and everyone is happy."[39] Teenagers inhabit most of these spaces, choosing to dismiss what an older demographic might define as a social network as they do not address their need for empathic, modern relationships.

Restarting the Web

This user-centric, socially driven use of the gaming platform signals the imminent arrival of Web 3.0. heralding its role as a significant enabler of user-driven platforms. As Max Mersch and Richard Muirhead point out,

37 https://hbr.org/2020/02/the-era-of-antisocial-social-media

38 Bloom, David 'Is Fortnite The New Social-Media Home For Teens?', Forbes <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dbloom/2019/06/04/is-fortnite-the-new-social-media-home-for-teens/> [accessed 3 August 2021]

39 https://www.popdust.com/animal-crossing-new-horizons-socialism-2638780017

"Web 3.0 enables a future where distributed users and machines are able to interact with data, value and other counterparties via a substrate of peer-to-peer networks without the need for third parties."[40]

This results in a human-centric infrastructure built from open (open source), trustless (bypassing trusted third parties) and permissionless (access without authorisation) protocols.

The Decentralised Web (Dweb) is crucial to Web 3.0, providing users access to the internet without using third-party platforms that treat its users as a resource to be exploited rather than stakeholders in its success. The DWeb is enabled by combining edge computing (leveraging increasingly powerful devices) decentralised data (taking ownership of data) and artificial intelligence (developing new solutions and processes). In real terms, this will enable trusted peer-to-peer collaboration on a global scale, "trusting all constituents of a network implicitly rather than needing to trust each individual explicitly and/or seeking to achieve trust extrinsically."[41]

This signals a return to vision closer to that of the architects of the internet where users themselves had the capability to take control of production, data and privacy to craft solutions to meet their own needs. However, to realise this demands a commitment by designers to include users in the design of the spaces and the will of the user to participate in the design and maintenance of these new digital public spaces.

40 'What Is Web 3.0 & Why It Matters. Written by Max Mersch and Richard… | by Fabric Ventures | Fabric Ventures | Medium' <https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b> [accessed 19 July 2021]

41 'What Is Web 3.0 & Why It Matters. Written by Max Mersch and Richard… | by Fabric Ventures | Fabric Ventures | Medium' <https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b> [accessed 19 July 2021]
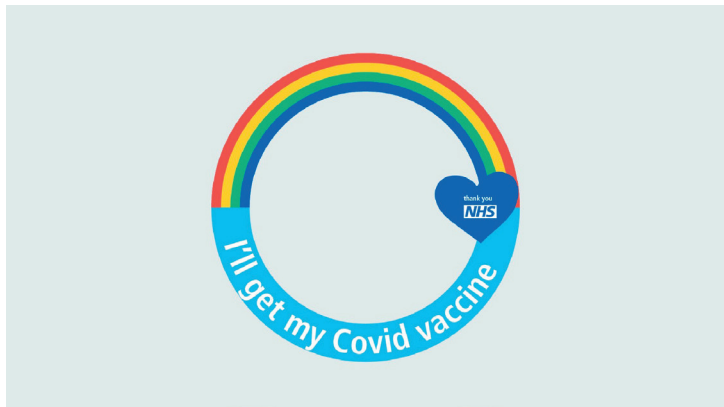
Fig.4: NHS #CovidVaccine @Facebook profile photo frame
Source: https://twitter.com/NHSuk/status/1362733797096185857

Fig.5: Eli Parizier presenting the New_Public Festival 12th -14th January 2021
Source: https://newpublic.org/festival

Fig.6: Fortnite screenshot showing chat function
Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/FORTnITE/comments/9rgxuv/the_new_chat_
update_is_amazing_no_clickbait/

3. USER SETTINGS

Depoliticising Labour

Returning to Eli Pariser, he outlines three obstacles to building sustainable online spaces: money, talent and public imagination. Of the last obstacle, he says *"fixing our ability to connect and build healthy communities at scale is arguably an Apollo mission for this generation—a decisive challenge that will determine whether our society progresses or falls back into conspiracy-driven tribalism. We need to summon the creative will worthy of a problem of this urgency and consequence."*[42] With this in mind, how can we activate this 'creative will' in building and maintaining our digital public spaces? What does it take for an individual to want to learn, participate and ultimately take action?

