Exploring interaction design for counter-narration and agonistic co-design

Four experiments to increase understanding of, and facilitate, an established practice of grassroots activism

Abstract

This is a documentation of a programmatic design approach, moving through different levels of an established practice of grassroots activism. The text frames an open-ended, exploratory methodology, as four stages of investigation, trying to find possible ways to shape and increase understanding of, and facilitate a process, of co-designing a practice. It presents the experience of looking for opportunities for counter-narration, as contribution to an activist cause, and questioning the role, purpose and approach of a designer in a grassroots activist environment.
1. Introduction 4
   1.1 Prelude 4
   1.2 Purpose 4

2. Theoretical framework 5
   2.1 An expanded notion of violence 5
      2.1.1 Systemic violence 5
      2.1.2 Symbolic violence 7
   2.2 Work criticism 8
   2.3 Agonistic spaces 10
   2.4 Ideas and innovations 10
      2.5 Design activism 11
         2.5.1 A contemporary participatory design practice as counter-narration 12
         2.5.2 Design for social innovation and social entrepreneurship 13
         2.5.3 Critical design and speculative design 14
         2.5.4 Artistic activism 14
         2.5.5 An emerging feminist HCI-methodology 15
   2.6 Innovation as political force 17
   2.7 Discussion 18
      2.7.1 Focus and purpose of counter-narratives 18
      2.7.2 Design as violence 20
      2.7.3 The designer and work criticism 21
      2.7.4 Dominant hegemonies and marginalized perspectives 21

3. Methodology 23
   3.1 The finite project 23
      3.1.1 Learning to serve a community 24
   3.2 Democratization through participatory design Things 24
   3.3 Quality versus participation 25
   3.4 Enforcing innovation 26
   3.5 Evaluating design activism 28
   3.6 Understanding non-humans 28
   3.7 Method discussion 30
      3.7.1 The infinite project 30
      3.7.2 Approaches to change 31
      3.7.3 Representing non-humans 31
      3.7.4 Summary of my approach 33

4. Context 34
   4.1 The organization 34
   4.2 The anti-speciesist film café 35
5. Experiments

5.1 Experiment: Interaction design as a non-profession

5.1.1 Defining “non-profession” as a counter-narrative

5.1.2 Approaching the animal rights organization

5.1.3 Reflections on “Interaction design as a non-profession”
   A constricting obsession with violence
   Intelligent naivety or symbolic death

5.1.4 Concluding remarks

5.2 Experiment: Interaction design as a trait

5.2.1 Organizing, arranging and questioning the film café

5.2.2 Goals

5.2.3 Evaluations and changes

5.2.4 Questioning

5.2.5 Reflection on “Interaction design as a trait”
   The economy of the film café
   The misalignment of my participatory approach
   Faulty presumptions
   Utopias and agonism

5.2.6 Concluding remarks

5.3 Experiment: What is the anti-speciesist film café?

5.3.1 Objects
   The suggestion box
   Anti-speciesist mixtape
   The Anti-speciesist jukebox

5.3.2 Reflections on “What is the anti-speciesist film café?”
   The film café as a Thing
   Objects as presenters

5.3.3 Concluding remarks

5.4 Experiment: Introduction of speculative design tactics

5.4.1 Movie night

5.4.2 Message board participation

5.4.3 Reflections on “Introduction of speculative design tactics”

5.4.4 Concluding remarks

6. Closure

7. Acknowledgements

8. References

Attachment I: Program definitions and descriptions

Attachment II: “Learning by doing”

Attachment III: Mapping of activities
1. Introduction

Designers have, for a long time, been able to ignore or be unaware of the inherent ideology of their designs, missing a political aspect of design that contains huge potential, for disruption, as well as reproduction, of an established order of things.

This thesis is the documentation of a series of investigations and attempts to contribute to an established practice, grounded in animal rights activism. It is the presentation of an open-ended exploration of a complex environment, with relations, fuzzy goals and purposes, entangled and intertwined. My approach is grounded in criticism, and the strive for change, even if the impact of my work turned out to be marginal, the experience of participating and analyzing the process has been rewarding.

1.1 Prelude

Work critic and sociologist Roland Paulsen (2012) sees the entire genre of disaster films as a collection of “feel-good”-stories. It is easier to give up, than keeping the faith that an alternative order is possible. It is easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of the current world situation. Crisis theory and talk about pending doom pacifies and puts us in an inactive, docile position of waiting and anticipating. These are the “dismallest of times”, where the gap between “what is”, and “what could have been”, is bigger than ever (Paulsen 2012).

But, are not disruption and change, in the very core of interaction design? Interaction is the flow of actions between agents, flows that are entangled and interdependent on each other. It is a perspective that does not satisfy with a chronological, binary view of simple actions and reactions. Each action is an interaction, and should be seen as a possible disruptive moment in a mess of relations. A thought model of actions and reactions are accepting a linear, reproducing state of existence. But every interaction is specific, unique, and bears potential for disruptive change, as well as affirmation and re-production of an existing order.

Design interactions!

1.2 Purpose

This work was started because I needed to personalize, and deepen, my relation to design. One goal was to search for a design practice that I could stand for. A design practice that I would have no problem to be held morally accountable for. When the final economic crisis comes, when chaos reigns, how does interaction design manage as a practice, outside the frames and structures of professions, financed projects, final designs, marketable products and services? How am I prepared for this?

Do not expect a final solution, or conclusion articulated in this text. Instead, I suggest that this is read and interpreted as a story, a narrative. The lessons learned, the reflections made, might not be relevant for everybody. I encourage readers to look for own patterns, meaning and make their own interpretation of my process as presented below.
2. Theoretical framework

This chapter will present some concepts I will use to think about, and frame, my work. It can be seen as covering three themes, followed by a discussion. The first two parts will take a glance at systemic criticism expressed as an expanded notion of violence, and criticism towards work as an over-arching ideology in our part of the world. The next two parts will deal with how to think about the world: the core of agonism, and the concept of ideas behaving like contagions.

Finishing this chapter, we will read about different practices of criticism, striving to impose change onto the world. Design as activism, and political aspect of technologic innovations, followed by a discussion on the topics.

2.1 An expanded notion of violence

“There is an old story about a worker suspected of stealing: every evening, as he leaves the factory, the wheelbarrow he rolls in front of him is carefully inspected. The guards can find nothing. It is always empty. Finally, the penny drops: what the worker is stealing are the wheelbarrows themselves…”

- Slavoj Žižek (2008, p. 1)

In Violence, Slavoj Žižek (2008) elaborates on different shapes and expressions of violence. A division is made between a subjective, direct violence, delivered by an identifiable agent, and an objective type of violence. A type where the violence is inherent in the state of normalcy.

The objective violence can be divided into two subcategories: systemic and symbolic. The systemic violence is the violence inherent in the way our world functions, as the economic and political system, the ruling ideology perceived as the state of normalcy. The symbolic violence is inherent in the way we speak and think about the world and our situation.

The three interact with each other, and are deeply entangled, but the more emergent nature and manifestation of subjective violence, e.g. terror, murder, humanitarian crises, tends to distract and draw attention away from analyzing the underlying symbolic and systemic violence. Another issue is that subjective and objective types of violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint. Subjective violence needs to be seen towards the background of an objective violence; a state of normalcy, a perceived non-violence, in which the subjective forms of violence are enacted. As Žižek writes: “Subjective violence is just the most visible of the three” (p. 11).

2.1.1 Systemic violence

“Today's academic leftist who criticizes capitalist cultural imperialism is in reality horrified at the idea that his field of study might break down”

- Žižek (2008, p. 165)

Žižek argues that the rise of capitalism is the cause of the emergence of an anonymized, systemic violence. This is understood on the Marxist pretense that the social conditions in the world, the social reality, affects the flow and speculation of capital, while at the same time, this flow and speculation sets the rules and conditions for that social reality. Production and re-production, irreducible to each other, transformed into an objective, anonymized, driven by whims of speculation, and perceived as a state of normalcy. Thus, in this perspective, the systemic violence is the kind of violence which “just happens”, with no identifiable agent to be held accountable.
Žižek exemplifies: The crimes of communism are easy to identify, there are even people to point out, say who did wrong. But with global capitalism and the wrongs performed by it, has no apparent evil agent. It “just happened”, as the result of an objective process.

The systemic violence is already difficult to perceive, but even more so if one would find oneself in the position of benefitting from the situation. Žižek (2008, pp. 9-10) uses a story from the expulsion of anti-communist intellectuals from Russia as a telling example. A bourgeoisie family perceives the increasing violence and threats directed towards them as incomprehensible. To them, leading their lives in peace, never directly harming anyone, the violence seemed to come from nowhere.

On this premise, Žižek (2008) criticizes social entrepreneurs, ironically labeled (by themselves) “liberal communists”, that are focusing on adjusting what Žižek sees as secondary effects, such as humanitarian catastrophes, treating the subjective, physical violence as the most urgent issues, while at the same time, unmindfully also supports the underlying systemic violence.

According to Žižek, “liberal communists”, claims it possible to combine global capitalism with anti-capitalistic values of “social responsibility and ecological concern” (p. 16). Which would eliminate the need for leftist struggle against capitalism, since the new realities involves “the dynamic and nomadic as against centralized bureaucracy; dialogue and cooperation against hierarchical authority; flexibility against routine; culture and knowledge against old industrial production; spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis against fixed hierarchy” (pp. 16-17).

For “liberal communists”, Žižek says, the main focus must lay on finding and solving concrete issues. They have an intrinsic aura of counter-culture and rebellion, they are hackers, punks, anti-establishment that dressed up in a suit and took over. He points out, transparency, sharing of knowledge, no copyright, focus on design, creativity, transdisciplinary collaborations, participatory, make things move, partner up with the state, change the world, as some of the key features of a “liberal communistic” practice.

But, one needs to make money, in order to spend money, on changing the world. What one donates for “charity”, first needs to be “created” - through ruthless finance speculation, or exploitation of workers, Žižek suggests.

Žižek argues that, towards the background of a state of normalcy, practices of charity, of good, are not perceived as colored by ideology, they appear as non-ideology - the opposite. But these practices and norms came from somewhere, they are merely ideology advanced, anonymized, normalized. A form which would be the purest shape and most effective expression of ideology. The same idea Žižek then applies on violence: “Social-symbolic violence at its purest appears as its opposite, as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air we breathe.” (p. 36)

Žižek’s rather harsh, and uncompromising, conclusion drawn from this, is that: “We should have no illusions: liberal communists are the enemy of every progressive struggle today. All other enemies - religious fundamentalists and terrorists, corrupted and inefficient state bureaucracies - are particular figures whose rise and fall depends on contingent local circumstances. Precisely because they want to re-solve all the secondary malfunctions of the global system, liberal communists are the direct embodiment of what is wrong with the system as such. This needs to be borne in mind in the midst of the various tactical alliances and compromises one has to make with liberal communists when fighting racism, sexism, and religious obscurantism“ (p. 37).
According to Žižek, the “liberal communist” is thus, in a way, disqualified from engaging in social innovation, or doing good, by means gained from global capitalism.

This disqualification is based upon the “liberal communist’s” position in and relation to the world. S/He owns corporations to infer change, a holder of enough power to be able to speak one’s mind. One who does not consider own advantages, because all of one’s needs are fulfilled, one who advocates change while making money of the practice of change. On whose initiative and on whose behalf are changes then to be enforced, Žižek asks.

2.1.2 Symbolic violence

In Žižek’s perspective, todays politics are politics based on fear. Fear of crime, immigrants, environmental disaster, economic crisis, harassment. Through this fear of harassment, our society of tolerance is elevated into its opposite. Our tolerance is transformed into our right to not be harassed. My tolerance of another’s intolerance of my proximity. My right to not be harassed, my “right to remain at a safe distance from others” (p. 41).

Žižek argues that, this distance is vital in the sense of distributing and ordering violence. Violent acts would be easier to execute through the push of an anonymous button, than directly pulling the trigger of a pistol. The distance does not however, necessarily have to be physical. While american media broadcasted thorough reports on the 9/11-attacks and the collapse of the twin towers, Al-Jazeera's reporting on US-bombings was condemned.

In arguing for or against purposeful violence, as torture, Žižek suggests that, what is actually discussed is the more or less abolishing of the Neighbor, “with all the Judeo-Christian-Freudian weight of this term, the proximity of the thing which, no matter how far away it is physically, is always by definition ‘too close’” (p. 45). What is in the works, is the reduction of a subject, the treating of suffering, as a quantifiable and comparable parameter. Žižek thinks that the act of, more or less, consciously ignoring the horrible consequences of our own ethics, called fetishist disavowal, may be at the core of every ethics.

Ethics of inclusion, for example Christianity, can be renounced by non-christened, who thereby is disqualified to be part of “humanity”, Žižek says. He suggests that this complicates the notion of universality and a subject’s possible perception and understanding of another subject. To be truly inclusive is impossible, since every notion of universality is a notion framed by ideological values, which gives tacit, or “secret” exclusions.

As one effect of globalization and the increasingly effective means of communications, Žižek proposes, the increasing risks of conflict. Communication makes the world “smaller”, hence brings others closer, which increases the risk of “being harassed”, it may intrude on my “right to remain at a safe distance from others” (p. 41).

Žižek sees the symbolic field of language, as a peaceful space for co-existence. Where we do not make use of direct and immediate violence, a space of mediation. But the process of distilling a thing into a symbol is in itself a kind of violent act. It reduces the richness of an object into a symbol, a word, expression, etc. A symbolic design is displacing the raw material from its environment, its connections to space and time, to infuse it in another context. As an example, Žižek points out that, racist violence, as well as the violence and riots in muslim countries, sparked by the Muhammad caricatures (published by Jyllands posten in 2005), are both reactions to the image of someone else, rather than an actual presence.
“The same principle applies to every political protest: when workers protest their exploitation, they do not protest a simple reality, but an experience of their real predicament made meaningful through language. Reality in itself, in its stupid existence, is never intolerable: it is language, its symbolization, which makes it such.”

-Žižek (p. 67)

Hence, Žižek proposes that, it is the image of a situation, or of another subject, that is what makes something intolerable. It is then, images that sparks protests and violence. The experience of the real is made meaningful through symbolization, through language, and hence, also made intolerable, according to Žižek. But at the same time we are setting up walls of language between ourselves and others. The unknown other, the infinite subject of another person, is neutralized by descriptions and labels. We build up a wall of symbolism, of language, to protect ourselves, to keep distance between each other. In the view of Žižek, language, or symbolic space, is the root of violence, but also what makes us capable of ignoring each other and our different worlds. This ignorance, or accepted violence, is violence that aims for a subject’s independence from others, while, if the goal of one’s desires would reach infinite proportions (for example which it might do in conflict between two sides, where no one backs down), it is evil. The way we treat others, and our presupposed image of another subject, affects how the other exists.

Language, then is, what separates my world from the world of another being, but also what opens up for understanding and co-existence, “the very obstacle that separates me from the Beyond is what creates its mirage” (p. 73).

Violence can be thought of, compared, and assessed by its holistic impact. From this perspective, actions that merely mean deciding not to do anything, can be considered to be more violent than sporadic acts of direct, physical violence. Žižek concludes that, in this sense, “doing nothing” might have a larger overall impact on a system which is only sustained by acts of charity or benevolence (Žižek 2008).

### 2.2 Work criticism

“They should hire anti-authoritarians and even indolent employees who hate everything about capitalism, including the very corporation that has hired them. These types of workers will create the most value because they are not simply telling management what it wants to hear, faking conformity and getting through yet another pointless day by doing the bare minimum. They also contribute things the corporation could not provide on its own accord: life. The fact that they are cynical and overtly against their own employer poses no problem. Because they’re not going anywhere.”

- Carl Cederström & Peter Fleming (2012, p. 23)

Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming (2012) consider work, as the generation of value from human resources, to be infiltrating and blending with our personal life. Office workers are encouraged to bring personal belongings to work, to “be yourself”. Capital is trying to bring life into work in order to generate value out of people’s social skills. And the other way around: To bring work into any times of the day. Like the academic writing a lecture on sunday evening, practicing writing, and talking. Work lets people decide when, and where to do work, it is more and more occupying all of our lives (Cederström & Fleming 2012).

