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## **Brokering between heads and hearts: an analysis of designing for social change**

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## **Brokering between heads and hearts:** an analysis of designing for social change

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### **Abstract**

This paper describes a fluid and responsive design process identified among certain practitioners involved in solving social problems or inspiring social change. Their practice is both user-centred and participative in its approach and addresses the shortcomings of many top-down initiatives. These people work tactically to weave together policy knowledge, funding opportunities, local initiative and ideas for improving social and environmental conditions, acting as connectors, activists and facilitators in different contexts at different times. Although their activities are recognisably related to more conventional designing practices, the materials they use in finding solutions are unusual in that they may include the beneficiaries themselves and other features of the social structure in which they are effecting change. We present an ethnographic study of practices in designing that focuses on social initiatives rather than the tangible products or systems that might support them. We explore the how design practices map to the process of winning local people's commitment to projects with a social flavour. To situate the discussion in a political context we draw on de Certeau's distinction between strategic and tactical behaviour and look at how our informants occupy a space as mediators between groups with power and a sense of agency and those without.

### **Keywords**

Social Change; Ethnographic Action Research; Discourse Analysis; Designing In The Wild

*...Jacob has begun leaving Facebook groups because he has exceeded the 200 limit and there are new ones he wants to engage with on his quest to change oil consumption practices in Britain and the world...*

This paper describes a fluid and responsive design process identified among certain practitioners involved in solving social problems or inspiring social change. Successful projects with a social agenda have an impact beyond the transformation of physical resources, bringing with them an increased sense of participation and community which is usually intended to persist in their wake. Recent British Design Council initiatives leave little doubt of the power that designers have to affect social activity, be that local environmental initiatives (DOTT 2007) or democratic engagement (RED 2006). This work has drawn attention to the many practitioners working independently in this field, not all of whom would call themselves designers, but all of whom engage in activities with common characteristics and whose

interventions bear the hallmarks and carry the responsibility of design practices. Here we explore this designing with an ad-hoc flavour and a quality of wildness that sits at odds with up-front promises and rigorously pre-planned design processes.

## **Processes and participants**

To understand how these informal design activities, which take place outside the usual context of design (what we have called "designing-in-the-wild"), fit into a wider context of design practices and what it shares with more formal processes, we must look beyond the act of design to how the designing is achieved and in what context. Indeed, recently Dorst (2007) argued that the existing literature focuses overly on design process at the expense of design content, designer and design context. He details a series of meta design activities to do with context, collaboration, interaction and learning which inform design practice. This paper looks at how these ancillary design activities become central when working in informal contexts with social change as an intended outcome.

## ***Wildness and design practices***

Is design for social change a special case? Coyne (2005) argues that all problems are wicked by nature (2004). Tamed problems such as mathematical problems are causal micro-worlds that we can, at times, use to ensure that trains run on time, computers calculate bank balances, and bridges do not sway out of line. Louridas (1999) uses Levi Strauss's conception of the bricoleur in his analysis of designing and again the theme of taming as an interpretative process is stressed in contrast to an approach that foregrounds design as planning. The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but cannot subordinate each one of them to the acquisition of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the project: his universe of tools is closed, and the rule of his game is to always make do with 'what's available'<sup>1</sup>. Whereas the engineer creates the means for the completion of his work, the bricoleur redefines the means that he already has. Louridas concludes that bricolage, and with it design, is at the mercy of contingencies, either external, in the form of influences, constraints, and adversities of the external world, or internal, in the form of the creator's idiosyncrasy.

We will argue that the nature of designing for social change is particularly prone to external contingencies and remains very much in these spaces of wilderness. And although 'what's available' is ever different, it is essentially this process of 'making do' by reinterpreting and being inventive with the tools to hand that characterises much social design activity. The landscape one will travel through is not so much created by the designer, as recreated over and over (Dorst 2003).