Political action is a challenge to activate when people, particularly within austerity measures, struggle to find the time to engage in wider social debate. A certain percentage of the population are unable to actively participate in political action and goes some way to reinforce Beradi's concept of social impotency. The will to self-initiate strategies for critical thinking and participation in future building is absent from a large part of the population when otherwise concerned with the more urgent priorities of survival.

Faced with the non-existent and failing power or labour organisations to rescue what could now be called 'front line' workers, there are limited mechanisms to unite people under a common purpose. Indeed as David Graeber illustrates, "Eliminating guaranteed life employment for precarious contracts doesn't really create a more effective workforce, but it is extraordinarily effective in destroying unions and otherwise

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42 'To Mend a Broken Internet, Create Online Parks', Wired <https://www.wired.com/story/to-mend-a-broken-internet-create-online-parks/> [accessed 28 October 2020]

depoliticizing labor".[43] Without this political interest, many social issues are rendered irrelevant by certain sections of society rather than being seen as a connected and relevant manifestation of social control that applies to all citizens. This particularly applies to social media. From their online echo chambers, the individual could be forgiven for focusing only on issues and events that directly affect them and their visible social group, in the process assimilating and reinforcing the world views of that group. Reiterating the need for acknowledgment of opinions other than your own, Onora O'Neill states,

"Citizens must be able to communicate their views… they need to be listeners as well as speakers, readers as well as writers… communicate with those whose views they do not share and seek to judge which claims are worth attention and which are flakey or false or indeed fake".[44]

Digital Identities

Social media is a manifestation of the visible and the hidden self. That is, we visibly share and perform to followers and networks but also share and perform an inordinately hidden amount of data that only the platforms themselves have access to. We have a skewed perception of how much of this information we are aware of, how much control we have over it and what responsibility we take for it.

With every swipe, click and tap, we happily relinquish our most intimate wishes through our digital devices. What we type, what we say, what we hear, where we go, who we meet - some of this is willingly shared, but we are largely unaware of the level of data collected and used for commercial purposes. Facebook, for example, has at least 52,000 traits of each user built

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43 David, Graeber, 'A Practical Utopian's Guide to the Coming Collapse', The Baffler, 2014 <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/a-practical-utopians-guide-to-the-coming-collapse> [accessed 2 August 2021]

44   'BBC Sounds - Rethink, Onora O'Neill: Rethinking Digital Power', BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08jns4r> [accessed 10 January 2021]

using three main algorithms, Deep Text, Deep Face and FB Learner Flow.[45]

Although we might consider our online data as an irrelevant document of our interactions and movements, the artificial intelligence algorithms that analyse this data curates our social media content to predict and manipulate our future actions. To the platform and any organisation using it, this data could be considered the only 'us' of any importance.

For a digital native, these undercover intrusions are ubiquitous, invisible and 'normal' enough to be of no particular concern. However, by owning our data, digital platforms could be considered to own an important part of our 'self', capturing and exploiting our digital souls. The 'us' we see is only a fraction of the digital persona built through our interactions and is possibly the only version of us of any importance within mainstream social platforms. We only see glimpses of these doppelgangers when we experience seemingly magical insights like receiving a message from Siri with a checkout offer while we shop.

Democratising Data

Although access to our captured data is accessible to download, it is a complex process to interpret any meaning. However, there are new initiatives enabling us to actively access, control and ultimately democratise the data we produce. Rita (Rights to Access) is a Brussels-based start-up that launched a platform in May 2021 that hopes to address this asymmetry of data ownership. *(Fig 7)* Under a mission statement of 'democratising data' Rita aggregates data from Facebook, Instagram, Google and Spotify to present your privacy dashboard and 'Rita Privacy Score'. Applications such as this enable users to track and update their privacy settings in one place quickly and see the commercial value of their data.

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45   'Facebook's 52,000 Data Points on Each Person Reveal Something Shocking about Its Future', Komando.Com, 2018 <https://www.komando.com/social-media/facebooks-52000-data-points-on-each-person-reveal-something-shocking-about-its-future/489188/> [accessed 2 August 2021]

The result of this kind of initiative is data portability and ownership of personhood. The data becomes the user's resource, whether for ethical maintenance or as a potential source of income, proclaiming a transparent future centered around data producers (users) and data consumers (retailers). This hints at a future where data management services could be part of your personal utility services in the same way as your mobile network provider, home utilities or life insurance.[46]

This scenario however relies on two things: Awareness of the control data has on our lives, and our participation in the cultivation and maintenance of our relationship with our data. We are perhaps still submerged in a state of ignorance of our digital personhood, that our data is something still so abstract and hidden it seems irrelevant for most to care about it. However, this scenario relies on two things: Awareness of the control data has on our lives and our participation in the cultivation and maintenance of our own relationship with our data. Before agency can achieve any change, users need to be willing to accept responsibility for their own (inter) actions.