Roland Paulsen (2010) argues that, the purpose of work during the 20th-century, has undergone a transformation. From being based on the production of sufficient goods to cover people’s needs, to
become a goal in itself. According to Paulsen, growth is now produced in order to create job opportunities, since employment is, currently, the only method for dividing resources among people. The result of this is that, in order to live, you must work, or pretend to do work, no matter what.

As a reaction, Paulsen (2012) poses a question of which professions that are actually useful, which are not especially useful, and which are flat out harmful? But the flip side of work is not only increased consumption of goods. Another, more uncanny consequence according to Cederström and Fleming, of the perceived obsession with work, is a feeling of alienation. A consequence which Paulsen (2012) described as a “collective existential angst”. In this perspective, work will turn into a more fundamental issue than, what can be seen as environmentally unsustainable growth and production.

The alienation, as explained by Paulsen (see also Cederström & Fleming 2012) goes beyond the analysis by Marx, which described workers alienation towards what is produced. Adoption of technology and increased automatization, decreases the need for skill and revokes the last sensorial involvement in production. To a growing degree, work will instead require employees to invest emotion (Paulsen 2010).

Emotional work, or services, are selling an experience of something, as well as the service itself. The returning example of this kind of profession is flight attendants, or tour leaders (Paulsen 2010, Cederström & Fleming 2012). Cederström and Fleming elaborates on this phenomenon and delivers an analysis that fits with Paulsen’s “collective existential angst”. Here, the emotional work causes an “inconvenience of being what you are not”, i.e. the alienation from ourselves, as objectified consultants. We are then unable to tell the difference from this alienated self, the what you are not, and our true selves.

“Following the injunction to be authentic - ‘who we truly are’ - we can no longer draw the line between what is fake and genuine about ourselves. It isn't just a fake and exteriorized mask that we sell as labor power, but the entire repertoire of our unscreened character /.../. This is where we can begin to discern the inconvenience of being yourself.”

- Cederström & Fleming (2012, p. 35)

But while we have become our work, work is not us. And while more and more jobs consists of empty tasks, not providing any value in themselves (Paulsen 2010), we have turned into, as dramatically expressed in the imagery of Cederström & Fleming (2012): “living dead”.

Cederström and Fleming continues their dystopian analysis and argues that, critique to this existential downward spiral are effectively absorbed by corporations, which have adopted the language of anti-capitalism. Claims to care about CSRs, fair trade, social issues, sustainability are articulated as a kind of “false critique”. Criticism that is not deep enough, that does not move the structures of capitalism, “plays a powerful ideological role for deepening our attachment to the dead world of work”. It sustains a belief in, and an image of “we tried” (Cederström & Fleming 2012).

The only escape and liberation, from the repetitious and dead process of work, as proposed by Cederström and Fleming, is a “symbolic suicide”. That is, to reject, stand apart from and forget our culture and lives. To take the role of perhaps a small child, not yet ruined, not yet instrumentalized by the demands of work and the impossible, never-ending search for authenticity (Cederström & Fleming 2012).
2.3 Agonistic spaces

“The fact that there was no programme behind the burning Paris suburbs is thus itself a fact to be interpreted. It tells us a great deal about our ideologico-political predicament. What kind of universe is it that we inhabit, which can celebrate itself as a society of choice, but in which the only option available to enforced democratic consensus is a blind acting out?”

- Žižek (2008, pp. 75-76).

Whether or not the above quote provides an accurate portrait of today’s western democracy may be a subject for further discussion, however, the concept of an enforced democratic consensus is also used by Chantal Mouffe (2007) as starting point for the notion of agonistic spaces. Mouffe argues that democracy should be thought of as a practice containing a series of unresolvable antagonsisms and contingent hegemonies. In her view, the world consists of values and perspectives that fundamentally differs from each other, complicated issues and conflicts “for which no rational solution could ever exist” (Mouffe 2007). That is, actual democratic consensus is impossible to reach, and what is treated as consensus in practice, values that are perceived as neutral or normal, always represses and marginalizes other perspectives.

Mouffe suggests that democracy is, and should be viewed as a constant, agonistic struggle between different perspectives, and that values that are treated as normal at a given point in time, always are the result of previous hegemonic practices. In this sense, no neutral or objective ground can exist, and dominant hegemonies can always be questioned, disarticulated and transformed. They can be described as contingent, since they only exist in our collective imagination, upheld by our anticipation of the future and how things work and “should” work.

The winner of an agonistic struggle is, as expressed by Bruno Latour (1986): “the one able to muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies”.

2.4 Ideas and innovations

“Maybe it is time to start to think about that the ‘entrepreneur spirit’ might be something that does not live within us - we have no inside - but moves trough us or via our connected senses.”

- Karl Palmås (2011, p. 88) (My translation)

Palmås (2011) (see also Palmås and Christoffer Kullenberg 2009) presents a philosophical approach to understanding innovation and entrepreneurship. Terminology and concepts borrowed from Gabriel Tarde are used to portray ideas as a virus or germs, spreading through us and our collective minds. The core of the idea is that ideas and practices can spread and mutate through imitations and repetition, from one brain to another. And in this sense, ideas, or rather thoughts, can be said to be contagious. Hence the proposed term “contagiontology” (or in swedish “smitto(-nto)logi”)(Palmås and Christoffer Kullenberg 2009).

Ideas, “memes” (Richard Dawkins 2006), or “thought contagions” (in swedish, the catchier expression “tankesmitta” is used) (Palmås and Christoffer Kullenberg 2009) can be seen as living things, trying to replicate and spread as efficient and wide as possible. The approach can be seen reflected in a hacker culture slogan: “No problem should be solved twice”, meaning when knowledge or ideas are gained, an invention is invented, they should be set free and shared. Let the invention do the work for you, let it spread and implement itself (Palmås 2011, p. 50).
A concrete challenge for the entrepreneur or innovator, Palmås says, is to prove that an idea “works”. When this is proven, others will imitate and the new practice will spread. In this perspective, Palmås divides innovators into two categories: People that are carriers of an idea, and people in possession of capital, investors. Both are of course of great value to the process of innovation, but seen through a holistic contagiontology-perspective, the coincidence of other factors are as important. Ideas must be present in a host brain, as well as be perceived as compatible by the host. This must happen in the right time, in the right place, and in some way it must be financed and successfully executed in a context where it “works” (Palmås 2011).

Palmås and Kullenberg argues that contagiontology can be, and is, used as a method for mapping, finding and understanding patterns in society. Companies want to tap in on the trends of tomorrow, ads are tailored according to our patterns. At one hand, the picture painted hints of a kind of cybernetic phenomenon, passivating and reducing humans to pawns under the contagiousness of ideas and trends. But at the other hand infections can be purposely spread, treated or even isolated. It is then up to humans to decide what viruses to spread and what viruses to try to stop. How, and by who, is that decision to be made (Palmås and Kullenberg 2009)?

### 2.5 Design activism

The broad term of design activism can be interpreted as a container for all of the following concepts and approaches in this chapter. It spans across different levels of design, with the common nominator of altruistic goals:

“design thinking, imagination and practice applied knowingly or unknowingly to create a counter-narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change” (Fuad-Luke 2009, p. 27)

Fuad-Luke uses the term “counter-narratives”, to describe a common quality of design as activism. He suggests it to be viewed as something opposed to main narratives, as deviations from public common assumptions, implicit or explicit, providing a glimpse of alternative scenarios.

The term “design activism” is then applicable to a variety of design concepts on different levels of a given scope, from approaches and ideology, to artifacts and end results. Ann Thorpe (2011) suggests the following criteria for defining design as activism:

- **Disrupt a normative re-production**
  In the case of design, any phase of the design process can be activism, and disruptive to a normative flow of events.

- **Frame an issue or injustice**
  A key question of framing an issue, is: who has the credentials to do so?

- **Make claims for change**
  When change occurs, there is a risk of the activist cause to become the next norm.

- **Work on behalf of a marginalized group**
  Thorpe argues that ecologies and systems can count as a “wronged group”, hence environmental issues would qualify as an object of design activism. However, the definition of a marginalized or wronged group is quite open for discussion.
Adding to this, Thorpe (2011) claims that design as activism has tendencies to be mostly generative, that is, to come up with alternative scenarios, instead of a more antagonistic, possibly radical, protest or straight out resistance. The reason might be that “as professionals, designers are in an exclusive group that has some interests in maintaining existing power relations; protest and resistance might jeopardize the meaning of the profession” (Thorpe, 2011). She points out that not only design activism but also many classical social movements called (or calls) for reform, rather than transformation.

I suggest that the following concepts and approaches should be viewed as counter-narratives.

2.5.1 A contemporary participatory design practice as counter-narration

“Participatory design started from the simple standpoint that those affected by a design should have a say in the design process. This was a political conviction not expecting consensus, but also controversies and conflicts around an emerging design object. Hence, participatory design sided with resource weak stakeholders (typically local trade unions), and developed project strategies for their effective and legitimate participation.”

- Pelle Ehn (2008)

Participatory approaches were in general, seen as a radical idea in the early days of participatory design. On the premise of democracy (Pelle Ehn 2008), they served as a counter-narrative, an alternative, to the mainstream design methodology, according to Fuad-Luke (2009, p. 42). The discipline of participatory design was a reaction to the threat technology posed to workers and their skills, as described in Erling Björgvinsson, Pelle Ehn & Per-Anders Hillgren (2010).

These days, Fuad-Luke says, participatory approaches to design, are adopted more broadly (for example as user-centric design), and rather serves the purpose of securing design goals and verifying users needs (Fuad-Luke 2009, p. 150). This adoption of the practice, can be considered an example of Thorpe’s observation, that what is perceived as activism at one point, is dependent on contemporary practices. Every activist cause might one day become the norm (Thorpe, 2011).

But, Björgvinsson et al. (2010) argue, the borders between work and private life are blurred, and the technology previously feared, is no longer perceived as the same threat. Therefore, in order for participatory design to evolve, Björgvinsson et al. (2010) bring the approach out of the, rather confined environment of the workplace, and into more public spaces and environments, where new complex challenges are discovered and needs attention.

Democratic implementation of the use of technology in public spaces, and in our lives, are complex issues. Open innovation and co-creation methods of today are often applied to develop and produce novelty products for the framework of the market economy. If aiming to democratize however, one needs to consider marginalized values and agendas, and how to support their right to exist and evolve. An artifact or an idea can open up a dominant hegemony for questioning, and cause or assist unexpected opportunities to emerge. This disruption cannot however be accurately measured in figures of popularity or sales, Björgvinsson et al. argue (2010).

This is why, according to Björgvinsson et al. (2010), participatory design must zoom out and shift focus towards public spaces and how innovations are introduced and developed. To democratize technological development or innovation in a community, it is not enough to make tools, information, and knowledge available, since far from everyone is capable (or motivated) of taking
advantage of the offer and actually use the resources that are made available (Björgvinsson et al. 2010).

Ehn (2008) states that, a challenge for participatory design is to design for, with and in established communities of practice, but an even greater challenge might be to design in contexts of communities that are not established. Where no consensus, or common object of design exists close at hand. The question is how to align perspectives and disagreements, turn antagonism into agonism and shape constructive participatory design opportunities (Ehn 2008).

2.5.2 Design for social innovation and social entrepreneurship

“They [‘social designers’] are inspired by the potential power of design, but despair of its current practices and philosophy.”

- Sophia Parker 2009

The field of design for social innovation (also known as for example transformation design or design for social impact) is said to have emerged as a reaction to unsustainable business models, and is concerned with economic, environmental and social sustainability (Emilson, 2010). Karl Palmås (2003) shows that it can be partly tracked back to 1980s Great Britain, where the concept of social entrepreneurship was developed and explored as a reaction to the profit-driven public services of public transportation and tele-communications.

As explained by Palmås, social entrepreneurship infers a re-prioritization among corporate goals, from profit to social benefits. Social goal-driven companies can be seen as a political middle way. The purpose is to sustain the benefits of companies free from centralized direction: that is flexibility of de-centralized services, ready to quickly adapt, evolve and serve locally (Palmås 2003), and, as expressed by Žižek (2008, p. 16), “endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility and ecological concern”.

In Social animals: Tomorrow’s designers in today’s world, Parker (2009) points towards difficulties for new generations of designers to adapt their learned skills to a changing world. Business models are seen as unsustainable and economic growth itself is questioned. In accordance to this, the focus of business and designers are changing. Factors like an increasing democratization of design tools, co-design-processes in grassroots or bottom-up organized environments, causes the role of a designer to shift. A designer can either design for, or with a community (Emilson 2010, p. 43). Epithets like facilitator, enabler or questioner have been proposed to describe this changing role (Emilson et al. 2011). But the new “material” of social relations, as suggested by Emilson (2010), also brings challenges and difficulties. Professional designers and non-professional designers in co-design processes, might find it harder to effectively communicate design.

“Public perception often drives decisions as much as reality, and so when designers fail to engage with these dynamics [politics around a topic] they risk their ideas being dismissed as unrealistic or impossible to implement.”

- Parker 2009

Parker argues for an “intelligent naivety”. To question practices and norms that are not longer perceived by the people working or living among them. An approach that might be understood as stupid or childish, because it questions what is perceived as a fundamental state of normalcy.
As shown by Emilson, there is a belief that design can benefit social innovation, and social entrepreneurship (Emilson, 2010 and Emilson et al. 2011). But the frameworks for practicing and teaching design seems to be perceived as outmoded.

### 2.5.3 Critical design and speculative design

In Design Noir (2001), Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby crudely sort design into two categories, affirmative design and critical design. Affirmative design is described as design that conforms and reinforce present structures and systems, with the intention to provide new products or services for consumption.

The opposing category on the other hand, critical design, is not directly aimed for any market. Dunne and Raby argues that critical design, effectively and affectingly, can point towards possible issues or tendencies in society. The main purpose here, is to question and critique underlying structures that other design conforms to, reinforces or even create.

In this perspective, the goal of critical design is to contribute to, or initiate a debate or discussion amongst designers, the result is therefore often rather conceptual, as opposed to a design intended for mass production, or actual use.

In this vein, the division of affirmative and critical design can be used to understand that design always is shaped by ideology.

In format, critical design draws on industry conventions like future scenario development. But where industry, or affirmative design, paints dreams, test markets, set out goals and focus on innovation - the critical approach plays on values "in an effort to push the limits of lived experience not the medium" (Dunne & Raby 2001, p. 58).

Since the term critical design was coined, the practice has drifted and blended with agendas outside of the design community. For example could the occurrence of “design activism” be interpreted as a evolvement of a critical design practice. Carl DiSalvo (2012) suggests to group these types of design practices under the label of speculative design. Furthermore DiSalvo argues, since every speculative design is always, somehow, grounded in the present, it can be used to analyze the society, cultural practices and politics, in our time and dimension. To scrutinize a speculative design, DiSalvo (2012) suggests to analyze its purpose as a spectacle or provocation, as well as the use of tropes to infuse values and deeper meaning into the speculation.

DiSalvo (2012) means that speculative designs often uses the notion of being a spectacle, but lacks deeper meaning. He argues that politics is an overseen factor, that would make it easier to relate a speculative design to the present, and by this, infuse deeper meaning to the piece, as well as offer a more meaningful starting point for discussions.

### 2.5.4 Artistic activism

“The objective should be to undermine the imaginary environment necessary for its (the program of total social mobilization of capitalism) reproduction.”

- Mouffe (2007)
Mouffe (2007) argues that understanding the notion of agonism (see above) could act beneficiary to critical art. It would help critical art to be acknowledged as a more solid social criticism, that is not as easily absorbed, neutralized, and capitalized upon by the system it tries to critique.

Mouffe proposes that social and political order is founded on a state of normalcy, things we take for granted, our anticipation of the future and how things work. In this setup, Mouffe argues that art can be the object around which, we collectively discuss, explore and think about other possibilities for our world. In this sense, it is possible for art to question the anticipation and assumptions, the contingent structures, on which we base the present social and political hegemony. Which could make visible the oppressive nature of current consensus, and hint about alternatives that are being repressed.

“Critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate”, Mouffe (2007) says, but points at the same time out that it is an issue for critical art of today, that critique against a capitalistic system, is absorbed, effectively neutralized and made into a part of capitalist productivity.

Mouffe calls for the rejection of the illusion of an avant-garde, the idea of a possibility to break with existing political practices, and come up with something entirely new. Instead, it cannot be avoided to include and build upon existing practices within the present hegemony. Mouffe argues that artistic activism needs to be understood in relation to what already exists. Taking present hegemonies to their extreme enables analysis of their oppressive nature (Mouffe 2007).

As successful examples of artistic activism, Mouffe (2007) mentions the activist group The Yes Men, and the project Nike Ground.

The Yes Men developed, refined, and are now spreading, their own tactics for artistic activism. The typical approach is to hijack a company name or government branch, to make press-releases, speeches and designs on their behalf. A tactic they call “identity correction”, meaning that the authorities targeted are being corrected. The yes men aim to say what they think authorities should say (The yes men 2010?, The Yes Men Fix The World 2009).

The elaborate hoaxes of The Yes Men includes presentations of speculative design concepts and prototypes. For example the scenario of turning bodies into matters of energy or fuel, or the risk assessment method to calculate profit to be made on the expense of human lives, a presentation that was held, accompanied by a large golden skeleton and the hand-out of golden skull key chains (The Yes Men Fix The World, 2009).

The Nike Ground project used a similar technique in order to question the use and ownership of public spaces. It was executed by speaking and acting in the name of multi-national shoe-and sportswear-corporation Nike, and consisted out of a website, a public installation and a performance. The message was that one of the main squares in Vienna, Karlsplatz, would change its name to Nikeplatz, and host a giant Nike-logo-monument (0100101110101101.org, 2003).

2.5.5 An emerging feminist HCI-methodology

Shaowen Bardzell (2010), proposes feminism to be a logical component in an evolving interaction design/HCI-methodology. When design becomes more complex and interwoven in our daily lives and social structures and relations it becomes entangled in complex social issues that designers must take into consideration. The focus of design shifts from being mere computer interactions to
highly delicate issues about people’s relations, for example to each other, or to space and place. Identity, empowerment, fulfillment, equity and social justice are examples of themes that Bardzell finds to be components of feminism, and which more or less comes naturally within interaction design. Therefore, Bardzell (2010) argues that, feminist theory could be used to enrich and widen the perspective on marginalization caused by design.

Shaowen Bardzell and Jeffrey Bardzell (2011) map different feminisms and suggest three common philosophical commitments. The first is the rejection of science as objective, or value-free. Standpoint theory draws upon this rejection, and stresses the fact that all knowledge and science is contextual and socially situated, even if framed and presented as objective truth. The second philosophical commitment is acknowledging every perspective as valid and equal. And the last commitment holds that feminism means to ensure that gender is under constant investigation.

According to Bardzell (2010), feminism can change HCI (and interaction design) in several different aspects. As theory, feminism could question existing core mechanics of HCI and design, opening up for future changes in practice. Regarding design methodology and user research, taking gender into consideration may broaden the perception of contexts, as well as the understanding of users. And lastly in evaluation of design, a feminist approach could make visible underlying assumptions and structures that genders users and their behaviors.

Katharina Bredies, Sandra Buchmüller and Gesche Joost (2008) attempts a practical, methodological approach in order to impose feminism in a process of designing mobile phones. The starting point of Bredies et al. (2008) is that designers, to a large extent, are responsible for the reproduction of stereotypical gender images. They argue that qualitative participatory design research methods are suitable for recognizing actual user goals, rather than reproducing stereotypical goals and images of users. Bredies et al. (2008) make use of a method including a cultural probe to evaluate its relevance to a gender sensitive design approach. Their subsequent evaluation of the work however, rather points towards the importance of being aware of your own standpoint as a designer and researcher, as they admit that the method of choice, in itself, reflected the implicit gendered prejudices of the researchers.

Sandra Buchmüller, Gesche Joost, Nina Bessing & Stephanie Stein (2011) achieves a design that (in theory) would resist gender inequalities inherent in peoples usage of information and communication technology. However, they seem to have done so, rather by designing against fieldwork findings and user suggestions, than according to such input. In the end, the qualitative user research needed to be filtered through the collective political agenda of the designers, and their interpretation of right and wrong. Subsequently Buchmüller et al. (2011) points to the conclusion that it is a question about the ideologic conviction of the designer (how) to make use of feminism in research and design. A line of thought that is also elaborated on, though on a theoretical level by Bardzell and Bardzell (2011), who point out that the increasing interest in socio-political matters within design, raises questions about objectivity and neutrality in design research. A solution they propose to this issue, is the development of a feminist HCI methodology. These are some of the key methodological positions for a feminist HCI methodology, as proposed by Bardzell and Bardzell (2011):

- “A simultaneous commitment to scientific and moral objectives”
- “A commitment to methodology”

Acknowledge assumptions, commitments, and goals when choosing methods
• “An empathic relationship with research participants focused on understanding their experiences”

• “Researcher/Practitioner self-disclosure”
  Disclosure of researchers position in the world as well as intellectual and political beliefs (to an appropriate extent)

• “Co-construction of the core research activities and goals”
  “As opportunities to nurture, rather than control, populations”

• “Reflexivity”
  Constant self-questioning on delivering on feminist ambitions

(Bardzell and Bardzell 2011)

2.6 Innovation as political force

“The modern economy builds upon the self-delusion in which we allow engineers, scientists and industrialists to shape the world, and at the same time say that politics is made somewhere else”.

- Palmås (2011, p. 44)

Palmås (2011, pp. 23-24) suggests that the border between nature and culture, market and politics is blurred. That structures we live by, technology and artifacts in our surroundings, are influenced and controlled by, reflect and re-create, current social and cultural values. While at the same time this culture and our social values are influenced by the same technology and artifacts. The notion that objects bear agency, turns them into quasi-objects, something in between pure subjects and objects, and this insight changes the fundamental premises of the modern democracy, Palmås argues.

Palmås (2011) describes the division between politics (culture) and economy (an objective force of nature), as supporting a division of power. Workers for a company is considered and expected to be apolitical, he argues, then if engineers and business leaders would officially act with a political agenda, it would seem like they “take a shortcut” to political change (Palmås 2011, p. 28).

As a consequence of this perspective, Palmås proposes that being an entrepreneur promotes a person from, just “believing” something, into being an “expert” (Palmås 2011, p. 40). If one can prove something to “work” through entrepreneurship, it becomes treated as objective truth. Palmås argues that entrepreneurship is seen like tapping in to nature, trying out the framework of economy, letting it talk through one’s entrepreneurial actions. Even if it can be difficult to determine whether political incentives is subordinate to businesses, or the other way around, for example regarding fair trade. Palmås (2011) insists that innovations and designs must be framed as natural, inevitable progress.

In the case of one being too disruptive in the “construction of quasi-objects - there is a risk that one’s initiative is disqualified” (Palmås 2011, p. 33). As an example of this claim, Palmås (2011, pp. 32-33) uses the court case against file-sharing site The pirate bay. Issues seem to arise when the court case deals with, on the one hand, the definition of a “file”, a thing, something that in other scenarios would be an innocent object, according to Palmås, and on the other hand the business-like shape of, and the entrepreneurial approach to, the website called The pirate bay. Palmås means that
this shows that one is allowed to be politically engaged on one’s spare time, but in working life, one must act objective, and be neutral (Palmås 2011).

In Palmås’ view, the self-delusive, but functional, division between nature and culture in modern society, served the purpose to protect us from abuse of power. Now when the border is blurred, what used to protect us, is rendered useless, and Palmås suggests that we therefore need to think about how to handle the political impact of quasi-objects. And in the light of political technology, we also might need to rethink what it means to be politically active (Palmås 2011).

2.7 Discussion

As an attempt to understand different levels of activism, I will now try to look closer on the focus and purpose of each of the mentioned concepts of design activism described above. Then I will present my crude interpretation of their relation to each other in a two dimensional scale. The result will be considered in the light of violence, work criticism, agonism, and with regards to how ideas and innovation spread.

2.7.1 Focus and purpose of counter-narratives

Let us begin with the proposed feminist methodology for HCI, and the participatory design approach to innovation. For now, we will base our analysis on the two examples already brought up. Their purpose then, seems to be to explore (and possibly prove) an alternative methodology. The focus here, seems to be to, by design research, developing and improving the design practice itself. Fuad-Luke (2009) has called this “navel gazing” design activism. It is true however, that part of the concern here, actually is to “democratize innovation” or creating a gender-sensitive gadget or piece of technology. But with the more transcendental aim to change a structure, rather than to create one democratic innovation, or one gender-sensitive mobile phone. The practice is perceived as activism, thus compared to the rest of the established design methodology.

Hence, this scale (fig. 1) presumably keeps “the own practice in focus” (“introvert focus”) in the far of one end. In the other end I will suggest to put the activity of attempting to directly manipulate, and interact with, the issue of concern (“extrovert focus”). In the y-axis of the scale, I will therefore put the labels of “introvert” contra “extrovert”. The x-axis will be labeled after the purpose of a practice, which could be to either question or prove an existing assumption “false” or “wrong”, or to prove a new one true (fig. 1).

Looking for the next item on this scale, I propose critical design and speculative design. Critical design once emerged for assisting designers to discuss among themselves. Hence, critical design used to be closer to navel-gazing, but can as well be included in the generalizing term “speculative design”. Still though, the term puts certain emphasize on the practice of designing, thus keeping some of the introversion. The purpose of speculative designs rather seems to be to question an existing assumption, than to prove something new working. An influence from critical design then, would be to keep designs conceptual.
Moving on, we will find artistic activism, near the bottom-left corner (fig. 1). Emphasis is now on the performed activism. Artistic activism is performed in public spaces, or as a public spectacle, with the intention to provoke and engage people in a discussion. It is not as conceptual as critical design, but not intended for large scale application as a substantial alternative. The idea here, is instead to show that alternatives to a common assumption exists, or could be developed. I see it as an attempt of disarticulating the present dominant hegemony.

Design for social innovation, or a more general social entrepreneurship, includes practices for doing good by entrepreneurial methods. Practitioners are dealing directly with the issue of concern, and are doing so within a framework of entrepreneurship. It is thus about accepting the rules provided, and trying to change within this accepted space. There are only concrete problems to be solved, as Žižek described the approach.

The slightly more direct way of engaging with an issue of concern would be to simply ignore the capitalist framework of entrepreneurship, and act on deeper political incentives. Invent or innovate in order to change the world according to one’s preferences and conviction.
2.7.2 Design as violence

An exploratory approach inherent in my work, is that, working with design, means working with a kind of violence. In other words: design is suppressive. The notion of violence can be applied in different ways, and I will suggest two cases below. The main idea that we will bring with us however, is to reflect on design as a type of violence.

The first case builds on the premise that a design itself is a symbol; the compression and interpretation, the translation of something more complex, into an artifact, a system, a logo, etc. Designers then, are creators and upholders of a symbolic violence. And as an objective type of violence this can (and will) result in a direct manifestation. On the same line, let us interpret the notion of a subjective violence, to pass for any kind of physical enactment or even presence, despite if harmful to humans or not. Any physical activity, or inactivity, caused by a design, can be considered a coercion, a force to act, not act, or behave in certain ways. Subjective violence is thus, the use of any design. The interaction caused by a design, is an act of subjective violence, and therefore the interaction designer is a designer of physical violence. While the scale of this violence, might in most cases be microscopic, compared to a humanitarian crises.

Also consider what is pointed out by Žižek, that the symbols used in a design, is what opens for the possibility of understanding between a human and a design. But it is at the same time a barrier that hinders total understanding of, for example what a design can do and cannot do. An example would be the understanding of an e-mail as something like a digital letter. A comparison that does not reflect what happens within the realm of e-mails.

The second case of looking at design as a type of violence would be to consider a service, as an online social network, or other service for communication. This system could be part of a systemic violence, consequences that are perceived to “just happen”. Consider that all my friends assume that I will constantly be available, through my mobile phone, my social network accounts, or both. Their adoption of these channels of communication, and their anticipation of my use, might force me to actually become constantly available. A habit of checking my email, social networks, and keeping my mobile phone close at all times emerges, as from nowhere.

Participatory design practice is, what I would like to think of as an optimist take on this expanded notion of violence. The ambition to democratize through participation, is the acceptance that violence is an inevitable part of design. The matter of concern here, is rather who would be given the privilege to exercise and shape the violence, and towards whom?

A feminist approach to HCI, as described by Bardzell and Bardzell, delivers a similar, agonistic view on design. Transparency will support understanding of an approach, and guide people into making the “right” decisions for themselves. The perspective of Buchmüller et al. (2011) on the other hand, is that some authoritarian decision needs to be made in order to instill a feminist, gender-sensitive, approach to design.

The use of design in cases of participatory design, artistic activism, and types of speculative design, is to question a present, dominant hegemony, or common assumption. It is the conscious use of symbolic violence to provoke a reaction, a discussion and possibly change. As another speaking example of this use, I would like to mention a campaign performed in the suburbs of Stockholm in 2012.

In order to show an alternative view of the segmentation in the city, where poorer areas are frequently pointed out as problems, activist network Allt åt alla, organized a guided bus tour to one
of the richest suburbs of Stockholm. Participants were given lectures on the history of the area and statistics about the people living there. The catchphrase of the spectacle was “class hatred” (my translation), and the name of the campaign was “Upper class safari” (my translation). The language surrounding the tour was the subject of innumerous discussions and debates, and the whole spectacle caused massive attention in national media (Allt åt alla 2012).

Regarding social entrepreneurship, I find the critique delivered by Žižek, towards “liberal communists”, valid in both macro and micro perspectives, it poses a problem to only focus on “secondary malfunctions” (Žižek 2008, p. 37). Despite this harsh critique, I am not ready to reject this approach to design and change entirely. But to dig deeper into the reasons for this stance, we need to look to the criticism of work.

2.7.3 The designer and work criticism

In relation to Cederström and Fleming’s expression, “living death”, one can pose the question if the changing role of the designer, is “killing” the designer? By taking the role as facilitators (or negotiators, or questioners etc), the designer is distanced from the product, the manifestation of the design. In this argument: is it possible that the “interaction designer”, a designer of intangible interactions, is an “empty work”? Mainly needed in order to not produce anything. A profession existing only because there is no alternative to work for dividing resources in a community. The question posed by Roland Paulsen (2012) is constantly pressing: Which professions are actually useful, which are not especially useful, and which are flat out harmful?

So how do we abolish the profession we do not actually need? The most obvious answer would be to find alternative ways to make a living, not as dependent on a paycheck. And this is of course where social entrepreneurship and innovation enters the picture. The issue that social innovation and entrepreneurship should focus on, is the abolishment of work.

2.7.4 Dominant hegemonies and marginalized perspectives

Consensus, common assumptions and anticipation, repress marginalized perspectives (Mouffe 2007). The potential that hides in these repressed views and people, are invisible to the privileged of a dominant hegemony (Žižek 2008). Therefore it makes sense to “use” those marginalized, in order to surface new innovations. The idea of innovation as something that needs to be found in a situation, a combination of ideas, a contagion, speaks in favor of the “new” designer role. Designers, negotiators, facilitators lure, or extract, ideas out of people, potential innovations that are invisible to them on their own. Disruptive concepts that can only be produced by people marginalized by the current dominant hegemony. Game designer and philosopher Ian Bogost articulates what might feel like a striking critique: "Reminder: When startups raise money to ‘democratize’ something, they're really ‘commercializing’ it." (Bogost 2012).

But what does this mean? The essence might be found in the analysis from Žižek: on whose behalf will change be enforced, when it is initiated by someone that is not, in actual need of it? And adding to this, someone who might even make a living out of the change itself.