<sup>1</sup> Louridas makes his own translation of Levi Strauss but keeps the original masculine pronoun.

### ***Collaborative and participative design***

This social design activity involves a range of modes of collaboration and participation. It holds much in common with participatory design, sharing the central tenet that participation of intended 'users' is a precondition for good design while operating within in looser contexts where roles, expertise and degree of involvement are less formalized than much PD activity (Kensing & Blomberg 1998). In this context, co-design is a process of negotiation and makes pragmatic use of what is available in ways which are unavoidably improvisational. Not unlike the lone bricoleur, co-production becomes ongoing adaptation to add, remove, reshape and weave constituents and to fit with others' productions (Beeson and Miskelly 1998). It involves overlapping interpretive communities and multiple motivations for participation including individual and social motivations which are not necessarily closely related to any perceived aims of the project but nevertheless lead to significant contributions. For some participants, individual or shared projects form through involvement and not vice versa (Miskelly 2002).

This has much in common with what Hester terms 'labours of love'; projects initiated by community-based innovators which have significant impact on urban spaces and which are "born of personal creative necessity, thrive where there are scarce resources, and produce flexible environments that are lovingly human" (Hester 1984). These projects are characterised by passionate dream, sacrificial struggle, allies, a campaign of education and visible results, followed by a period of transfer, adaptation and institutionalisation of power which is necessary but painful for these individuals but which ensures a community owned project.

### ***Flexibility and imposition of ideas***

Many social change projects lack impact, particularly those with a top-down approach to assessing need and planning a solution (Gaved and Foth 2006). Some succeed in delivering promised artefacts, but without inspiring adoption or social coherence and where the intention is to transfer responsibility for maintenance to local 'beneficiaries' this must be deemed a failure (Anderson and Gaved 2007). Particularly those projects with an inappropriate image of stakeholders' needs built into them have a poor chance of engagement. This top-down approach is often fuelled by an economic environment where considerable money exists to improve the design of local environments and social processes. The imposition of unsolicited projects is promoted by supporting agencies that demand to know project outcomes before committing funds. This is part of a growing culture of accountability but the interests of the greater good are sometimes in tension with what would best serve the needs of the local community. Grants come with tight guidelines for use and competitive calls are won by organisations preparing precisely defined plans as to method and outcome. This planning stage might be essential to ensure some progress, but it often precedes a full understanding of local issues and how they relate to the work to be undertaken.

We have argued above, that projects involving participation and user-led solution-seeking are, by nature difficult to define before the process begins. To be considered social, design must take on board the values, desires and needs of those affected and thus show considerable flexibility in process and

in goals. Yet, the approach to administering public money for social change conflicts with this flexibility and thus the ability of designers to be responsive.

Even well-intentioned targeting can fail. During the regeneration of Manteo, Hester (1996) worked with local residents to identify and preserve valued lifestyles and landscapes. Once identified, important social patterns and places inspired a plan for community revitalization. However, there was a disconnection between urban design techniques aimed at community regeneration and mundane community practices that are highly valued. Hester notes that those existing planning and design mechanisms developed precisely to preserve local cultural heritage almost entirely ignored the places most critical to Manteo's dwellers. He attributes this failure to their indetectability: "These places were not distant enough in time or separable enough from daily life to be consciously seen as special." Yet: "because these places embodied the existing social life, habits, rituals and institutions as well as the collective memory of life, they were singularly useful in describing the essence of Manteo's life in ways applicable to decision-making." (Hester, 1996).

### ***Tactical design***

We can pull the discussions of the preceding sections together by relating them to Certeau's (1984) analysis of everyday practices of 'making do' and his distinction between *tactics* of resistance and *strategies* of power. Dominant systems are strategic in that they involve a subject with will who can manipulate power relationships. This requires a place which belongs to this subject and serves as a base from which relations with others can be conducted. Those without power, or without a place, operate tactically within the space of others (Certeau 1984).