Conversions

The influence of family, peers and upbringing on our behaviour cannot be underestimated. It can be used both to relinquish responsibility and also to mask an individual's true nature. It is difficult to convince an individual to reject ingrained behaviours borne from strong tribal values reinforced by marketing algorithms. It takes a significant event to break these bonds.

Suppose we hypothesise that we are born into the world with either a neutral or predetermined behavioural type. In that case, it could be argued that the environment (culture) changes the individual from this predetermined state. The act of behavioural change or conversion

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46 Team, Rita, 'Rita - It's Your Data, Own It.' <https://ritapersonaldata.com/> [accessed 10 August 2021]

is simply a return to the true nature of that individual. As psychoanalyst Adam Philips suggests:

"far from being a rupture, a break with the past, in its psychoanalytic version conversion sustains continuity: in a sense we are more successfully our past selves after a conversion than before."[47]

This concept indicates that the individual is submerged beneath the visible character built by and viewed from the culture they find themselves in. An authentic self with altogether different opinions, views, and actions is suppressed in favour of allegiance to that culture.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that in social media advertising terms, the term 'conversion' describes the shift from prospective customer to paying customer - we are converted from prospective customer to customer, or prospective believer to believer, or prospective convert to convert. The term 'prospective' is also an important one in this context. We enter a 'prospective' state through curiosity, through interest, by something or someone gaining our attention. An undefinable attraction that appeals to our needs, wants and obsessions that aims to reinforcesour established world view or to shatter it completely.

Another term used in social media advertising is impression. This describes the event of a post or advert being placed in front of a user, the bridge between the prospective and the converted. This is an important step in constructing an individual's opinion, that is to say, a person's first impression is something to overcome if the opinion formed in that encounter is not a correct one, or unfactual. Transitioning through these states, Prospective, Impression, and Conversion, possibly indicates the stages we should instigate to access change, not just from a commercial and psychological perspective but also from a design process perspective.

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47   Phillips, Adam, On Wanting To Change. (S.l.: Hamish Hamilton, 2021)

Decision Confidence

Although there are major social influences on our ability to change our beliefs and assumptions, research suggests that there is also a neurological reason for our reluctance to change our minds. *(Fig 8)* Metacognition is our ability to think about and assess our thoughts. More profoundly, it enables us to think about our own state of self and those of others. [48]

When a subject has good metacognitive sensitivity, they have a high confidence that they are correct in their thinking and understand that any self-evaluation is sensitive to their change in performance. An accurate sense of confidence in our personal and political beliefs has been shown to increase our ability to know when we might be wrong. Recent studies suggest that "having the ability to engage in "cognitive reflection… is an important part of resisting misinformation and fake news."[49] Those with low metacognitive ability do not realise that they have a lower metacognitive sensitivity, indicating why they see no reason to adapt or amend their behaviours and world views. Clinically this is termed 'anosognosia' or lack of insight, a known symptom of dementia and a visible observation of the neurological processes behind decision confidence.[50] Creating processes to assess confidence in one's own opinions could be an important consideration when influencing behaviour changes and conversion to an authentic self through design thinking.

When social media's reinforcement of particular world views are combined with metacognitive sensitivity, we can begin to understand how the infrastructures in which we live impact the architecture of our own thought processes and even affect our own capability to assess what we do and don't know.

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48 Fleming, Stephen, 'The Power of Self-Reflection', New Scientist, 250.3333 (2021)
49 Ibid
50 Ibid

Although these studies reveal a biologically programmed genetic foundation for metacognition, our culture, our parents, teachers and social groups remain a force for developing and reinforcing confidence in our beliefs. Our metacognitive fingerprint is built in childhood, but it is not fixed and can be affected in adulthood by stress, changes to mental health and training.

Embracing the Glitch

Having a different way of looking at the world could be considered an error when viewed from a contradictory context, but breaking the bonds of cultural obligations could begin with the acknowledgment that actually this error, or glitch, represents an acknowledgment of ones authentic self and should be embraced.