To get rid of the immediate feeling of hypocrisy, the solution would then be, not only to share power with those marginalized from it, but to entirely surrender all power, in order to enable the pure perspective of another to fully bloom. In the light of agonism, will this not only interchange the dominant hegemony, repressing someone else? The middle way ought to be that the ones in
power, at a given point in time, are prepared to voluntarily surrender power and submit, when requested (in order to get the “favor” returned at a later point).
3. Methodology

“When designers themselves intentionally use design to address an activist issue or cause, whether working alone or within a not-for-profit design agency specifically set up with altruistic objectives, it can be considered as ‘design-led activism’.”


This chapter will describe some of the key concepts and methods of instilling change, which have been used as reference points in my work.

The overall approach has been an open-ended, exploratory process, based on a program and experiments, influenced by what is described by Johan Redström (2011). In Redström’s view, a program frames an issue somewhat different than a hypothesis. One argument for using this approach, rather than a traditional research question (which in this case could be something like: “How do we design for this grassroots movement?”), is that a programmatic approach might allow one to frame, view and do things differently. It is necessary to take factors into account like how we approach a design problem/space, and the implications this has for the outcome, and the lessons learned. According to Redström (2011), the difference between a traditional, project-based and a programmatic approach, is “similar to how ‘Let’s try this instead!’” differs from ‘How can we change this?’”.

The idea here is that, how a program is expressed or phrased, opens up for a specific design space, which might otherwise not be visible, or viewed through a particular perspective. Within this space, or within a current framing, experiments can be performed, to generate knowledge and experience about the context, that is the program. In Redström’s (2011) analysis, experiments will start influencing each other as well as the program itself, which will start to drift from its original position.

As pointed out by Redström: a “risk”, and highly possible outcome, of research based on a design programmatic approach, is that the researcher ends up with even more questions than initially articulated. For a presentation of my articulated program and its drift, see Attachment I.

3.1 The finite project

Jon Kolko (2011), similar to Parker (2009), argues that design practices needs to be transformed, in order to adapt to the problems that designers of today are facing. The genuine engagement in a cause, is necessary for longer relationships, and longer relationships are necessary for social impact. Kolko suggests that in order to transform a design practice, design education must go through, at least one fundamental change. Today, design education is organized in “finite projects”, a setup that has several beneficial qualities for the education system of today. Projects with a final product are easy to quantify, to measure in, for example: Grading, deadlines, and learning outcomes. Kolko however, sees two main disadvantages of the format of finite projects.

1. “The finiteness of the studio project can force us to abdicate responsibility to those being served.” (Kolko 2011)

That is, if a solution is not fully reached within the project, the designer leaves “those being served” to deal with the situation on their own. Kolko means that design for social innovation requires genuine passion about an issue, and that innovation is not always achieved by time-delimited contracts.
2. “[P]roject-based learning reinforces the artificial idea that meaningful impact can occur in a tremendously short time-frame” (Kolko 2011)

As described in Björgvinsson et al. (2010), managing, or infrastructuring, a collaborative process aiming for social innovation, is an ongoing task, which cannot be planned beforehand. Furthermore, the finite project, Kolkos says, “continues to drive a ‘design for’ attitude, where a designer conflates their expertise in design with expertise in a particular social problem and assumes that they know best” (Kolko, 2011).

3.1.1 Learning to serve a community

“In communities-of-practice there is a strong focus on ‘learning’ as the act of becoming a legitimate participant, establishing relations to other ‘older’ participants and learning to master tools and other material devices.”

- Ehn 2008

In his book Educating the reflective practitioner (1987), Donald Schön argues that all practices contains elements of artistry, and in this sense everyone is a designer. The act of designing, then is described as a tacit knowledge achieved by training. According to Schön (1987), this design skill is learned and taught in a master apprentice relation. An apprentice cannot fully grasp the meaning of design techniques until one fully masters them. This while a master is incapable of communicating the importance and appliance of the practice being taught to the apprentice. This creates a teaching/learning paradox that can only be broken by the apprentice surrendering power and blindly follows the master. Which means that the master must convince the apprentice of doing so, without being able to explain why.

3.2 Democratization through participatory design Things

"[T]he origination of participatory design as a design approach is not primarily designers engaging in use, but peoples (as collectives) engaging designers in their practice."

- A.Telier (p. 162)

Ehn (2008) points towards an increased attention to the dynamics of an object of design, during design time as well as during use. A shift which leads to changes in how we speak and think about design processes and their results. The modification, repurposing and adaptation of a design, lasts even long after a design is dispatched into the world, Ehn says, and uses the relation between “web 2.0” and design as a speaking example. In the context of digital materials and online presence, design is characterized by mass-participation. Platforms for internet based, more or less social communities as Facebook, Youtube, Flickr and Wikipedia can be brought up as successful examples of how ideas and material are freely made available and how design is performed by “non-professionals”. With this in mind, Ehn argues, the objective of the professional designer is, to a larger extent, to design for design-after-design, rather than design before use (Ehn 2008). In order to be better prepared for the task of designing ever evolving objects, our language might need an update.

Commonly, the word “thing” has been understood to refer to an artifact, a physical object. Björgvinsson et al. (2010, 2012) however, suggests that a Thing can (also) be viewed as an
assembly of people and things, “humans and non-humans”, who gathers around a “matter of concern”.

This notion of Things, or “thinging”, can be used as an alternative reference to the traditional concept of projects (Björgvinsson et al. 2010). A shift of reference that supposedly allows for a more open approach to conflicts, and unexpected use and behaviors, to explore the marginalized values of innovation.

“Project work involves a strong focus on ‘representations’ as constituents of the object of design. Traditionally they are thought of as gradually more refined ‘descriptions’ of the object to be designed. In our understanding of design things and design games, the focus should instead be on these devices as on the one hand material constituents of the evolving object of design, and, at the same time, public things, supporting communication or participation across design games in the design process.”

- A. Telier (2011, p. 168)

The view described in the quote from A.Telier, are parsed into the compelling expression “presenters”, in Björgvinsson et al. (2012).

Another reference of importance for Björgvinsson et al. (2010), is infrastructuring. A process they propose should be thought of as a constantly ongoing, and intertwined process, of entangling and adjusting the environment of a Thing, rather than a preparation, or system, separate to the design project. In practice this could mean:

“facilitating the building of arenas consisting of heterogeneous participants, legitimizing those marginalized, maintaining network constellations, and leaving behind repertoires of how to organize socio-materially when conducting innovative transformations.”

- Björgvinsson et al. (2010)

Björgvinsson et al. (2010) suggests that a “successful” agonistic design thing is achieved by "open-ended explorations of continuous articulations" of matters of concern.

The concepts of infrastructuring and Thinging, contribute to the disintegration of the image of design as something that should reach a final solution. A language which questions the idea of a design process that only lives within a time limited project.

3.3 Quality versus participation

“For /.../ supporters of socially engaged art, the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanizes —or at least de-alienates—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism. But the urgency of this political task has led to a situation in which such collaborative practices are automatically perceived to be equally important artistic gestures of resistance: There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond.”

- Claire Bishop (2006)

Bishop (2006) sees an increase of participatory, or collaborative, art. An approach to artistry that, according to Bishop, tends to put emphasis on process, rather than end results or aesthetics. An approach that might remind more of the form of a discussion, than a debate, “exchange not change”
as it is said described by the turkish art collective Oda Projesi (Bishop 2006). This seems also to be the mindset in design, were things are setup to explore dilemmas and different perspectives. Agonism instead of antagonism.

Bishop means that art criticism focuses on examining the methodology used to realize the work, the amount of authority, and over who it is exercised, instead of the “end result”, and what that might tell us. Bishop claims that “emphasis is shifted away from the disruptive specificity of a given work and onto a generalized set of moral precepts” (2006), but “good intentions shouldn’t render art immune to critical analysis”. Bishop argues that art needs to be criticized on aesthetics, what it can tell us about ourselves, regardless of what methods were utilized in the process, whether ethical, including, well-intended or not. In the perspective of Bishop, a fair process should not be a purpose of its own. That is, for art to be able to say something valuable, it sometimes might need to be authoritarian or unethical, otherwise we might simply miss out on seeing things, and learning things about our world (Bishop 2006).

3.4 Enforcing innovation

Peter Denning (2012) argues that, for an idea to become an innovation, the inventor needs to do a lot more than just coming up with the idea. Denning suggests some crucial phases that should be included: Sense a disharmony, investigate until able to articulate, discover how a current “common sense” generates the disharmony, propose a new common sense and, maybe the most important part: commit to a path of action. This way Denning separates innovators from inventors, and innovations from mere ideas.

The difficulty here, is not to generate ideas, but to get a community to adopt a practice. Therefore, Denning argues that resources should be put to develop and adopt practices, rather than ideation. He states that:

“Many innovations clearly start as practices. Someone starts doing something differently, often as an improvisation. When the new way is superior to the old, other imitate it; the practice spreads. After a while, someone builds tools to facilitate the practice and enable even more people to engage with it. People in the community experience this as responding to a need or an opportunity to make things better for others.”

- Denning (2012)

Denning (2007) divides innovations into two categories, sustaining and disruptive. He suggests that a sustaining innovation should be seen as technical progress, an extension and continuation of what already exists. A disruptive innovation on the other hand, questions a paradigm, challenges assumptions. It is most likely not anything new in terms of technical progress, but rather a new perspective on something that already exists. It is a novel way to perceive, and use, existing technologies, which transforms a practice and creates another paradigm.

Denning (2007) focuses on innovation as a solution, or something that provokes, or provides, for a change of behavior or practice. He suggests that innovators benefit from seeking opportunities for innovation in “messes”. Complex situations where no explicit problem(s) can be articulated. These messes can, according to Denning, be identified and sorted into categories (Fig. 2), with an escalating difficulty-setting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Solution knowledge exists in your own domain.</td>
<td>Redirect attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Solution knowledge exists in another domain.</td>
<td>Find an expert. Become an expert and design own solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>No solution exists in any domain; system is very complex but responds the same way to repeated stimuli.</td>
<td>Explore for recurrent patterns by probes and experiments, design resolution around patterns discovered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>No solution exists in any domain; system is chaotic and adaptive, does not repeat patterns under the same probes.</td>
<td>Try to organize the local parts of system, then to spread the new organization to the larger system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 2 - Denning (2007)

For Denning (2007), the problem for a prospecting innovator is though that it is impossible to recognize what kind of mess one is dealing with at a given time, and it is only afterwards it is possible to gain insight about the mess. The list in fig. 3 presents a list of the most common signs of a “mess”, as suggested by Denning.

![Signs that you are in a mess](image)

Fig 3 - Denning (2007)

In order to handle, and create order in, a mess, Denning (2007) proposes some “basic strategies”:

**Declare** - The mess is based upon assumptions, therefore a declaration is needed to engage people who are willing to participate in exploring solutions, or change.

**Learn about it** - Find an expert or become one, patterns will reveal themselves to you. If you find yourself in a “category 3 or 4” mess (Fig. 2) you need to assemble a team to help you.

**Question the paradigm** - Find underlying assumptions that might be questionable. Anomalies are caused by limitations in a current paradigm.

**Think together** - You need to look “outside” the paradigm. Interdisciplinary collaboration increases chances of finding a solution.
Lead - Someone must lead the change.

Disguise - To avoid protests against the change you are enforcing: disguise disruptive qualities of your solution.

To summarize the approach described above: the challenge in innovating, is not to come up with the perfect idea, but rather to master techniques to identify opportunities, and to be able to control innovation.

3.5 Evaluating design activism

Fuad-Luke (2009, pp. 81-83) proposes a framework for evaluating design activism. By estimating or evaluating the fulfillments of a set of goals, the “success” of the activities could be comprehended. The goals boils down to the object of design activism’s achievement of reaching the different target groups for message and for transformation, and whether the goals of the activities were met, and how effective they were.

Björgvinsson et al. (2010) suggest that innovation, as the transformation of a practice, are commonly measured and judged by technocratic, market driven values, such as sales and popularity. Instead, they propose to shift focus to the disruptive qualities of an innovation, its capability to question public common assumptions. A more abstract scale for this is, proposed by Andrew Barry (2001). He suggests to estimate whether an idea, or artifact, opens up a space for discussion or change, or if it on the contrary, narrows down possibilities and opportunities. He writes:

“**Political and anti-political:** An index of the degree to which a problem or object is open to contestation and dissensus. In this sense scientific arguments can be political in the sense that they open up a space for dissensus. Conversely political projects and ideologies can be anti-political to the extent that their ambition is to close down the space of contestation.”

“**Invention and anti-invention:** An index of the degree to which a technological or political change opens up the space of possibility. Technical change may be anti-inventive in its implications to the extent that it displaces or blocks off other possibilities.”

- Barry (2001)

3.6 Understanding non-humans

In a paper, Michel Callon (1986) proposes some outlines to an approach for studying actors and relations involved a controversy. As an attempt to avoid difficulties involving biases towards the own field, and the irreducibility of actors (regardless if human or non-human), Callon suggests three methodological principles.

- **Agnosticism** - Do not censor the identity, the views, of any actor. All perspectives on anything, are equally important.

- **Generalized symmetry** - Use a single translation vocabulary for issues of both Society and Nature. Because controversies are a mixture of both worlds. A narrative is thus rendered as valid as any other.
- Free association - The idea of a division between Nature and Society is the result of an analysis, and must be rejected. As an observer, one must pay attention to all elements present for an actor.

On these principles, Callon gives a report of the events and actors involved in an attempt to preserve, and domesticate, the declining scallop population of St Brieuc Bay, in North-western France. Actors in the story, includes three researchers, trying to form alliances with research colleagues, fishermen of the bay, and the scallops of the bay.

The framing of the scallop-situation and it’s stakeholders, sets the scene for a series of evaluations of the “solidity” of the researchers problematization. A process during which the different “entities” (or actors) can accept the researcher’s plan, or “refuse the transaction by defining its identity, its goals, projects, orientations, motivations, or interests in another manner”. Identities “are formed and are adjusted only during action” (Callon 1986).

In order to create alliances, and be able to carry out their intended research, the three researchers negotiate with spokespersons from each entity. The few scallops that were captured, represent all the assumed scallops in the bay. The few official representatives of the fishermen, represent all the fishermen in St. Brieuc. The few research colleagues that were present at conferences and read papers on the topic, represent the research community.

“To translate is to displace”, but it is also to interpret – to say in own words what others mean, want and relate to others, it is to be a spokesperson for others. Which means, a translation will both displace and transform.

The researchers manage to be able to speak for all of the involved actors, but in order to speak on behalf of others, those others need to be silenced. The act of representing, both human and non-human entities, are therefore in need of “continuous adjustments and devices of interessement that are infinitely more sophisticated” (Callon 1986). If one becomes a successful spokesperson; if one is successful in establishing and maintaining relationships with other actors: those one tries to speak for, will join in, and “only voices speaking in unison will be heard” (Callon 1986).

The “interessement”, is here what the three researchers do in order to lure another entity into an alliance, and stabilize that alliance. It is devices that presents, the researchers image of the other entity. Devices which “extend and materialize the hypothesis made by the researchers” (Callon 1986).

The researchers case with the scallops and fishermen of St Brieuc Bay, collapses with acts of betrayal. The scallops rejects to be part of the research, by not anchoring to the devices sent out to capture, protect, and domesticate them. The fishermen betray their representatives, by continuing their hunt for the scallops, despite the researchers request not to.

From the study, Callon concludes that the three methodological principles of agnosticism, generalized symmetry and free association, shows that: the setup for an “experiment”, the alliances that are established, are a result of a hypothesis, rather than a starting point. That, both human and non-human actors (or “entities”) are of equal importance to understanding the process. And that, relationships play out over time, and some of them can only emerge in hindsight.

In “The companion species manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness” (2003), Donna Haraway argues for a similar understanding of non-humans, and their influence, and importance, in regard to history and humans. Her notion of “companion species”, involves the understanding of the
blur of the nature-culture divide, that “biological and cultural determinism are both instances of misplaced concreteness” (p. 6). Similar to Callon (1986), Haraway argues that the nature-culture divide is the result of an analysis, it is not a preexisting foundation. “There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends” (p. 6), she states, and means that the number of configurations, varieties, and kinds of relations possible in the world, should be perceived as, close to endless. The category of “companion species”, includes all those, actors or entities, animate or inanimate, who “make life for humans what it is—and vice versa” (p. 15).