So, tactics operate beneath the level of, but often in tension with, the strategies of those with the power to plan. Here we find a framing for Louridas' bricoleur and all the contingent and interpretive aspects of designing that is self-consciously political (though without the power of de Certeau's strategists) even if they are not self-consciously designerly. Tactical representations are by their very nature unpredictable. Certeau's tacticians:

"..trace 'indeterminate trajectories' that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated spaces through which they move. ... these 'traverses' remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of different interests and desires. They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks". (Certeau, 1984. p.34)

Hester (1996) suggests that in order to achieve engagement and to have a lasting impact, social design activity needs to have relevance to everyday experience. Social design activity adopts the everyday ruses of the creative consumer, tactically active in spaces defined by others, as identified by Certeau. However, these social designers have an articulated agenda beyond everyday 'making do'. Their activities suggest potential to open up new spaces where tactics can be harnessed to go beyond 'making do' and to be part of a set of activities intended to make change.

## **Approach**

### ***Action Research***

Action Research is interventionist. "It is research that benefits the excluded, impoverished, marginalized, oppressed, and so forth by, for example, increasing their self-esteem, their participation in institutional decision making, and their access to political influence or economic resources" (Krimmerman, 2001). By conducting ethnographic action research (Tacchi et al, 2003), we identified ourselves as participant observers, rather than those researchers who stand in the wings. This activist commitment was a necessary part of gaining admittance into the particular world that we wished to study, both ethically and pragmatically.

There are particular methodological issues in working both with naturally occurring social data and as participant observers. A starting point is to differentiate the underpinnings from a more positivist framing of research: working in this way, we do not seek to produce 'objective' findings, but to produce fruitful discoveries (Potter and Wetherell 1987) of use to designers and those who study them. Rigour comes in the consistency of the analysis, while justification comes from the value of the outcomes. For instance, we readily accept that we changed situations: we contributed ideas, offered money, took part and generally followed precepts that attach to the domain of action research, rather than attempting to employ any distancing mechanisms. Barry reminds us that our research conclusions are "factive fictions crafted from numerous sources and methods influenced by the availability and quality of different materials, and designed at the end of the day, to please both the researchers and the researcher's audiences." (Barry, 1996)

When looking at a process which is by definition open-ended and unpredictable, researcher methods must assist in revealing the process rather than imposing a rigid structure. This approach as characterized by Nelson & Wright (1995) has much in common with the design practices we are seeking to observe: "Participation means learning experientially as a positioned and interacting subject. ... Simultaneously, as a distanced observing outsider, the meaning of these experiences and interaction is analysed in terms of wider systems." (Nelson & Wright, 1995)

We would call our approach empirical, because, although unrepeatable in the particular, we tried out hunches and tested our ideas. We have strived to pull out threads of our experience that others might recognise as being more generally applicable. Indeed, in the last case study below, we share our thoughts with a group of peers and allow their discussion and validation to give us confidence that we are talking about a meaningful phenomenon.

### ***The ethnographies***

Social design practices and roles were identified using ethnographic action research, in particular, observation and interview. An action research approach provided a means to engage with practitioners operating outside conventional organisational structures. Participation in events and activities gave us access to in-situ decision-making and discussion unavailable through

interviews. Thus, we were able to work with people whose practice stood in direct contrast to the top-down approach of many more visible and accessible social change projects. We attended a variety of meetings between social change activists and created some of our own as part of a related project<sup>2</sup>. In particular, we observed the behaviour of an independent practitioner and an ad-hoc group developing a social change initiative. We have picked three examples to describe here because, after analysis, they appeared to succinctly illustrate the phenomenon we were examining and allow us to present the narrative of the research.

In taking this participative approach, we had to mark our role and purposes with especial clarity. Having sought permission, we flagged up whenever we were recording our encounters and borrowed others' records where these were available. Having analysed our recordings based on discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell)<sup>3</sup>, we gave this paper for review by all case-study participants to ensure that they orientate towards the arguments put forward in it and that it concurs with their ideas of self-representation and accuracy.