In her book 'Glitch Feminism', Legacy Russell proposes a manifesto for the modern individual and a celebration of the plurality of society. Constructed from our singular mixture of genes, cultures, experiences and inputs, we are never a duplicate of another enough to be contained within any particular grouping, especially those proposed by government, advertising personas, or society as a whole.[51]

The glitch reinforces the observation that the younger generation are embracing their authentic selves through gaming platforms, a reason why spaces like Fortnite and Animal Crossing have become havens for teenagers who find other physical and digital spaces unfit for purpose in the modern world. It is also interesting to note the duality between a gaming environment, where an avatar can be created to represent a more faithful representation of the authentic self, and a platform like Instagram, where curated images of the self are considered inauthentic amongst young people. It is the infrastructure that dictates which is which in these settings, that is, design influences behaviour.

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51 Russell, Legacy, Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto (London New York: Verso, 2020)

This philosophy insists that the neoliberal idea of the individual, that is, success at all costs, is to be reset and reprogrammed to form one of participation and empathy. It manifests success within the matriarchal approach of support and nuturing instead of one of patriarchal power and violence.

This approach can also inform our design processes; instead of forcing external design expertise on people or groups, it is now the role of design to apply a nurturing, supportive framework for stakeholders to access their imagination and capabilities in world-building.
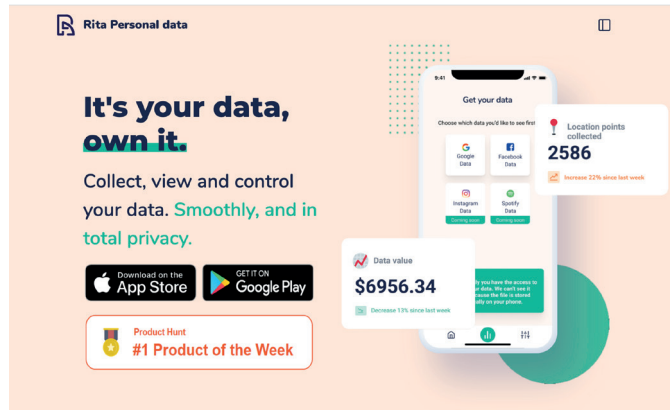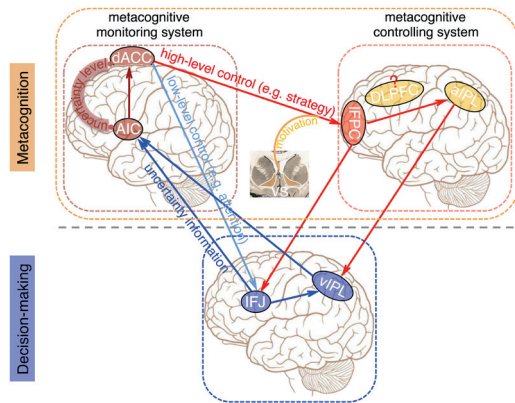
Fig.7: Rita personal data website
Source: https://ritapersonaldata.com/

Fig.8: The functional architecture of the metacognition neural system
Source: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2004037.g008

4. DESIGN SETTINGS

Design Access

In 'Design, When Everybody Designs' Ezio Mancini proclaims "In a world in rapid and profound transformation, we are all designers."[52] This may be true. However, it could be argued that within social media platforms, only the user's ornamentation applies, that is, the beautification, or the aesthetic image of what could be viewed as 'you'. Enabled by access to tools and equipment previously needing to be mastered by professionals, users design a public-facing, branded version of themselves through careful curation and editing.

Since the invention of desktop publishing with MacPublisher in 1984, the tools used by designers have become ever more accessible.[53] Online tools like Logomaker and Fiverr reinforce the perception that design is a purely ornamental endeavour. Particularly prevalent in the world of graphic design, off-the-shelf components can be used to construct visually pleasing results without the potentially unnecessary step of design thinking. The proliferation of access to design tools bypasses the reasoning and process behind a good design, or a good designer. People make images without understanding the meaning behind these images in a broader sense than they otherwise may have when applying design thinking.