Blurring the nature-culture divide, Haraway suggests significant otherness to be applicable to these other species as well. Where her notion of significant otherness is signified by “emergent practices” which “cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures” (p. 7).

Haraway uses dogs and the sport agility as examples of how these concepts can be explored and grasped. How the concept of “animal rights”, could be far from the “relief of suffering as core of the human obligation to animals” (p. 54), but to include seeing and treating a companion (animal) as a significant other. A partner, in a co-constituted relationship, whose history and presence, have influence over one’s current life. Training for the sport, a human and a dog, finds value in the activity together, as an emergent practice, which affects the lives of them both. The history of breeding, which have effects on the lives of dogs, and human perception and image of them.

3.7 Method discussion

Before looking into the ideas described above, here are some words on my decisions regarding documentation and method of investigation. My approach has been rather ethnographic in a sense. I went to people to observe, analyze and learn. The organization I have been involved in during this work, has been, on different occasions, more or less sensitive to exposure to outsiders. This is due to activities in legal grey zones, or possible intrusive antagonists. In order to not get on the wrong foot with anyone, I have consciously chosen a rather passive style of documentation, putting emphasis on my participation, rather than their participation. I would like to think of it as, out of respect, but it might as well be grounded in an anxiety about “breaking” something. The economy, of any resources, were relatively fragile, since everything was based on volunteering.

3.7.1 The infinite project

For Kolko (2011), the solution to the issue of the finite project, is entrepreneurship. To let students form a company that will live on after the duties of formal education is completed, and thus keeping a sense of responsibility towards people they engage with. Björgvinsson et al. (2010) on the other hand, acts as researchers working with and connecting a diverse set of stakeholders for continued collaboration outside the frames of the research project. I will however search out and become active in an activist organization, with which I sympathize, and volunteer on the same conditions as everyone else. It is of importance that the presentation in this thesis does not pose any limitations to the activities I engage in on behalf of the organization and it’s cause. The goal is that the relationship between me and the organization will proceed, beyond the work presented here. In a way, this might be my ground level of counter-narration, the rejection, or inconsideration of a time delimited engagement.
3.7.2 Approaches to change

The environments described by, both Björgvinsson et al. (2010) and Denning, consists of complex relations which are impossible to entangle or foresee the implications of. One difference between their respective perspective though, seems to be that Denning still urges us (designers/engineers etc) to look for solutions. While Björgvinsson et al. (2010, 2012) are more modest, and perhaps sober, in their analysis of possibilities. Here, design is never finished, Things rather lead to other Things than to “solutions”.

The “solutions” that is frequently mentioned by Denning, could be interpreted as something which takes control over a situation, in order to be able to capitalize on some aspect of it. This is the same interest in the concept of innovations as Björgvinsson et al. (2010) expresses, but with the agenda of establishing a new consensus, delivered as a solution. An agenda to purposely replace one hegemony with another; the political activist entrepreneurship as described by Palmås (2011).

Denning provides a clear structure with clear commands on what to do, in order to bring innovation to people. The structure and analysis of “messes”, will to a certain degree be used as reference points in my self-reflection, but not used as an explicit method. To keep my work open-ended I will not presume any outcome in the shape of a solution.

The perspective of agonism admit the world to be organized by a number of shifting hegemonies. Simplified, this would mean that something must rule at a given point in time. So why not enforce your own perspective, your solution, to be the dominant one? The role of agonism in design, as explored by Björgvinsson et al. (2010), is to democratize the process of finding “solutions”, or rather, by innovation explore sensitive or controversial topics.

The model of measuring potential, suggested by Barry (2001), seems more appropriate than Fuad-Luke’s method of measuring in concrete outcomes, in this context. Analyzing the potential in objects seems to be more constructive and helpful, than measuring concrete outcomes in hindsight. This way, Barry’s scale promotes the image of a design that is never final, but constantly evolving. I will however, present reflections on each experiment, as this thesis can be seen as some kind of milestone in an endless process.

3.7.3 Representing non-humans

I find the rejection of a nature-culture divide, which serves as a common ground for Haraway (2003) and Callon (1986), to be a necessity for me in order to explore the impact of my designed artifacts. Where both Callon and Haraway, presents entities constituted by animals (Scallops and dogs, respectively), my work have not (yet) reached a point where I attempt to act as a direct spokesperson for such entity. Instead, the entities figuring in my work, are constituted by collectives of humans, and to some extent inanimate objects.

Where I interpret Callon’s work as more directed towards a way of analyzing and understanding the world, I find Haraway’s Manifesto as something calling for a change in perception. I do not, however, see any necessary antagonism between the two. The general main purpose seem to be, to adopt a less biased and prejudiced language and perspective on the world.

If the subjective violence is a symptom of an objective violence, as proposed by Žižek (2008), is this not in essence the same concept that Björgvinsson et al. (2012) writes about? Prototypes, design games, scenarios, etc, are presenters of an object of design. Watch the subjective outcome, to get a glimpse of the invisible structure behind it. We use symbols, design, to sense what we cannot
perceive. Symbols that are the representations of our human thoughts and being, they spring from us, and are thus severely biased. The most trustworthy source of information is thus, the impact of our design. Watch how our design affects relations and behaviors, this is how our presenters present an “object of design”. In the same fashion: speculative design is an assembly of established objects of symbolic violence, with the purpose to provoke reaction and thought.

As examples of projects which deals with the significant otherness of non-humans (as described by Haraway), I would like to mention “The bat billboard”, and “the OOZ projects”.

The Bat billboard by Natalie Jeremijenko and Chris Woebken (2008), is a housing for bats in the shape of a billboard. The bats living in the billboard-house, are monitored, and their calls are interpreted into human language. The result is displayed on the billboard, which turns into a communication device between bats and humans.

Another piece by Jeremijenko is the “OOZ projects” (Jeremijenko n.d.). “OOZ” consists of a set of concepts and interfaces with the purpose of bringing humans and animals closer to each other. It allows for human exploration of animals, like a traditional zoo, but the animals are free to stay, or leave as they wish. The interfaces consist of two parts:

- “an architecture of reciprocity, i.e. any action you can direct at the animal, they can direct at you and” (Jeremijenko n.d.)
- “an information architecture of collective observation and interpretation” (Jeremijenko n.d.)

For example, an interface for interacting with geese, are constituted by three components: a robotic goose, placed in a pond, or where other geese might reside, and remotely controlled by a human. It allows for the human “driver” to swim with other birds, “talk” to them, listen to what they have to say and see how they react.

An interpretation of the experience can be saved in a database with other interpretations for future use. The project website states that: “1) people enjoy driving the robotic goose and ‘talking’ to actual geese; 2) people immediately speculate about the meaning of the goose responses, and can be guided by others’ interpretations, to test, verify, or contest these meanings; 3) people become more interested in their goose neighbors and significantly shift their attitude toward valuing their presence” (Jeremijenko n.d.).

Both of the examples are attempts to interpret and understand animals that live among us in cities. Especially the robotic goose, manages to keep the complexity of the non-humans, by emphasizing that an interpretation is just that: one interpretation out of many others. A human/non-human interface can be compared to a “presenter” (Björgvinsson et al. 2012), a channel for facilitating the understanding and communication with a significant otherness.

Bishop (2006) argues that in art, you should not loose focus on the representation of things, the aesthetic qualities of an artwork, in favor for moral precepts. Are these criteria of critique applicable for design? Possibly. What we can learn from Bishop, seems to be that some practices are in more need than others to be democratic. It seems that it is up to each person to decide, as an authoritarian creator of art or design, what is more desirable: an ethical process or a final communicative message. As we proceed into chapter 5, a description of my process, we will see that this choice can be an obstacle.
3.7.4 Summary of my approach

On the whole, my search has been for opportunities for counter-narration on different levels, from interaction design as an established practice, to the practices of the organization I engaged in, to the specific concerns of the organization. This development was not clear from the start, but has unfolded along the way.

This development and constant re-framing of my situation was possible due to my open-ended approach and rejection of time limitations in my engagement. The slow process that will be described below, was based on attempts to engage: myself in an unfamiliar practice, others in a participatory design practice, and myself in a design practice.

A contagionontology-inspired tactic, has been to throw ideas out there and see what catches on. What provokes, what is well received? Then work for the ideas that spreads, and see where it leads.

In my work, I have not used infrastructuring, in a strict sense. Some of the events I have participated in could, if one wanted to, supposedly be described as design Things. In my case, though, I see no real point in doing so. I will however try to adopt the idea of “presenters” and an ever evolving object of design.

It may be useful to understand the work presented below, with some reference to the principles suggested by Callon. As Callon translated different “moments” out of a larger context, I will, similarly, present my work as four “experiments”.

4. Context

This thesis is based upon my (at time of writing) recent engagement in the local group of a national wide-spread animal rights activist network. This group, or part of the network, are active in Malmö and surroundings. This part of the network will here on be referred to as the organization, or organization at large. Other local organizations that are part of the complete network are not dealt with in this thesis.

My engagement includes general activities like participating (and organizing) monthly meetings for the local group of Malmö. Read and participate in online communication via a closed message board, as well as e-mails and mobile phone text messages and calls.

Additional to this, there are other meetings, online communication and organizational tasks related to specific work groups and their different agendas (Fig. 2). Nothing is of course “mandatory” for an activist, but this is the channels of communication that keeps the organization, and its sub-groups, together and active. For meetings, an informal flat structure and meeting practice are established. For example, an agenda for the meeting is set on location (anyone can add things to it), a “meeting facilitator” (reading and keeping track of the agenda) is appointed for each occasion, as well as someone for taking notes, which are later posted to the closed, online message board.

4.1 The organization

The map below (Fig. 4), is an attempt to visualize how the organization is held together. The film café (which we will deal more with later) for example, would be one of the “work groups”.

![Diagram of the organization structure](image)

*Fig. 4 An approximate mapping of the structure of the organization.*
The “bubbles” (fig. 4), that floats in the space called “Common interest/issue” could be considered to be the organization’s interventions with the world. The touch-points of the organization, activities where it becomes visible to people outside of the organization. The line styles represent an arbitrary openness or transparency, withdrawness or distinction, of an object - for example a group, an event or a connection.

4.2 The anti-speciesist film café

My main focus of engagement has been an anti-speciesist-themed film café. The particular work group concerned with planning and executing this film café, consisted of five participants (myself included), a core to which others spontaneously joined to help carry out the actual events.

The events was constituted by the screening of a feature film, preluded by an arbitrary number of shorter films or music videos. As a rule the films should bear the theme of speciesism, or other kinds of oppression that could somehow be connected to speciesism. This setup is complemented with a serving of cost priced, home made vegan food and dessert.

This thesis deals with my involvement in four instances of the film café. Number of people present at each event, ranged from around 15 to 30 (organizers included).

---

1 **Speciesism** Coined in 1973 by Richard D. Ryder. The discrimination of living beings based on their species (Peter Singer 1975).
5. Experiments

This chapter will explain my experience, my approaches and decisions. The process will be divided and described as four different experiments, or phases. When performed however, the parts of the experiments were highly entangled and intertwined. The following is thus, one attempt of making sense of the “mess”.

Each experiment description will include a description of the situations that I participated in, and the performance of these situations. This is followed by reflections on the process, which in turn are followed by a few concluding remarks.

The four labels that will categorize my explorations are:

- Interaction design as a non-profession
- Interaction design as a trait
- What is the Anti-speciesist film café?
- Introduction of speculative design tactics

5.1 Experiment: Interaction design as a non-profession

The idea behind this experiment was to explore the potential in a counter-narrative to the concept of interaction design as a profession. The purpose of this experiment was to explore and experience the power relations in a participatory process, as well as the practice of interaction design in a completely volunteer based environment.

5.1.1 Defining “non-profession” as a counter-narrative

In the core of this counter-narrative, lay a question of whether interaction design could survive as a valuable and trusted practice, if it were to be deprived of qualities granted to it only because of its status as an accepted profession.

The expression “non-profession” was constructed only for the sake of this experiment, it does not refer to any other notions of “non-professions” that may or may not exist. The purpose is to speak of practices and constructed roles that are commonly labeled professions, but which are, in a given situation, not manifested as such. A practice or occupation that is more than a hobby or leisure activity, but still not performed as a profession. It may be pictured as removing connoted social structures and negotiated compensation from the concept of a profession and salaried employment.

In the wake of the concept of professions, some roles will still be needed. In a design process there will still be design work that needs to be carried out. For example, the title “interaction designer” implies that designing interactions is one’s profession, what one does for a living. One is without further ado, “promoted” to an expert (Palmás 2011). But in the case of a “non-profession”, the person performing a particular type of tasks, is not economically compensated, nor is s/he given a title or more authority (than anyone else). Rather more importantly, the “non-professional” designer does not want, or expect any negotiated compensation, authority or to be treated different from other roles in a project, organization or other social environment. At the same time, a “non-profession” is more than “a hobby”, it is still a skill that may require training, experience and education.
The idea that profession follows skill, is an assumed connotation of the concept of profession that
the expression “non-profession” is meant to address. The “non-profession” means the rejection of
the profession as a sign and/or guarantee of competence or knowledge. But it also functions the
other way around, rejection of the idea that not having a profession (or being “unemployed”) would
be proof of a lack of skills and/or knowledge.

To summarize: the main point of this counter-narrative was to even out implicit power-relations,
and flatten formal hierarchies. It was an attempt to:

- Remove titles (of professions), that can enforce status and power-relations
- Remove external means of reward - negotiated (possibly economic) compensation. Reward will be ideological, whatever is the impact of your actions.
- Suggest equal value of every perspective.

To a large extent these goals were already met by the organizational form applied by the
organization concerned in this work.

The experiment of rejecting professions is, of course more or less pertinent to different
professions and practices. As mentioned above: it was not the purpose of this work to argue for the
formal abolishment of all professions, but rather to serve as an expression of the question: what is
work?

The concept of the “non-profession” was never meant to be interpreted as a desirable utopian
future vision. The experiment was rather speculating by attempting to act out a possible counter-
narrative. A speculative methodology invented “as I went”.

5.1.2 Approaching the animal rights organization

Heavily influenced by the concept of design for social innovation, my goal was to help my new
community. Presuming there would emerge opportunities to introduce design techniques, for
example: methods for brainstorming, visualizing, and communicating. But I did not want to become
an authority, or impose an agenda. I wanted to make humble but compelling suggestions, present
“novel insights” and pose smart questions. All the things I read about interaction designers doing in
papers and articles. But without entrenching advantages through treating the interaction designer-
role as a superior tactic or skill. The activist cause was supposed to be the infallible greater good.

Over time however, situations I found myself taking part of, did not play out as I expected them to
(Fig. 5). I sensed that my input was met with skepticism or impatience and at other times more
concrete dismissals or unimpressed indifference. Or it was endured, probably because of the
common belief and premise of the organization, that everyone has the right to speak their mind. I
was performing the scenario presented by Parker (2009).
What seemed like the main outcome from the process, what needed to be dealt with first, turned out to be my own feelings of bewilderment. I did not concentrate on exactly how it all played out, but instead I tried to identify and analyze the implications in my actions, and derived at the following conclusions:

- I felt like I was too eager to speak my mind about things I apparently had little experience of.
- I had an underlying idea of some kind of solution, not even knowing if there was a problem.
- I was unable to clearly/convincingly communicate ideas
- I was too unfamiliar with the social situation

In short, I felt like I was naive and stupid, ruining my relationship with people in the organization. A scenario I assumed to be prepared for through my literature studies.