We quote verbatim from recordings of interactions: analysing, displaying and acknowledging our role among others'. (Quoted material is in italics.) In this way, we are able to share with the reader our approach and allow some co-construction of significance.

## Three case studies

### ***Case Study 1: PRaDSA***

PRaDSA (Practical Design for Social Action) is a two-year project investigating the practices of people who design technology to support social action practitioners. We were a participating practitioner and an academic involved in a series of workshops bringing academics and practitioners together during 2007 and 2008. We had access to tapes recorded during three workshops. Quoted extracts are from these.

The workshops involved a self selecting group who identify themselves in some way with 'practical design for social action' although not necessarily describing themselves as designers. Nor do they necessarily share a common understanding or values as regards the social change they want to make. An activity to map the reach and goals of the group revealed a broad scope in their constituencies and significant differences in scale and focus in hoped-for outcomes.

Nevertheless, commonalities of approach emerged through the series of workshops.

From the outset in the first workshop, there was awareness of the complex interactions of skills, resources and people involved in participants' work, and

<sup>2</sup> PRaDSA

<sup>3</sup> In looking at verbal exchanges, we are not asserting that each is any more than an account prepared for a particular audience. For more on how discourse analysis is understood by the authors, see Light 2006.

the need to mobilize and weave these. One participant chose the term *intermediaries* to highlight the common ground between participants who

"..know a bit about the interaction of technology and social action...and... can facilitate things (participant a)".

Activity illustrated how participants attend to mobilization and place significance on communication flows:

" Unless you understand how information is transmitted in a community and how it's taken seriously and when it isn't, what they listen to and respect and what they don't and what motivates or mobilises people and what doesn't, it doesn't matter what means you use to transmit it". (participant b).

Values, beliefs and political motivations are important to this work, even if not articulated or shared. A recurring theme in discussion is about enabling co-operation amongst heterogeneous groupings. Enabling such cooperation requires particular forms of negotiation and decision-making. This becomes the theme of the second workshop where participants on the one hand shared knowledge of a raft of decision-making tools that could be picked up in different situations, while on the other hand acknowledging the "*seat of your pants decision-making*" required in responsive and fluid practices (participant c).

These discussions and the desire to collaborate led to frequent mentions of funding bids and opportunities, commonly too late to act on them:

"There are definitely lots of projects that we're all involved with which are fundable and there are definitely people here who have skills in getting funding because we're sat here now and yet it does seem to be funny that we're not harnessing our collective intelligence". (Jacob, see below)

Noticing this in workshop three, the group turns to planning a tool to allow funding opportunities, project ideas and calls for collaboration to be more effectively shared, taking:

"a more entrepreneurial stand on our online activities where there is a part of our site developed for ideas and sources where people remember to put in ideas". (participant d).

The terminology and goals of the group suggest this might be a tool to help weather the contingent nature of the design activity embraced by these participants and to support their weaving activities, as well as that of their wider networks.

A variety of approaches to creating such a tool emerged in discussion. Some identified the materials that are available already – a partially funded process, an existing website and online tools, expertise and time and a wealth of connections leading out from the people in the room to wider networks. Others addressed how to weave these together in a way that will both reach and mobilize people with whom they want to collaborate. In describing the tool and arguing as to whether it could perform as a direct link between resources or would need match-making intervention, the group revealed their intentions that it should enhance *brokering* and it briefly acquired the nickname: *the dating game*.



## **Analysis**

This ongoing workshop process displays a poly-vocal character, where participants voice and accommodate a continuum of political and social goals, a variety of practices, multiple perspectives on what constitutes good practice and a spread of influences through engagement with international, social, political, technical and other networks. Gradually through both articulating understandings and ways of being within the workshops, practices and perceptions are revealed which are common to this group.