A fictional narrative of the 2038 project previously referenced included citizens needing to learn code to access and control their financial data after a terminal reset. However, it's probable we will not even need to

52 Manzini, Ezio, Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation, Design Thinking, Design Theory (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015)
53 'The First Desktop Publishing Program, MacPublisher, Is Introduced: History of Information' <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=1436> [accessed 2 August 2021]

learn how to code: In 2021 Microsoft released an artificial intelligence system that can recommend code for software developers to use in their work.[54] At the moment it simply suggests code for developers aiding the build process, but this may eventually be used as a tool for all. So it follows that, as with public access to design tools, online applications could be produced by people with limited coding skills. If this is the case, it could be argued that design knowledge needs to be transferred to those engaged in the design of our future, that is, the public.

Co-design

The conventional understanding of design, an aesthetic and object-based endeavour, could now be shifted to one of systematic and inclusive approaches in how we might design the infrastructures of our systems, spaces and capabilities, or more precisely, our lives. Design is a force for transformation.

Mancini proposes a shift in the role of the expert designer, to one as a facilitator for the non-expert's role in designing futures on a personal, social and systemic scale. Mancini suggests a struggle, a transition in which all of us every day, whether we like it or not will find ourselves up against difficult choices. "Expert design can contribute to reducing the struggle by supporting the process of constant co-designing that it entails… it works as a cultural operator, collaborating in the creation of the shared images and stories that underlie a new idea of well-being."[55]

Arturo Escobar's work on Autonomous Design assesses world-making through communal co-design. In 'Designs for the Pluriverse', he also proposes a shift in design's role in society, outlining that design is implicit

54 Novet, Jordan, 'Microsoft and OpenAI Have a New A.I. Tool That Will Give Coding Suggestions to Software Developers', CNBC, 2021 <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/06/29/microsoft-github-copilot-ai-offers-coding-suggestions.html> [accessed 18 July 2021]

55 Manzini, Ezio, Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation, Design Thinking, Design Theory (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015)

in the political, environmental and social crises of the modern world. Its main goal is "the realisation of the communal, understood as the creation of the conditions for the community's continued self-creation and successful coupling with their globalised environments."[56]

"Design can thus become an open invitation for us all to be mindful and effective weavers of the mesh of life", being "atuned to the earth and each other in a profound way, in a way that acknowledges everything exists because everything else exists."[57] In current social media models this way of thinking is restricted: we either do not see users outside our algorithm's bias, or we see opposing views as a source of conflict rather than an opportunity to learn.

Transition Design

Transition Design is a new area of research aimed at addressing the many 'wicked' problems confronting 21st Century societies. *(Fig 9)* In a 2019 lecture Terry Irwin, now Director of the Transition Design Institute at Carnegie Mellon University outlined Transition Design as a process of visioning and backcasting to propose a 'Transition Pathway'. This pathway instigates an iterative process, a feedback loop, that adjusts and improves design interventions (rather than solutions) as the projects develop over a long period. *(Fig 10)*

Irwin outlines a 'wicked' problem of primary concern, 'multiple stakeholders with contradicting agendas'. Of this she explains, "stakeholder conflict is often a result of conflicting world views, beliefs and assumptions that are both individual and collective in nature". Rather than focusing on contradictions within short-term problems,

56 Escobar, Arturo, Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds, New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)

57 The Monadnock, Arturo Escobar: Designs for the Pluriverse // Clark University Atwood Lecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ouy7aN6XPs> [accessed 8 August 2021]

long-term futuring enables stakeholders to become aware of shared goals and, through activity, develop an appreciation for complexity in the face of these contradictions. This forms a way of being that is driven by an understanding of the present infomed by a vision of the (distant) future.

This problem aligns with my observations on conversion and metacongnition in the previous chapter. Developing processes that activate a stakeholder's will to learn about other stakeholders who may have different experiences and agendas is a fundamental part of imagining new futures in a collaborative process.

Another fundamental part of Transition Design's approach is asking the design expert to step back and allow other stakeholders to emerge from the design process. To become humble in the knowledge that design is a ubiquitous human activity and if we are to successfully address the world's problems, should not be left colonised by a design elite. Irwin confirms, *"designers should work in service to comunities, helping build their capacity from within to surface the inate knowledge they have about how to solve their problems"* empowering stakeholders by supporting them with the resources, knowledge and tools to grow the capacity of the community to solve their own problems, leverage their wisdom and have productive civic conversations among each other.*58*

Masters of Invention

Design, then, is realigned as an enabler of a shift in self-awareness and self-reflection, which particularly applies in the context of digital public spaces. Design enables the user to access imagination and invention through research, proposal, feedback, and refinement to co-design new environments and realities. Expert and non-expert designers form new coalitions to imagine, design and actualise sustainable futures, instead

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58 Hanze Ontwerpfabriek, Lecture Terry Irwin on Transition Design @ Hanze Ont-werpfabriek, Groningen, Holland. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCT7yNbA-4VA&t=43s> [accessed 6 August 2021]

of being held at the borders of the cultural territories, platforms and identities we find ourselves inhabiting.