The perceived rejection of, or lack of interest for, my suggestions and input became tearing, and the feeling of not going anywhere, or not being capable of making a difference, emerged. To reconcile, reframe, and review my tactics, I interpreted and assembled my experience as a conspicuous comic pamphlet (Fig. 6 & 7 & Attachment II).
Fig. 6 Rough draft of comic

Fig. 7 Extract from the comic pamphlet (Attachment II)
The comic, titled “Learning by doing” (Fig. 7), tries to explain my interest in design, and the confusion and frustration I felt. The conclusion drawn at the time (Attachment II), stated that I did not know how to act in the social environment I found myself in. That I, over and over, failed to make use of my skills and knowledge. Something that I had a hard time coping with. The issue then, seemed to be “how does one develop skills in failing?” When “failing” means not being able to handle the experience of a situation that does not unfold according to one's intentions and plans; to give up control. The issue boils down to: How does one prepare for unprepared situations?

The goal of the pamphlet was to serve as a starting point for discussions between designers, around how one could deal with situations similar to the one presented in the comic, and how to learn and practice the experience of failure and set-backs.

Casual discussions around the pamphlet, with fellow design students (BA-level to PhD-candidate), led to the advice that “being naive”, is the characteristic that provides the ability to question and have novel insights. The issue might not be about “failing”, but rather about how to remain confident and know how to act and communicate in that role. Another advice given was that to initiate some kind of change or action, one would need mandate from the community (Anders Emilson & Anna Seravalli 2012).

Presenting the approach of a non-profession did however mostly seem to upset and confuse more than it provided for a substantial debate.

5.1.3 Reflections on “Interaction design as a non-profession”

The process described above started out by the whim to find a different path through a design process. Instead of treating and imposing design as a tool or solution, letting it find its own way to an appropriate place and manifestation in the given environment. My unaccustomedness of the process however, made me turn the loupe onto my own approach and perception of design as a practice.

The initial question “whether interaction design could survive as a valuable and trusted practice, if it were to be deprived of qualities given to it only because of its status as an accepted profession”, changed subtly to the more personally upsetting: “Whether I as an interaction designer could survive as valuable and trusted, if I were to be deprived of qualities given to me only because of my status as an accepted professional designer”, to which the answer at that point would simply read: “no”.

Instead of putting my energy and effort into the activist cause as intended, the setup caused a somewhat reversed process. Most of my focus was instead directed at, or probably never even left, design methodology and the designer role. The experiment was “stuck” on principles instead of exploring design opportunities.

I will try to discuss my experience, mainly through a perspective of symbolic violence, but will begin by referencing a Participatory design-approach of design Things. Then I will try to shift my perspective, and view this experience as parts, and symptoms, in a bigger picture.
A constricting obsession with violence

The concept of the non-profession seems to have acted as an effective paralyzer. By worrying about taking too much space, I demoted myself, to barely be allowed to have any concrete influence, or take action, at all. The few moments when I managed to convince others to follow my lead, led nowhere in particular. The approach was characterized by a careful avoidance of “harassing” others.

Within the discourse of participatory design, researchers explore concepts of agonistic spaces and design Things (ex Björgvinsson et al. 2012), as ways of thinking about and communicating design work. Seeing design through the lens of Things and agonism, puts design and innovation in the light of democracy and equality. The introduction of these philosophical concepts offer a professional designer to take a more humble stance towards design and innovation, and the people affected by it. And while doing so, manages to put emphasis on, or at least not lose track of, other possibilities and design opportunities.

Compared to the concepts of agonistic spaces and design Things, the concept of the non-profession perhaps constitute similar practical conditions for democracy and equality, but the conditions are now achieved by putting emphasis on restraints. The non-profession rather intimidates the designer into a state of petrified carefulness.

Would this be the result of the approach of not reducing, objectifying participants to users? An outcome possible, partly because of my chosen ignorance of documenting gender, age or other quantifiable data? But the closeness to others that emerges from not having the full emotional distance of language and images for labeling each other, also comes with the consequence of not being fully capable of understanding each other. As Žižek (2008) points out, the language serves both as the bridge to another subject, as well as the wall between us.

In participatory design, “presenters” (Björgvinsson et al. 2012) can serve the purpose of facilitating communication between stakeholders and designers. My worries of harassing, and my determination of not framing design as a superior method, did however hinder this particular outcome to emerge. Instead it seems that I turned to what was left to harass: myself. Reducing myself to a symbol and packaging my experience into a comic.

Then, instead of confronting those “closest” to me and with whom I shared experiences, I turned to people I knew and could distance myself from by the language of interaction design. This was justified by the content of the comic, which was the experience of designing; methodology to be discussed with other designers with whom I share a language. I was somehow claiming my right (from myself) not to be harassed, to keep a distance between me and other subjects of the organization. This is what is described by Parker (2009), and what must be trained and prepared for.

It seems obvious in hindsight that for design, as we know it, the two types of violence contrasted above, are both unavoidable, or even necessary. The violent act of interpreting and the reducing of experiences, and other subjects, to gain understanding of each other. While at the same time trying not reduce other participants to symbols, images of collections of interpretations, a non-act by which the door opens up to the possibility of one getting too “close”, or the experience of an insensitive treatment, questioning or proclamations that might be perceived as insulting and upsetting.

In this sense, a completely “non-violent” design process may not possible to achieve. It could however be useful to be aware of the types of violence one can utilize, and what effects they may have. A relevant question may then be: how can one learn to strike a fruitful (im)balance?
Intelligent naivety or symbolic death

As mentioned, the similarities between Sophia Parker’s story in “Social animals” (2009) and my situation, are striking. It still seems like an urgent issue as a designer without a granted authority, is how to act and communicate. How to be naive in an appropriate manner; to apply an “intelligent naivety” (Parker 2009), to be able to frame novel insights and pose questions that challenges assumptions and obsolete concepts.

One reflection made early on (see Attachment II) is that self-criticism or what can be experienced as set-backs or failures in a scientific design process, falls out the frame when portrayed and communicated in articles and books. The essence of a written description of a process, is what we can learn from it. A purpose that may transform the image of a process, lined by difficulties of various sorts, into being perceived rather one-dimensionally.

The conclusion of the experiment explained above, if relevant, must be that I was not familiar enough with the mechanics of designing in this environment, to be able to act “intelligently naive”. This conclusion might seem overly self-critical when spelled out like above, but is necessary to convey a message. A message that this is also an outcome, something that can be learned about my process, and that I wishes to pass along.

Analyzing the concept of the non-profession through DiSalvo’s take on speculative design criticism, I would draw the conclusion that the non-profession served well as a provocative spectacle within the designer community. My presentation of it however, maybe did not contain enough “scaffolding” (DiSalvo, 2012) to communicate any deeper meaning or substantial ground for debate. The comic “Learning by doing” (Attachment II), did on the other hand contain a scenario that many could relate to, but where a palpable provocation was missing.

Instead, the very emotionally driven, immersive approach of passionate participation in an environment, that includes or constitutes an object of design, seems perfectly aligned with the observation that one is merging with one’s profession (Paulsen 2010, Cederström and Fleming, 2012). Would it benefit our understanding of my work, to view the non-profession as a symptom? The symptom of a collective existential angst (Paulsen, 2012) in western societies, a desperate call for help and search for escape and meaning. The “non-profession” is either a logical step in the evolvement of fully “becoming” one’s profession, to enter a state of no escape and constant “living death”. Or, the impulse to escape, the implicit and unconscious attempt to commit “symbolic suicide” (Cederström and Fleming 2012)(which I failed).

5.1.4 Concluding remarks

The lens of violence and non-profession might provide a provocative framework for thinking about design. It bears qualities for increased understanding, but where for example Björgvinsson et al. (2010) focuses on opportunities in a situation, the approach described above tends to focus on negative factors. Instead of encouraging to look for advantages - it raises a cautionary: “Look out!”.

Distilling and extracting issues from the process, was manifested as a comic pamphlet. The comic had the explicit purpose to communicate my experience of the process so far, and by explaining and discussing it, also helped make it clear what the focus of my work maybe rather should be. That is to learn how to approach objects of design with an “intelligent naivety”; in a sensitive and respectful way. This would include to stop thinking about one’s “insights”, or designs as possible
solutions, but rather see it as a way for the designer to understand and learn more, and thereby also be able to put one’s skills to practical use to the environment.

Then again, perhaps readers would gain more from reading this chapter altogether as symptoms of something else. The “collective angst” proposed by Paulsen (2012) (see also Cederström and Fleming, 2012), or merely the expanding sphere of work and capitalism.

Regardless quality of the outcomes from this phase, the involvement in the activist network did proceed and evolve.

5.2 Experiment: Interaction design as a trait

This next chapter will deal with changes in attitude and methodology that followed the approach of the non-profession described above. After the condensation of the experience into a comic, even if the shift was not obvious at the time, I seem to have taken on a more modest, but at the same time challenging role. Where I before, inadvertently entered a role to make claims and give advice, in what felt like a rather insensitive, or even boorish approach, I now consciously aimed to understand more basic mechanisms and prerequisites in the social environment, and also regarding potential objects of design.

Instead of viewing interaction design as a standalone tool for achieving something, a toolbox to use when a situation arises, one could see interaction design as a trait. The interaction designer is forever scarred by interaction design methodology, techniques are carved into one’s bones, the mindset is etched to the brain. Whatever I do, and however I act, it will be under the influence of this trait and perspective. This way getting rid of the notion “interaction designer”, stop worrying about how it might be oppressive, to me or others.

This thesis covers my engagement in arranging four instances of the film café, and this chapter will focus on the process of preparation of events, rather than executing them.

5.2.1 Organizing, arranging and questioning the film café

In this chapter I will describe how I worked to propose methods and techniques for organizing, understanding and developing the theory behind, and concept of, the film café, in order to turn it into a more efficient counter-narrative. More explicitly, this means that I participated in activities like:

• Trying to articulate goals, and evaluate and adapt practices and efforts
• Question the existing practices, in order to explore ideas and approaches
• Organizing, promoting and executing events

In my initial experience of the process of organizing and executing the film café, everything was carried out with a large portion of spontaneity. Quite arbitrary decisions being made in the moment, and practices and presumptions, seemingly. living on by mere routine. An overall routine that was not often subject of discussions, or even acknowledged.

It seemed to me then, that collectively articulating any kind of order, goals or ideas behind our decisions, would ease the workload of organizing an event. Unravel the structures and presumptions
that existed, and set up new more visible ones. I hoped this would benefit the film café in its presupposed goals and methods of spreading message of, and supporting, the issue of animal rights.

5.2.2 Goals

A set of goals were agreed upon, and written down. The process of articulating these goals went rather smoothly, and some of them were probably inherently present even before the discussion that led to their articulation. This articulation and setting of goals made the group as such become collectively aware of a purpose, what to actually aim and work for.

The goals were said to be revised and changed at any time, but at the time of writing they read as follows:

- Express and create support for the organization and knowledge about its actions (nation wide and locally)
- Raise awareness of speciesism and anti-speciesism
- Spread veganism

5.2.3 Evaluations and changes

The list of goals provided a very concrete opportunity to evaluate practices and communication around the film café. How do we actually work in order to meet our goals? What are the concrete measures taken to raise awareness of speciesism?

Continuous evaluations of the relation between ideas, practice and goals led to several concrete changes and outcomes. As a direct consequence of the goal to raise awareness about (anti-)speciesism, short lectures on the topic and on how to take action in everyday situations, were introduced as an element of the film café.

The goal of expressing and creating support for other activities within the organization led to the invitation of people from within our own organization to give short talks about current activities and happenings. As an indirect consequence of the discussions leading to the implementation of these features, the idea of some kind of official host also became a standing feature of the film café.

As for the goal of spreading veganism, the concept of a “recipe flyer” where invented and introduced. That is, a flyer for visitors to take home, containing a compilation of recipes for the different dishes served at a given event.

5.2.4 Questioning

In the discussions dealing with goals, evaluations, food and films, there were also parts of them that outright questioned the routine design and performance of the film café. Themes that were brought up were, for example: The relation between current regulars of the film café and the film café as such? Do we see people coming to the events as visitors or participants? How does the usage of language communicate the film café to its audience? Is the term “anti-speciesist” perceived as excluding and/or informative? What kind of films should we screen, and why? Do we want to inform or shock?
Suggesting different perspectives, or simply asking a question, started discussions, which did open up silent consensuses for re-evaluation. They did however also turn into exhausting discussions and meetings. Something that has implications in a fragile economy. “Mandatory” issues on the agenda were postponed because of the lack of time, after a lengthy evaluation. The whole process of planning and organizing then becomes delayed and risks the event to be cancelled (which almost happened once). Even if it was not my intention to pose a question as a personal objection or standpoint, arguments were sometimes perceived as personal opinions or beliefs, and participants sometimes took a rather defensive position on matters, or simply assumed that there was a disagreement. The result was more often rather a debate, for or against, than a verbal exploration of an issue, looking for new insights or possibilities.

An issue that seemed to contain some controversy, was to problematize one of the corner pillars in the organization; the issue of keeping a strict vegan diet. On this issue I made a claim that it is something that could fail on other levels than simply not agreeing with animal rights.

The group should however not be perceived or understood as narrow-minded or confined, quite the opposite. I experienced the environment and everyone as very open-minded and fair, I was part of the group and therefore possess the same right to influence or claim space as everyone else. It turns out that ideas or experiments were very welcomed to be executed, as long as it did not mean additional work (for others than myself) (more about this in the next chapter: “Experiment: What is the film café?”).

The result of one discussion were for example to re-think and look for possibilities to change online promotion of the events, to be perceived as more available to people not already familiar with the concept of the film café or anti-speciesism.

5.2.5 Reflection on “Interaction design as a trait”

Again: the outcomes that are described in this chapter emerged and crystalized over time. My participation in the activities described below happened “as we went”. My focus was rather in the moment, and the patterns are only fully assembled and interpreted afterwards.

This chapter has so far, partly been a description of how I perceived my role, and results I participated in producing. Chronologically, most of the events in this chapter took place after the first experiment (“Interaction design as a non-profession”), the relationship between me and other participants had evolved and become more established, while at the same time I also felt more comfortable in the social environment.

The issues found, or lessons learned from this experiment can be summarized as:

1. Discussions are time consuming
2. Difficulties convincing others about new approaches/perspectives;
3. since I did not possess any special benefits of obedience, or had any mandate form the group to implement changes.

So why is it that these issues are experienced? The goals and evaluations of the film café, did indeed spark some interesting discussions and ideas, as well as help articulate some useful lessons learned (for example: it is too stressful to serve dishes that are produced on location, e.g. waffles). The goals that were set were rather arbitrary though, and in the context of a volunteer-based
organization and events, the effort to do more research on who the visitors are, or engage in exploratory design experiments (or even discussions), are down-prioritized in favor for more essential, practical issues (e.g. When? Where? What to screen? What to serve? Who prepares what?).

Below, I will reflect upon three types of issues that I encountered in this experiment. The first is the scarce economy of a volunteer-based activity as the film café, and how it may affect a designer role. The second, is my approach and the activistic qualities of the concept of the film café. Lastly, I will reflect on the nature and utopian visions of activism and the possibility to create agonistic spaces.

**The economy of the film café**

This chapter presents a change in the approach and method, according to a designer role. In the light of these changes, the role as a questioner, negotiator or facilitator can be partly linked to the skill of speculating, as in posing and presenting alternative perspectives, realities or futures. Counter-narratives (speculations) within the counter-narrative (animal rights). The questions posed and discussed, could have been elaborated on, and developed into more concrete, speculative and challenging designs, such as scenarios, personas, or artifacts. But the economy of organizing the film café, includes heavy time constraints for engagement. Different backgrounds, experiences, skills, and goals of the participants make it difficult to argue for applying a design approach. Since one’s engagement in the main issue (animal rights) is unpaid at best, but even costly at times, discussions about methodology, and communication and other abstract themes, are often neglected by default. The reason people are active in the organization of concern, is after all to do something, i.e., to make stuff happen, rather than to talk about stuff that could happen.

The situation reminds of what is described by Schön (1987): to fully grasp artistic elements of a practice, an apprentice needs to blindly trust a master. But who is master and who is apprentice in this case? My rather one-dimensional, first response to this would have been to not even ask this question, but to assume that people in my environment must learn design, they must put trust in me and my ways. Others should adapt to my ideas.