Common practices include: getting within a problem, being prepared to both draw on a set of useful tools and methods and mix these with 'in the moment' responses to the contingent, observing the whole and the parts in order to judge a situation, brokering complex coalitions and striving to bring together multiple perspectives on the same activity. These could be summed up as processes which gradually tame a problem or situation through interpretation.

These common features - and the reflective process which surfaces them - contribute to the realization of the need for and then the beginnings of developing a concept for a brokering tool. This development in turn reveals more about how the practitioners negotiate and broker their own heterogeneous development styles and design techniques.

## **Case Study 2: Jacob's mission**

We meet Jacob<sup>4</sup> several times over the course of summer 2007 to hear about a particular activity he is designing. It will involve bringing ideas, people, money and gifts in kind together if it is to work. Jacob has no 'job title' as such, but a strong mission to unite the world and live more humanely in touch with the environment, which he funds through a mixture of freelance activities. He knows thousands of people, belongs to hundreds of networks and keeps information flowing between them as part of his goal to produce a united diversity.

When we talk to him first he is about to start instigating an event with only an idea and a location. Jacob tells us he is planning to stage a one day meeting and party in an inner-city area, to raise awareness of Peak Oil and the need for action on the environment. He plans to use Open Space Technology – a means of letting matters of importance to participants surface by handing over choice of topics and organisation to them (Owen 1986). And he knows people squatting an unused council-owned community centre which he can use as a venue.

At our next meeting, we mainly hear about the logistics. Lunch overall will cost £50 and he has someone who will prepare it if he gets the money for ingredients. We move on to technology: the building has electricity and a good sound system, and laptops are no problem to come by in his circles. But there isn't going to be broadband at the venue will be needed: *I must just get enough money in the next couple of months to afford that.*

<sup>4</sup> Not his real name.

He has gathered that there are issues locally about the way that the council buildings are run. Typically, he says, the people living in them don't know the whole story. Jacob has rung the council and now has a pile of pdfs to read, downloaded from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website. As for the event:

*" I hope that some kind of community organising will come out of it or at the very least some awareness-raising about the current state of the whole regeneration plan... the banking system... climate change (laughs)".*

By the time we meet again, the occupants of the squatted community centre have become co-designers. But Jacob's focus for the event is changing. He has been talking to local residents as a way of interesting them in the event and he has now read his research on the council buildings. In the process, he has found a topic of immediate concern that is superseding the broader goal of addressing environmental issues. We accompany him to visit the cafe at a local community amenity, where we buy eggs and chutney and talk to the woman behind the counter (X). She turns out to be someone with a long history in the local people's struggle with the council over who runs the estates in the area and how. She no longer wants to take on this challenge, being exasperated by the last piece of council activity: to use tenant-enabling legislation to hand control of the area over to an organisation that is not trusted. Having thwarted the council's attempts to do this by selling off assets, the tenants are now watching it happen by the granting of a long-term lease. So Jacob has found a concern to organise the community around and it directly involves the locale, the building and his friends in occupation.

At the meeting, later, with members of the squatting group, he explains his rethink:

*"I'm thinking probably less 'party', because the idea before was to do a thing like we did (at another venue) was to get all sorts of people from all over. That was the original idea but as I've read more of the regen documents it's become clear what the actual situation is. It seems like there is a massive opportunity for some local action. So I think I'm going to try and focus it as much as possible on just on (local area) and get people like X to come. 'Cos even if I spent two days convincing her that she wants to come that would be better than getting 20 others to come, really. ....We want the council to come, we want X to come, we want you guys (HQ residents, us) to be here, we want whoever those kids were demanding to have a gig to be here. ... We need a community trust that the community can trust, basically".*

Although it becomes clear that the current role of the building we are sitting in will be contested by local people who used it as a community centre before it was closed, the principal squatter tells us:

*"I'm up for it. I want to see this happen. I've got loads of boards we can tie to lampposts. ... What do you want to do? When do you want to do it? ... Ah, so we've got a month..."*

## **Analysis**

Jacob takes us with him as his project changes, as new features come to light and people change their orientation to towards working with him. He moves

flexibly from his generic mission of promoting awareness of peak oil to tackling a social issue that he has only learnt about by coming into the area and talking to local people. Although his agenda has changed, his wider goal can still be served: building capacity and identity in communities, which feeds into the bigger scheme. And he has changed his agenda with the interests of the local community in mind, even if he did not immediately find much support from local people.