Returning to Berardi, he says "the designer is the interface between the inventor and the user but also the interface between technology and the economic exploitation of the products of the mind... The designer is the master of the invention."[59] If as Mancini says we are all designers, then we may assume everyone has the potential to become masters of invention.

59 Berardi, Franco and Verso, Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility (London; New York: Verso, 2019)

Based upon Rittel and Webber (1973)

Fig.9: Wicked Problems
Source: https://transitiondesignseminarcmu.net/resources/#1607715405738-
b0dc299c-0dd3

FOUR AREAS OF CO-EVOLVING KNOWLEDGE & SKILLSETS
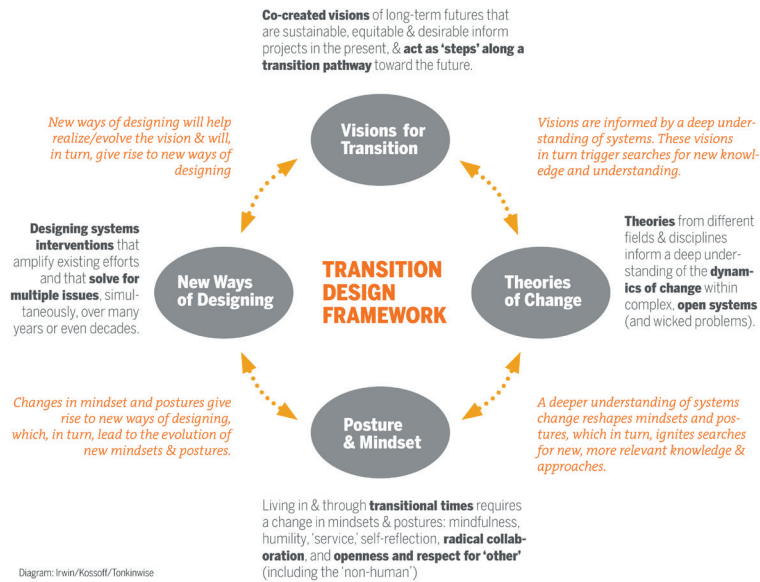
Fig.10: Transition Design framework
Source: https://transitiondesignseminarcmu.net/resources/#1607715405738-
b0dc299c-0dd3

5. RE: SETTINGS

For this dissertation, I wanted to investigate the relationship between digital social spaces and the subjugation of knowledge, and whether design processes could provoke public will to access knowledge, imagination and participation in imagining futures. Supposing the public became more aware of and acknowledged the asymmetry of power within the socio-technological systems they inhabit, would they have the will to take responsibility for these systems if circumstances permitted them to do so?

Re: Futures

My research revealed that social platforms significantly control knowledge building and for many is the only source from which to build a world view. Web 3.0 could reinvent how we access and build our knowledge but more than that it could be the catalyst that enables new digital public spaces to emerge and as a result provide new ways to understand and interact with each other. This could provide new settings for conversation and discourse that has been subjugated in favour of commercial agendas, and in turn perhaps revolutionise the political, economical, educational and social systems that are unfit for purpose in the 21st Century.

I have discovered that institutions such as governments, universities and now social media platforms are revealing an ineptitude, or indifference, towards converting existing infrastructures to sustainable, inclusive systems. With this lack of confidence in centralised institutions, is it at the individual level where new thinking, collaboration and connectivity can trigger alliances borne from an individual's needs and dreams. The individual can assimilate the properties of Web 3.0, Open, trustless and permissionless, which allows individuals to work together to support and encourage each others' life projects.

Re: Users

As BF Skinner suggested over 70 years ago, "what is needed is not a new political leader or or a new kind of government but further knowledge about human behaviour and new ways of applying that knowledge to the design of cultural practices."[60] And so design becomes the application of knowledge of human behaviour transfered to stakeholders in order to the build our future settings. In order to do this, design should become a catalyst for individual awareness and accessibility. Through transferral of design knowledge and processes, designers can navigate difficult conversations and conflicting agendas. This can unite local and neo-transnational communities and activate their innate contextual knowledge to inform sustainable design interventions.