It is clear to me though, that my relation to the organization and other participants (and vice versa), changed over time. I got to know people better, and people got to know me better. The roles of masters and apprentices appeared to be rapidly swapped, without notice or forewarning. I needed to learn from others just as much as, or even more than, they needed to learn from me.

So, how can we create an economy that affords to pursue a participatory, speculative design process? As a first step, to fully engage in activities, participants must be convinced there are benefits of the methods proposed; or, a designer needs to “declare” (Denning, 2007) that there is a problem that s/he intends to fix.

**The misalignment of my participatory approach**

My approach was to bring things up for discussion, question by actually asking a question, explaining by words, my intention of speculation and change of perspective. I wanted to have permission, or mandate, from the group to together pursue exploratory discussions (in any material) to see where we would end up.
It seems however that I overestimated the importance of participation and engagement in relation to impact. My attempts to engage in discussions and reflections on the film café had, in this case very limited value in itself, since a flat-organizational model were applied in the first place. Therefore, as long as all communication between participants were word-based, my attempts of elaborating on the concept, added nothing new to the practice of organizing the events. It rather complicated a practice, that was already somewhat fragile due to its scarce economy.

We can perhaps transcribe the point made by Bishop (2006), that a participatory approach does not automatically create striking art, or in this case, design. As long as it is not the process itself that is an overarching goal, which in this case (as with art, according to Bishop) it is not.

The different levels of practices and goals are entangled, and are easily mixed up. As a starting point, I adopted roles (“questioner”, “negotiator”) and approaches (Participatory design for a democratic design process) from my reading of theories. What went unnoticed was that these frameworks were not properly aligned with the environment in which I was acting.

The participatory design process is, in some senses, a goal in itself, e.g. democracy, and it is mainly through this lens of ethics that I saw my approach. The roles I adapted, are tools for guiding, improving and facilitating this democratic, ethical process.

In the environment of the film café, democratic means already exists and are firmly established, it is not what is strived for, since it is already there. Democratic means are the reason that the environment that constitutes the film café, exists at all (fig. 8a). My approach of trying to engage everyone in a common task to question existing practices, may therefore have been overkill. My approach silently presumed that it was a goal in itself, and the effort put into upholding a democratic process, was rather obstructing things from happening or evolve. A diversion, or detour, fulfilling nothing in particular (fig. 8b).

A mistake may have been to believe my task as a designer was to design with other people, while the situation actually required to design among other people.

Apparently, as described above, some things did change and evolve during this time. There could have been even more fruitful results however, instead of insisting on lengthy, wordy discussions, maybe I should have engage in a stringent, undemocratic act in pursuit of the goals of the film café. For example what would have happened if the possible elitism inherent in an expression like “anti-speciesism”, suddenly was materialized or manifested in some act? A provocation to stir emotion and spark discussion. Instead of, as in the actual case, discussions about provocations around the issue.

The process described in this experiment was slow-paced and tedious. It’s outcomes were marginal.
Fig. 8a The work group builds upon democratic practices. The film café is a mean to reach goals.

Fig. 8b Time and effort spent to ensure a democratic process.
Faulty presumptions

When shifting perspective, it is revealed that the concept behind the film café was fundamentally thought of as a business, or entrepreneurship, with ambitions to change people’s speciesist behaviors and habits. This view of the “business” is however not aligned with what can be made out as the present role of the film café.

The film café was supposed to encourage people to pursue a vegan diet, as well as spread propaganda, and in this light, the film café rather failed. The goals set up, presumed that the film café were to adopt some general goals of the animal rights organization. To spread a message and, in the words of Palmås (2011), “prove” that a vegan diet “works”. But in fact, other actors in the geographic proximity could already pose as successful examples of vegan businesses. Therefore the disruptive factor in “proving something to work”, were slim to non-existing from the start.

This entrepreneurial spirit can also be identified in the execution of the events. There was an unarticulated and constantly assumed division between organizer and visitors, that made itself visible in details such as signs announcing the price of cakes, a counter for money transactions, a host making official announcements on a stage. A tacit strive to keep the event somewhat structured and slick before the audience.

Seeking reference in Denning’s guidelines for innovating, it is quite clear that my situation fulfills some of the requirements of the definition of a “mess”. The goals, discussions and results described in this chapter, could be understood as “common sense” that upheld the practice and people’s understanding of the practice. “Confusion” and the “feeling of being stuck” are recognized in both chapters so far, and we could catch a glimpse of “conflict” or “controversy”, through the lengthy discussions that are framed as a result in this chapter.

It is still hard to tell what kind of “mess” I was experiencing. However, the next part of my reflection, might give a hint.

Utopias and agonism

It becomes clearer that the inherent, informal structures and opinions of the movement, often are of a very antagonistic character. The official standpoint from the organization is very uncompromising. As a person active in the organization expresses it: “The struggle is not about animal welfare, it’s about animal rights”. Therefore approaches or suggestions that hints of compromises, seem to be rejected on ethical and moral principles.

This official, uncompromising standpoint, seeps through the organization and activities, influencing discussions and dialogues. Bringing up issues or solutions that do not fully correspond with or even question, the default approach, can cause controversy.

This uncompromising approach, seems like a direct clash with the “reformist” design as activism (Thorpe, 2011). And while the concept of agonism needs one to accept the existence of other perspectives and practices, conflicts “for which no rational solution could ever exist” (Mouffe, 2007). A relevant question in this context, could be: how to identify a conflict as unresolvable? When to settle for reform instead of complete transformation? And who is capable of making that call?
5.2.6 Concluding remarks

Comparing this experiment to the previous one (“Interaction design as a non-profession”), the change can be described as a step from the more abstract (and self-reflecting) scrutinization of design methodology, towards a slightly more specific (and practical) scrutinization of the present activist practice.

The designer role now seems to seamlessly shift between something like a negotiator and questioner, or apprentice and a master. How does one know in what role to act in a given moment?

My approach aimed to maintain high level of democracy; while questioning current practices and assumptions in dialogue, I wished to get mandate to develop designs to explore topics further. Even if discussions lead to some results, they were exhausting for participants, and as shown in fig. 8a and 8b, they may have been an unnecessary assurance of keeping the process democratic.

One question that remains then, is: How does one (more effectively) persuade others to try out different methods or approaches? One possible way could be to use design to facilitate discussions, as proposed in Björgvinsson et al. (2010). To provoke more direct, or emotional and genuine responses.

The knowledge about our own misguided view on the film café, as something entrepreneurial, is progress for the sake of the work group. Even if it could be considered a mistake, in hindsight. Efforts previously spent on marketing events and spreading propaganda about anti-speciesism, can in the future be toned down, while figuring out what the film café is, and how to use it.

5.3 Experiment: What is the anti-speciesist film café?

The events and processes that are described and discussed below, took place during more or less the same period of time as the previous chapter. The previous chapter were aiming for participation and collaboration, where this chapter will discuss a reaction to the lack of responses to my invitations to co-design.

In order to try to improve the concept, performance, execution, and increase understanding of the film café, a number of objects were created. They were dispatched into live events to see how they would affect some of the perceived qualities of the film café. The objects were named and thought of as:

- The suggestion box - a box for collecting suggestions from “visitors”, written on small scraps of paper, presumingly concerning the film café. The suggestion box was present during three events in a row.
- The anti-speciesist mixtape - a collection of songs were mixed together, and played during one event.
- The anti-speciesist jukebox - Derived from the mixtape. An artifact offering to playback a song of choice. The song must be selected from a preset collection of 27 different songs, and is played through loudspeakers. The jukebox took the place of the mixtape for two remaining events.

The objects were created and dispatched in order to explore the object of “socio-material”, and the participatory spirit of the film café, or in reference to Denning: act as stimuli in an attempt to analyze the “mess”.

50
5.3.1 Objects

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there were difficulties motivating other participants to become engaged in designing brand new objects for the sake of exploration. These three objects were, however, all pitched in the work group, and more or less approved, before realized and dispatched into an event.

The common idea behind the objects, was to explore identified existing qualities and characteristics of the film café by tweaking and extending them. To try to make abstract features more visible, and see if, and how, other constituents would respond. The hope was to surface, or confirm, something for further development or exploration.

The suggestion box

The suggestion box (Fig. 9) itself was wooden box, painted white with a stenciled red paw (an element from the organization logo) and the black text “Förslagslåda” (= ”suggestion box”) freehand written with a brush.

![Fig. 9 “The suggestion box”](image)

Its specific and explicit purpose was to try get ideas and opinions from others, not involved in organizing the event. The suggestion box was a straight forward box, where one could anonymously turn in suggestions, or whatever information, on pieces of paper. It was a centralized service of one-way communication. The events themselves had a tendency to be rather chaotic in the sense of communication, since to outsiders, it was never obvious who was an organizer or utterly responsible for an event, that is: who to talk to in order to communicate an opinion or issue.

The box was thought of as a mean to lower the threshold for participation, and influencing the film café. Instead of, for example referring people to an e-mail address or social network (where the animal rights organization as well as the film café are present), a physical box was thought to bring forward the experienced quality of the film café as something which “takes place”, an occupation of a physical space during a limited time. The physical shape of a box suggests notes to be written by hand, placed in a designated, enclosed space, during the event, and to later be collected and processed by a human being.
These qualities described above, were seen as qualities to enable and invite. But the suggestion box was also supposed to subtly manifest and communicate a more authoritarian nature of the film café: “You may suggest, but we decide”. The selection of films to screen, food to serve, prices were actually all quite spontaneous decisions, and as described above, the atmosphere of the work group was very permitting, open minded, and open for anyone to join. The suggestion box would in contrast to this, be a materialization of the border between organizer and visitor. Opening for questions about the democracy of the practices and executions of the film cafés.

The suggestion box appeared on three different events, and its existence were at several occasions announced. Despite efforts to encourage usage, within the timeframe for this analysis the suggestion box collected a mere total of two contributions (fig. 10a & 10b), whereof one was an inquiry and the other was a result of a confusion caused by the jukebox (which, at the time, was located next to the suggestion box).

Anti-speciesist mixtape

The theme of the film café was anti-speciesism. This was intended to be reflected by the name of the events, the selection of food and pastry served, and in the theme of the films screened.

There were two presumed purposes of the mixtape. The first idea was the format of a mixtape; preselected songs mixed together in a specific order. The characteristic I tried to make more visible here, was the act of selection in the film café. An act of authority, demanding trust (in that acceptable selections will be made).

The other idea was the actual contents of the mixtape, which implemented the over-arching theme of anti-speciesism. It was a proposal that the anti-speciesism-theme could be extended to include not only food and films, but also music (and who knows what more!!?).

The result was a 25 minutes worth of music, mixed together in a specific order, and with the common theme of animal rights (or vegetable-eating). It was played at one occasion, starting when the first visitors arrived, lasting until the screening began. The suggestion box was also present at the given event, but without managing to collect any contributions.

Over all, it all passed relatively unnoticed, being subtly acknowledged once, because of the diverse set of music genres put side by side. Which was why the concept later evolved into a physical artifact.
Early in my engagement in the film café, I noticed how friendly and open the people who came there were. The food was home made, everyone were very positive, people took their plates to the dish washer and someone helped putting furniture back in place. An event can be set up, organized and arranged by one person or a group. Organizers controls how the event is to be marketed and executed. Despite this, visitors cannot be completely reduced to passive by-standers. Everything present at an event contributes to the atmosphere and each other’s experience, by shouting, talking, applauding, eating the last piece of the cake, or even by not being present.

The idea behind the jukebox (Fig. 12 & 13) was to explore this atmosphere of shared responsibility for the film café. It was meant to provide, or hint about, the possibility to, to some extent, help assemble the film café without engaging as an organizer. The issue explored here, is the relationship between people and the film café, and the question whether people could generally be described as “participants” or “visitors”.

Since the mixtape did not cause any particular, or noticeable reaction among anything, the approach to extend the anti-speciesist-theme into covering music, was developed further. In a sense, the anti-speciesist jukebox could be seen as a hybrid between the other two objects.

Painted white, with a stenciled red paw, and title written in black. A display is lit up by a number of LEDs and contains the track list, printed on paper and suspended by a plexiglass pane. The control panel is made out of twelve buttons divided into two rows. Each button was accompanied by an LED to indicate activation.

The first row consisted of three buttons, labeled “A”, “B”, and “C”. The second row were, nine buttons long, and labeled by numerals. This setup provides 27 different button combinations between the two rows (e.g. “A+1”, “B+7”, etc).

The music repertoire was thereby expanded into 27 predetermined songs. The over-arching lyrical themes were now animal rights, racism and sexism (structural oppressions that were also featured in the films that was screened during the events where the jukebox was present).
The artifact was wired to a nearby computer, which was connected to a projector. The computer played songs selected by the pressing of buttons on the jukebox, and the projector functioned as a realtime display of what was currently playing.

The idea of a jukebox was presented before the work group, but the reactions to the idea were cool. Of course in the context it seemed like a waste of time, given the scarce economy (pointed out in the previous chapter). A cardboard-prototype (fig. 14), bearing some functionality, was presented for the group, and infused some excitement for the object. The group did however also wrestle with the regular issues of what to serve and screen, who would bake, and so on. Hence the jukebox, or the general idea of throwing new objects into the film café, were constantly a secondary discussion.

Fig. 12 “The anti-speciesist jukebox”, placed on a table.

The artifact was wired to a nearby computer, which was connected to a projector. The computer played songs selected by the pressing of buttons on the jukebox, and the projector functioned as a realtime display of what was currently playing.

The idea of a jukebox was presented before the work group, but the reactions to the idea were cool. Of course in the context it seemed like a waste of time, given the scarce economy (pointed out in the previous chapter). A cardboard-prototype (fig. 14), bearing some functionality, was presented for the group, and infused some excitement for the object. The group did however also wrestle with the regular issues of what to serve and screen, who would bake, and so on. Hence the jukebox, or the general idea of throwing new objects into the film café, were constantly a secondary discussion.
The work group was also invited to help assemble a track list with the proper thematics, but to no avail.

In the film cafés, the jukebox was seen as a channel for participation, since anyone could walk up to it and select a song to be played from its repertoire. During the events, the two objects (jukebox and suggestion box) were purposely placed close to each other, hoping for a synergetic effect. For
example: provoking people to turn in suggestions due to the narrow selection of songs presented in the jukebox.

The result of the jukebox’s presence was not what was hoped for. Most people who interacted with the piece, were explicitly asked, or offered, to do so. They then carefully browsed the track list and perplexedly selected a song.

The most common reaction to the object was not excitement to be able to play music, but a nervous surprise. People were surprised that it actually played music (one person used a paper slip from the suggestion box to write the number representing a song in the jukebox, together with a short motivation on why s/he wanted to hear that particular song, and posted it into the suggestion box (Fig. 10b)), and they praised the handcraft and its aesthetics. The discussions around the table (where the object was placed) rather circulated around the object itself, and my relation to it, rather than its function, potential, or relation to the film café.

At this point it was not quite clear to me how to act, what to tell or ask people. I felt a carefulness of not spoiling their image of, and relation to, the object, by infecting them with my own ideas of it, contaminated with presupposition. I wanted the object to somehow act for itself. The jukebox though, was not a particularly obvious actant on its own.

5.3.2 Reflections on “What is the anti-speciesist film café?”

From the approach of my first experiment, scrutinizing design methodology and myself, we went to look closer on the established practice of arranging the anti-speciesist film café. Now, we have arrived at the even more specific task of scrutinizing the film café itself; the environment, or the actual material constituting the film café.

The mixtape, and later also the jukebox, were supposed to make visible the, in my perspective, preposterous idea to expand the anti-speciesism-theme further. The theme already influenced the clientele (who attended) by being included in the title of the events. It certainly influenced what was served (put in our mouths) and what was screened (put in our eyes), so why not also what was listened to (put in our ears)? To which extent could it be used? For how long would it be fun and durable?