Jacob gives time to winning people to his cause. This patience significantly changes the stakeholders during the course of the project. The squatter, in the third extract, shows from the way he is responding that he is now part of the design team, whereas when we talked first, Jacob was negotiating with the squatter group just to let him use the building. Tensions in the team Jacob is assembling are surmountable: the difference in interests between local people - who regard the squatters dubiously and who want their community spaces back - and the squatters themselves can be absorbed in the open space technology, he decides. Getting others to feel ownership is critical to him, not least so that he is free to move on to the next opportunity for raising awareness and promoting community action.

Jacob has no financial support in the formal sense, but turns up small pots of money to keep the planning going. He is resourceful, persistent and undeterred by dealing with complexity. His determination to understand the activities of the council is typical. His research is thorough, if unsystematic.

We observe Jacob research, engage, synthesise and iterate, weaving all kinds of unexpected events, people, resources and ideas into the process, but engaged in a recognizable design activity. He creates his interventions deliberately to effect maximum change in his chosen direction (admittedly his direction is broad and absorbs many paths) and involve as many others in making that change as possible. Doing so with such ad-hoc resources and working outside any formal structure, we see, in Jacob, the ultimate tactician-bricoleur.

### ***Case Study 3: Discussing design for social justice***

As part of their Digital Inclusion research and development programme, Futurelab ([www.futurelab.org.uk](http://www.futurelab.org.uk)) ran a two-day workshop in October 2007 around designing projects that wish to address social injustice. We were contributors at this event and this gave us the opportunity to analyse practice as reported by a further group of motivated individuals<sup>5</sup>. We also tried out our understanding of the social change design process as part of contributing to the discussions.

All the material quoted in this section comes from one session on the second day of the meeting. The discussion moved to how projects get started and what process can be employed to make them fundable. Spelling out the

<sup>5</sup> We are grateful to the organisers for allowing us access to transcripts of the meeting.

ingredients, the leader of a design consultancy that often works with regeneration money, describes it thus:

On commitment: *"you have to have the passion behind it, you have to have something you want to do"*. (participant x)

On 'pragmatism and the kind of people that you need to spur a project and how those people do that, and what traits they have':

*"we're talking about this pattern-matching, constant-watching thing that happens that's slightly entrepreneurial where you're constantly watching, all the time, to do with needs, what's happening with people, it's a sales-y thing in some ways"*. (participant x)

On linking 'need' and 'people who have money':

*"sometimes there may be this entrepreneurial thing, as I call it, where you're slightly changing, like, the funder, and what their output has to be, and adapting it to a need on the ground. So it's a little bit dodgy, it's a little bit Arthur Daley, there's that point in the middle, you have to adapt it because things are happening on the ground"*. (participant x)

On funders and their understanding:

*"Needs are always constantly changing and I really don't think funders can ever come up to scratch with what they know about those things because they never know enough about those things"*. (participant x)

On choosing what should happen:

*"there's that kind of starting point and there's that, yeah you need those connections.. activists in a sense. And actually we're choosing things from what we know best so it might be someone on the ground, someone like us who knows the community"*. (participant x)

At which point, we sound out the idea that was developing as we thought about the processes we'd seen:

*"we did identify the roles of the synthesisers, the connectors and the activist who all have a part and sometimes it's the same person and sometimes it's groups, but you need somebody with the energy and somebody with the people and somebody who can pull it all together into a coherent thing, and those three things seem to be the essence of this quite pragmatic response connecting money to community projects"*. (participant y).