The connection between Glitch Feminism and Autonomous Design are clear. In particular, the pluriversal nature of both the individual and the group and its uncomfortable setting within a 'one-world world'.[61] I realise that, although initially a response to provocations and observations from my own family's experiences and my own professional insights, I was investigating the subjugation of individuals within the infrastructures they inhabit. Any vision of what is possible is restricted to the system's edges, whether a political system, social media platform, educational institution, friend group, or our own families.

Re: Permissions

I titled this dissertation 'Re: Settings, Permissions to Imagine the Future' because I suspected that the infrastructures and tools for knowledge building and unity, particularly within the technological realm already existed. However permission to access these tools is denied either through lack of awareness or explicit exclusion. I have become aware of three permissions that are obstacles to the emancipation of knowledge

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60 Skinner, B. F., Walden Two, Repr. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ, 2008)
61 Law, John, 'What's Wrong with a One-World World', 2011, 14

within public digital spaces.

Political permissions: setting borders of governance
Platform permissions: setting borders of social relationships
Personal permissions: setting borders of the self

This echoes Ezio Mancini's proposed components of a design strategy to construct a future democracy in our hyperconnected world. Firstly, 'enabling systems' - make alternative opportunities available (as opposed to limiting opportunities), Secondly, 'favourable environments' - improving the space of possibilities (produce spaces where multiple solutions can happen) and lastly, 'skills empowerment' - *i*ncreasing peoples' design capabilities (enable knowledge in order to acknowledge a problem, frame a problem, listen and collaborate and make dreams viable solutions)[62]

It struck me that my own conclusions reflected a similar form, 'Political permissions' in as much as alternative futures that prioritise plurality and empathy for its members, 'Platform permissions' explores favourable environments for autonomy and agency for users and 'Personal permissions' investigates obstacles to self-empowerment and development of an individual's capabilities. Settings (infrastructures), settings (spaces) and settings (defaults), converge to produce a manifestation of our permissions. What we can and cannot access, what we can and cannot know.

To overcome these permissions in a digital public space, the process of Prospective, Impression, and Conversion could be harnessed to enable stakeholders to understand another's point of view rather that provoke a purchase. Behavioural change has been proven over short periods within the confines of Surveillance Capitalism, so why not use this tool as a component to induce understanding and knowledge? One could term

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62 cmudesign, Design the Future with Ezio Manzini <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-KL1zSpr2E> [accessed 3 August 2021]

this 'Surveillance Communalism', learning through mutual knowledge sharing and support, shifting the trajectory and aims of this technology to a more matriarchal agenda.

Using Transition Design's long-term futuring processes, we can imagine ourselves as a 'future ancestor'. Imagined versions of ourselves that reveal the shared goals we have with others and the shared action we might propose to actualise them. Using digital public space to access knowledge, understanding and empathy might conjour what form this 'future ancestor' will take, and allow us to leverage our singular experiences and attributes to design resources future generations can steward and maintain. [63]

Re: Imagines

Artificial intelligence algorithms may predict our online behaviours, but they can't imagine our futures. It could be possible for individuals to leverage Transition Design processes such as long-term imagining to highlight shared goals, releasing the will to learn about others and collaborate on new social infrastructures.

There is a dissonance between the Euro-American capitalist design machine as a regulator of life and the community (local) design conversation for a world made up of pluralities. Without permission to limit the former, our ability to access the latter continues to be dominated by neoliberal globalisation, as Escobar defines it, "a war against relational worlds, against everything collective."[64]
We increasingly rely on digital public spaces for our knowledge and interactions of the world and each other, it is the design of these kinds

63 'Why You Should Think about Being a Good Ancestor — and 3 Ways to Start Doing It', Ideas.Ted.Com, 2019 <https://ideas.ted.com/why-you-should-think-about-being-a-good-ancestor-and-3-ways-to-start-doing-it/> [accessed 8 August 2021]

64 The Monadnock, Arturo Escobar: Designs for the Pluriverse // Clark University Atwood Lecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ouy7aN6XPs> [accessed 8 August 2021]

of infrastructures that defines how we live our lives: we design the conditions of our existence.[65] Everyone must ensure these environments manifest the existence we and future generations can gain permission to imagine.

65 RISD Museum, Decolonizing Design, Imagining Alternative Futures <https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=9Sqm7h8UmEo> [accessed 8 August 2021]

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