The previous chapter hinted about that the entrepreneurial approaches to the film café were probably misguided, or misaligned with what the film café actually was, what role it played, what kind of relations it had. Looking at the mixtape and jukebox, one can make out the same pattern. The objects were created with the antagonistic approach in mind, the one adapted by the larger organization, containing the message of a utopia. But when dispatched, they were neither questioned or embraced for their contribution. They were rather tolerated. They did not pose any threat or controversy. Is it then possible that the environment within the film café (and the organization) is already characterized by agonism, openness and tolerance, rather than antagonism that needed transformation (into agonism)? The social environment, of the film café and the organization in general, were very open, welcoming and respectful.

It seems like the film café does not serve a purpose of proving anything to work. It adopts the antagonistic character of a utopia, but does not keep utopia as its direct goal (Fig. 15a & 15b). Looking back at the set goals of the film café, what remains is to express and create support for the organization and its activities. Hence, the goal of the film café is rather only to exist at all. The film café is its own goal.
Fig. 15a - The perceived relation between method and goals. Before dispatching the objects.

Fig. 15b - The perceived relation between method and goals. After dispatching the objects.
This miscalculation of the qualities of the environment, also made the objects lose part of their critique or expected crookedness. Rendering them without larger impact.

I should also be careful to point out that I wish not to “blame” the constituents of the film café for not being aligned with my objects. The objects did not communicate a powerful enough message, and one reason might be that I was biased. It is an environment, a cause and people that I personally care for. My bias would be that I was to precautious, or worried that I would change or influence the film café to much, with a negative result.

The film café as a Thing

As hinted from the pictures above (fig. 15a & 15b), the environment described here takes on a depth of multiple dimensions, or perspectives. My goals, as a designer, is to benefit my environment and its cause. Another perspective of the environment is the film café work group, people whose goal it is to organize and arrange a monthly film café. Yet another perspective is that of the film café, which has in its ultimate goal to help enforce animal rights, an activist “utopia” (Fuad Luke 2009). An additional perspective to this, is the goals of the larger organization, which also spans the different missions of every work group acting under the flag of said organization.

Every meeting with people involved in any of the dimensions has the potential to be a design Thing. An issue experienced and described in this text, is how to align and keep track of every perspective, in order to make the most out of every situation, or Thing.

Meetings, regardless of in which dimension, possesses a rather agonistic setup. And the main issue as a designer in this situation, is to convince the other participants in a “Thing” about trying out, for the topic, unconventional methods of design.

The approach used to measure the results and impact of the objects, mostly consisted of observing the environment in which the objects were introduced. No formal evaluations involving humans actors within the environment were performed, though certain attempts to start discussions were made in the work group. The combination of an informal (off the record) approach, and the agonistic, open environment, did however not spark any immediate reactions. The responses in general where futile.

Objects as presenters

Usually, objects are viewed as “representations” (Björgvinsson 2012) of the object of design. For the sake of analyzing the objects of the film café, it would be false to claim that these objects were “representations” of an object of design. If that would be the case, the object of design would be corrupted. The obvious example of this would be to look at the jukebox. It was built upon a blurry thesis that the object of design could be “participation in the film café”. The jukebox, supposedly representing this act of participation was thus introduced, and was thereafter also used as a form of participation. Hence, “participation in the film café” as the object of design, is articulated and confirmed, in the exact same moment.

Björgvinsson et al.(2012) however, suggests to change this view and think of objects, or non-humans, to be “presenters” of the object of design.

The insight that the image of the object of design, in this case was skewed (as depicted in fig. 15a & 15b), was possible because the objects were presenting rather than representing. The presenter would imply that the object in fact was linked to a transcendental object of design, while the
presenter allows for the object of design to be questioned, and continue to evolve. The objects might be seen as interfaces (as Jeremijenko’s robotic geese) for trying to understand the significant otherness of the film café.

The objects should be accounted for as presenting a theory of an object of design. They were not about “gradually refining” (A. Telier 2011, p. 168) or achieving a final design, and did not anticipate a final ground. They were merely a stage in a process, open to change and evolvement. The objects were posing blurry theories that might have germinated and become something bigger or something else. Or they could simply have withered and died, which is more analogous to what actually happened.

It turned out, they were presenters of what the object of design was not. They presented what could be excluded from the object of design, crossed from the list of suspects. In a way this could be viewed as a failure of the objects, and in a sense it might actually be. For the environment in which I am acting though, it is a lesson learned, and something learned is something gained.

5.3.3 Concluding remarks

The objects helped reveal a fundamental misconception about the purpose and role of the film café. In the previous chapter, it was seen that the utopian message and antagonistic values embraced by the organization as a whole, was also adopted by the film café. Furthermore, an object of design, or goals and purposes of the film café was assumed to also be adopted (and adapted) from the larger organization. However, the relation between the film café and the larger organization seems to be reversed. As the organization strives for some kind of utopia, it rather seems like the film café functions as a safe-hold for other actors within the organization.

The existing structure of the film café in its “slick”, or at least polished appearance, was to robust to be budged by the objects. They were accepted into the structure, and nothing was questioned, since the objects were slightly misaligned (or not misaligned enough). The goals of the film café were thought to be the same goals as present in the larger organization, while in fact the goal of the film café was rather for itself to exist. In order to move the structure of the film café and make it evolve through design, more powerful or bold moves might be needed.

A separate economy for a design approach within the organization would suit the approach of design and “thinging” better. In order to be able to create this separate economy however, a broader conviction of its benefits is necessary. Latour (1986) points out that the one winning an agonistic encounter, is the “one able to muster on the spot the largest number of well aligned and faithful allies”. To be able to win this encounter, he proceeds, one should go away to return with an “immutable mobile”. Or yet again in the language of Palmås (2011), proof that something works. This could also be compared to go looking for a “solution” in “another domain” (Denning, 2007).

5.4 Experiment: Introduction of speculative design tactics

This chapter is a short venture of the task of introducing speculative design tactics, or artistic activism, more broadly in the organization. It will pick up around were the previous experiment left off: To go somewhere and bring proof of the success of unfamiliar techniques, in order to win over allies and convince about the potential power of a design approach to activism. In this chapter, I will also elaborate on future efforts to be made.
The efforts made in this chapter, were inspired by the concept of “contagiontology” (Kullenberg & Palmås 2009). The idea behind my actions were to spread ideas and, hopefully, an alternative (for this context) approach to problem solving. To do this, I engaged in two different activities. First off, I organized a movie night, separate from the film café. Secondly, I initiated and became more active in existing online discussions on the internal message board, aiming to provide ideas for actions and campaigns were I could not physically partake.

5.4.1 Movie night
A number of people within the organization felt that the engagement to be an activist had dropped over the last year. In order to attract people and boost morale, a set of easygoing activities additional to the “routine” missions were therefore called for. My contribution to this was to arrange a movie night. For the occasion, I proposed to collectively watch and discuss “The Yes Men: Fix the world”, a film that humorously depicts actions carried out by the artistic activism group The Yes Men. I prepared some discussion material and snacks for the event.

Preceding the movie night however, was a banner painting work shop. An activity that dragged somewhat overtime, and after which many participants left the premises. Present for the belated screening of the film were four persons (including myself). Whereof one had to leave in the middle of the film. On top of this, the mentioned belatedness caused the film to end quite late in the evening and the remaining two had to leave immediately after the film had ended. The proposed discussions therefore fizzled out.

5.4.2 Message board participation
To spread the message of an artistic, or design, approach to activism, beyond the three people showing up at the movie night, I turned to the internal message board. The intention was to brainstorm ideas for existing campaigns. The expectation was not as much that any idea would be executed or performed, but rather to plant ideas and an approach, a “thought-contagion” (Kullenberg & Palmås 2009) if one will, that could potentially spread and make it easier to find allies in the future.

The overall theme of the posts, can be said to be aesthetic qualities of the campaign, emphasizing how it could be experienced by outsiders. An aspect that I felt was missing.

Since I could not physically participate in every work group and their activities, I have no way of estimating the results of the initiative, other than ascertain the few, relatively optimistic, responses it generated on the message board.

5.4.3 Reflections on “Introduction of speculative design tactics”
It is important to point out that the “speculative design tactics” that I wanted to introduce, and adapt to our purposes, is “just” another theory of a “solution”. As the anti-speciesist jukebox, posed a speculation of participation, this experiment speculates about design as activism being beneficial to the animal rights movement.

The occurrence of design as animal rights activism today seems sparse. More popular topics seems to be the broader themes like sustainability and capitalism (Fuad-Luke 2009). It is therefore difficult to find examples that appeal to the specific activism of animal rights. I want to help and
contribute to animal rights activism, by contributing with knowledge and skill in the topic of my study. To get “mandate” from the people I engage with, I need to convince them that it is a good idea. To do so, I need to “muster allies” in an agonistic space. I need to bring an “immutable mobile” (Latour 1986). I tried luring people to come with me to this “other domain” to look for immutable proof of an alternative approach to the existing activist practices, that of design or artistic activism. But to make people come with me though, I already needed proof that it “works”. Could it be that I “simply” must produce this proof myself?

5.4.4 Concluding remarks

I need to produce proof of that my proposed techniques “works” beneficial for our utopian cause. I need to bring concrete evidence that design approaches are worth the investment. Until then I am on my own.

So, how convincing must this proof be? Does all my efforts, so far, count?
6. Closure

This text has been an exploration of counter-narration on different levels in an activist environment (see attachment III for a mapping of my actions and activities in relation to each other). The development of my experimentation, has been framed as the following different approaches:

1. I started out by examining my own ways and my own approach to participatory design, in a grassroots activist environment.

2. I tried to analyze, and contribute to, the practice and perspective of organizing and arranging a film café.

3. I tried to understand the film café as a design material, by dispatching objects and looking for reactions.

4. I tried advocating a design perspective, in the broader organization. In order to gain trust and help.

Fig. 16 A visualization of a reading of the focus and purpose of the four experiments presented above
The actions as counter-narratives I have presented here (Fig. 16), where:

*Interaction design as a “non-profession”*;
   As opposed to the common assumption that design should be a profession.

*An “infinite” design project*;
   As opposed to a time delimited project.

*The anti-speciesist film café*;
   As opposed to the norm of speciesism in the world of today.

*Objects as “presenters” - exploring by design*;
   As opposed to the film café as organized by the established practices.

*Design activism tactics*;
   As opposed to the established practice in the mentioned activist environment.

Personally, through this process, I have become more aware of the complexity of co-design and social environments. It is not always easy (or maybe possible) to foresee implications of one’s actions, which can sometimes even be the absence of such implications. I will bring with me, a less cautionary approach to interaction design, but I will also try to be more open minded as a designer. In hindsight, my work (so far) seems to take shape as a series of “betrayals” (Callon 1986), or in the vein of self-criticism: a series of false hypotheses, or wrongly assumed “identities”, and maybe it could have benefitted my work if I had payed more attention and research into the history of the organization, the cause and the individual actors. Just as Haraway (2003) insists on the significance of history of a companion species.

On behalf of Callon’s principle of “agnosticism”, and Haraway’s advice to apply an extended perspective of significant otherness, or the acceptance that another actor may contain a depth of infinity, which I cannot know: I would, in practice, most likely be found guilty of an anthropocentric bias. Animals have been a “dormant” actor in this story, despite my interest in “animal rights”. My presupposition was, that in order to reach animals as an actor, I had to go through other activists – the current spokespersons for the animals. However, maybe I should go the other way – through animals to reach the activists.

On a similar note may the above, somewhat misdirected, concepts of agonism and Things come of better use outside of the organization. As it turned out, the environment where I acted: mostly within the organization, was already carefully democratized and pervaded by agonism (towards the own). As mentioned, the organization tends to apply a rather antagonistic approach by default. A fruitful use of the concepts might then be to act as a mediator between the organization and their target of communication. To present the message of the organization to “outsiders”, possibly by assembling Things, where antagonism can meet and be transformed into agonism.
7. Acknowledgements

Thank you for your contribution to this thesis:

Simon Niedenthal for being my supervisor. Pelle Ehn for reviewing this text. Thanks to Anders Emilson and Anna Seravalli for a nice conversation and sharing their thoughts. Sveta and Scott for reading and commenting upon this. And thank you: everyone who put up with me during this time. Especially my family.
8. References


Attachment I: Program definitions and descriptions

1:

*Engaging in a bottom-up organized process, focusing on a marginalized group or agenda.*

*Investigate the role of a designer in chosen process.*

*Explore and shine light upon a systemic issue.*

The initial articulation was an attempt to encapsulate and delimit a constructive design space for working with systemic, and possibly social, issues. “Marginalized” issues, that seemingly cannot hastily enough be addressed through present political agendas or discussions.

The expression “bottom-up organized process”, aims towards the democratic philosophy behind participatory design, as well as an idea that some issues needs to be solved or emphasized in a bottom-up structure, if only because of the ruling hegemony leading to their marginalization.

As much of the literature tells us, the role of a designer changes under similar premises. The role of a designer might develop from designing artifacts, products or services, into acting as a facilitator or negotiator. From developing solutions, to shine light upon tensions and dilemmas, turning antagonism into agonism.

This articulation did however change when an engagement was actually commenced, into something perhaps more specific.

2:

*Engaging in a bottom-up organized process aimed at a marginalized issue.*

*Investigate the role of an interaction designer in chosen process, how does the removal of authority affect?*

To try to maintain a credibility in whatever environment I would act in. I chose to focus more on a marginalized issue or question, rather than a marginalized group of people.

Based on my cultural background, (lack of) previous knowledge and experience, I felt that I was simply disqualified from acting on certain important issues. For example, I have very little experience in encounters with persons seeking asylum and the issues and regulations that afflicts refugees, which might lower my credibility for designing directly for someone in this situation (or the process of getting involved would be too long and complicated for the scope of this thesis).

The result of this reasoning was that the program now drifted towards positioning my acting at one (or more) remove from actual manifestations of systemic issues.

The question of my role in a bottom-up organized social environment evolved into exploring a need for authority in order to impose and direct a collective design process. This drift resulted in the first experiment, titled “Interaction design as a non-profession”.

The outcomes of this experiments was the cause of a drastic re-framing and re-articulation.

3.

*Interaction design in grassroots-movements.*

*Interaction design as activism.*

*Critical interaction design.*
This drift was subjected to a focus on more or less just existing in the environment as an interaction designer, and looking for opportunities to intervene or influence. The previous attempt to try to separate “interaction design” from “the interaction designer” was abandoned. In practice this meant that focus shifted from imposing interaction design thinking onto others, to just act as an interaction designer while participating in activities.

Emphasis could be put on the first bullet of this articulation, since the process of engaging and getting involved turns out to be more time-consuming and demanding to lend space to meta-explorations as captured in the remaining two bullets.

This approach was mainly present in the part described as “Interaction design as a trait” below, but also serves as initiation of the experimentation with the film café as socio-material and design thing.

As my engagement in the film café progressed the program drifted.

4.

Investigate the role of interaction design (and interaction designer) in a (non-hierarchical) community by participating on equal terms.

Explorations of how an interaction designer can benefit an activist cause.

The design space now focusses on designing for a community (or network) of people, while participating by personal interest, and with the ultimate purpose to come to benefit the agenda of the community. The experiment is described under the title “What is the anti-speciesist film café?”.

This articulation is the last one acted upon within the scope of this written report. However, in alignment with the presupposition of long term relationship and engagement, I will predict a future development of my engagement.

5.

Explore the potential of an interaction design-based animal rights activism.

Introduce a practice of artistic or design oriented activism.

This last articulation of the program for this thesis could be read as the result of all my work and engagement so far. The previous articulations helped explore parts of a topic consisting of interaction design and interest in activism. They led to a specific agenda of enforcing animal rights, as well as activities to build trust between me and other participants and hopefully between other participants as well. I learned about an organization in general, and more specifically about one fraction, arranging a film café.

It is not until now the relationship is starting to ripe for more concrete, extroverted and collective designs, aimed at external goals and purposes, instead of internal, organization- and motivation-themed issues.

My hope is to be able to, within the animal rights organization and together with other activists, introduce and explore practices of artistic activism or design activism as complements to traditional types of activism. Can skills in interaction design be useful to develop an activism to challenge hegemonies and spark public discussions around common assumptions and habits?
Attachment II: “Learning by doing”