## **Analysis**

Participant x is producing an unsolicited description of the kind of design processes we've been considering and, in one case, watching in action. It supports the idea that a path of negotiation and tactful influencing is needed. He talks sensitively of funders' inability to keep up to date and how the designer's job is a *"pattern-matching, constant-watching thing* so that *we're choosing things from what we know best"*. But this is not just the act of matching things up (connecting), it is modifying people's expectations and one's own design: *"you have to adapt it because things are happening on the ground"* (synthesizing). In this sense, everything is again contingent and the

people involved, such as the funders and the community, are the materials of the design. He is fairly explicit on this point: testing people out and working with them reveals what is possible to expect of them. But because the materials are human, the role is facilitator as well as designer: as with Jacob, the best solutions feel as if they have been created by everyone involved. The act of synthesis here involves process as much as outcome and reflects the integrating nature of participative design and its multiple goals: addressing material outcomes as a by-product of changes to a social system.

But participant x is in a very different position to Jacob, in that he works within the dominant funding systems rather than round them and has won the trust of funding bodies over a series of intelligently designed and responsive projects. He is now one of the most likely people in the design industry to convince a regeneration project funder that more flexibility in a project outline will be in everyone's interests. But he is still employing the same weaving process, from a slightly different position. And the passion is just as tangible. He occupies the grey area between the strategists and the tacticians, which is about as good as it gets in designing for social change but is also an outcome of repeated application of this kind of weaving process.

## Discussion

We have presented three examples to show how social change practices emerge and map to existing ideas of design and also how they relate to social structures and power. In the process, we have drawn attention to the challenge of understanding social dynamics and to the shifts of accountability and ownership that take place as grass-roots projects develop, following the trajectory of ideas as they flow between people and as new members join the project team. We have noted the brokering, synthesising and connecting that goes on and the facilitative elements of the designer's practice that contribute to a shared sense of ownership for the final outcome.

The research suggests that obstacles to the flow of designing, such as funding difficulties, local apathy and changing conditions, become part of the design challenge and that the process as well as the outcome is constantly renegotiated, the landscape constantly recreated (Dorst, 2003), as external contingencies impact. The many ways that ideas, funding sources, policy priorities, local skills and serendipitous opportunities are used as the materials for problem-solving have been revealed as examples of an opportunistic but productive kind of intervention.

The fluid, interpretive and grounded character of these design practices appears to have much in common with Hester's (1984) investigation of 'labours of love' and Certeau's (1984) tactical manoeuvres within the technological system and within dominant systems of representation. We suggest these design practices embrace tactical and interpretive approaches to everyday life and thus have the potential to open up new spaces where these tactics can be harnessed for making change.

The case studies include many instances of the weaving together, taking shape like Certeau's tactic, which insinuates itself into the other's place: fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep

at a distance (Certeau, 1984). Our designers resemble Certeau's tacticians with their 'heterogeneous traverses'. They cross all boundaries in pursuit of accommodations and resist classification in their heterogeneity, but they also show consistency in their practices across these different terrains and in this way can suggest how re-appropriation of social design spaces is possible. They are able, through their interventions, to connect those people with less sense of agency to means of making change and taking more control.

We offer our interpretation here as one among many, to further discussion about the support of social design, especially those activities which are less visible, less formally structured and less legislated for. With this paper, we hope to have contributed an early sketch in this growing but under-acknowledged domain, to support turning policy money into projects that meet their social goals. Designers of social engagement have a critical role to play in stimulating activity by mediating between different systems, people and tools. Further research is needed to determine how far they are, or might be, key to stimulating the growth of what one might call social organisation or social capital as well as creating specific solutions. Meanwhile, we present this paper as a challenge to the way that policy is formed without sufficient reference to the brokering that human engagement requires.

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